

Sources of Continuance-Focused and Outcome-Focused Motivation in Subsequent Trials among Businesspeople

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The purpose of this study was to examine sources of continuance-focused and outcome-focused motivation in businesspeople. Previous studies have tended to focus on motivation for continuing a task. However, in light of recent environmental changes of business organizations, motivation focused on outcomes also needs to be examined. This study focused on these two types of motivation and revealed the level of each motivation. We also examined sources of motivation, focusing on reflections on past experiences as past-oriented sources, and goal setting as future-oriented sources. Questionnaires were administered to 259 people employed in various sectors of business. The results showed that (1) people maintain higher continuance-focused motivation after success, whereas outcome-focused motivation is higher after failure, and (2) motivation after success was affected by mental rewards from reflecting on success, and motivation after failure was affected by lessons from failure. Based on these findings, we propose the theoretical suggestions for the processes on the foundation of motivation.

Key words: continuance-focused motivation, outcome-focused motivation, success and failure, reflection on experience, goal setting

This study begins by focusing on two types of motivation connected to undertaking tasks: continuing motivation and outcome-focused motivation. Additionally, we examine the effects of goal setting, as future-oriented motivation, and reflection, as past-oriented motivation, on performance in trial tasks.

1. A Theoretical framework for motivation

Previous studies have proposed several well-known models of motivation, including proactive (Murray, 1964; Deci, 1975) and creative accomplishment (Amabile, 1988). Recently, Pinder (2008) has conducted a review of this research that is both detailed and comprehensive.

One of these studies, Steers, Mowday, & Shapiro (2004), argued that motivation consists of three components. The first is "arousal," which indicates an elevated state of tension. The second is

"persistence," which means that a person continues to pursue a goal or complete a task. The third is "direction," which includes having a clear meaning for an effort or a definite sense of the value of an accomplishment.

Among these three components, arousal and persistence were seen as of primary importance, while direction was almost overlooked by researchers as well as practitioners. This was because the external environment was generally stable around the workplace at the time, and tasks that resulted in accomplishments were continuous or repeated, so that the recurrence of tasks might result in expected higher performances even if the value of the accomplishments was not immediately clear.

However, we must take into account the advances in information technology, the changes in institutional values, and the disappearance of pre-

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vious assumptions that have occurred recently in many business organizations, and thus realize that attempting tasks using previously successful methods will not always lead to improved performance. That is, a person involved in business today needs to focus on the quality of the outcome, and not only on repeating strategies that may have worked well over a period of time.

Taking into account these factors, in a discussion about motivation for businesspeople employed in modern organizational situations, it would be valuable to focus on both "continuance-focused motivation" and "outcome-focused motivation."

Therefore, this study focused on outcome-focused motivation, comparing it with continuance-focused motivation, and examined differences in the levels of these two types of motivation. This study also examined the relationship between these two types of motivation, contrasting goal setting, as future-oriented motivation, with reflection, as past-oriented motivation.

2. Sources of motivation

The factors that influence continuance-focused motivation and outcome-focused motivation are detailed below.

The first group of factors is related to experiences of success and failure among previous task accomplishments. Business people basically hold positive feelings when they can maintain a positive self-image (Rosenberg, 1965; Deci, 1975). Based on this finding, successful experiences would maintain or improve motivation and experiences of failure would not.

The second group of factors consists of mental rewards that accompanied experiences of success or failure. These mental rewards include confirmation of self-development (London & Smither, 1999), psychological safety without anxiety for failure (Kahn, 1990; Edmondson, 1999), and self-affirmation (Rosenberg, 1965). All of these factors have been shown to be effective for maintaining the will to complete tasks (Banabou & Tirole, 2002; Ellis, Mendel, & Nir, 2006), therefore these are considered to be related to improving "continuance-focused motivation." These mental rewards

were also shown to be acquired when reflecting on success rather than failure (Markman, Gavanski, Sherman, & McMullen, 1993).

As the third group, there might be lessons (principles) that are acquired through experience (success or failure) that enable one to avoid failure in the future and help to accomplish tasks successfully. Morrison (1993) demonstrated that drawing scenarios or methods based on lessons improved self-efficacy and motivation. Here, it is presumed that the lessons (principles) are acquired through reflecting on failure and are strongly related to outcome-focused motivation.

The three groups of factors discussed above are past-oriented, as they draw upon reflections based on past accomplishments (experiences). A business person's motivation is also affected by a fourth factor that is future-oriented, as previous motivation theories, such as goal setting (Locke, 1984), expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), and achievement motivation (McClelland, 1961), have shown. Locke & Latham (1990) revealed that businesspeople improve their motivation for task accomplishment by setting clear yet slightly difficult goals. They also argued that goal setting encourages people to make greater efforts, create methods geared toward goal accomplishment, and to improve performance.

This study focused on past-oriented factors, including experiences of success and failure, as well as the mental rewards and lessons acquired by reflecting on these experiences. We also looked at future-oriented factors, including goal setting. Our aim was to examine the relationships between these factors and both continuance-focused and outcome-focused motivation.

METHOD

1. Sample

This study used businesspeople who engage in jobs in sales, development, engineering, system integration, personnel, etc., from different business companies as the sample.

People who work in the business sector are often required to set clear goals, and they experience success and failure as part of their work routine. Furthermore, they engage in tasks that

require improvement of performance on an everyday basis, in common with other sectors. For examples, salespersons are required to improve their sales performance, people in new product development are required to acquire trust from customers after delivering, and people in personnel sections need to engage in completing management objectives after building the personnel systems. Therefore these persons were considered to be suitable as the sample for this study.

This study asked businesspeople working in different companies to invite their colleagues with different jobs to participate in a survey. In total, there were 282 businesspeople from different companies and departments. The questionnaires were sent to their companies by post mail or e-mail. After completion, they were returned by post mail or e-mail directly to the researcher.

After the deletion of surveys with missing data, the full sample comprised 259 people (179 male and 80 female, representing a 91.8% valid response rate). The mean age was 37.20 years old, and the mean tenure was around 11 years and three months. The samples belonged to the following departments: personnel sections (25.1%), sales (24.3%), engineering (11.6%), development (11.6%), system integration (10.8%), production (5.4%), distribution (2.3%), other (10.8%), and unknown (0.8%).

2. Measures

(1) Motivation

We asked people what levels of continuous-focused motivation and outcome-focused motivation they felt they had.

Motivation after success Three items were provided to measure continuance-focused motivation after success (e.g. "I would try again after I succeeded"), and outcome-focused motivation after success (e.g. "I would try to do better the next time even though I was successful").

Motivation after failure Three items were provided to measure continuance-focused motivation after failure (e.g. "I would try again even after I failed"), and outcome-focused motivation after failure (e.g. "I would try harder the next time even after I failed").

The responses ranged from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal) for success and failure.

(2) Past-oriented factors (Reflections on experiences)

Mental rewards on reflection People were asked to what degree they feel they acquire mental rewards based on reflection on past experiences. This study measures the degree of this acquisition based on three components (confirmation of self-development, acquisition of psychological safety, and self-affirmation). First, we asked people to what degree they are able to confirm abilities they have gained, assessing this with three items. Second, we asked people what level of psychological safety they feel they gain through reflection. Finally, people were asked how much they believe in their abilities after reflection. These responses ranged from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal), and related to reflections on both success and failure.

Lessons on reflection People were asked to what degree they acquire lessons based on reflection.

Lessons are divided into two categories (Furukawa, 2004; Markman & Tetlock, 2000): one for the process of experience (clarification of causes) and one for the outcome (extraction of success principle). Given this point, this study assessed the degree of lesson acquisition based on these two aspects.

The first is "clarification of cause." People were asked to what degree they are able to confirm why they succeeded (or failed) through reflection on past experience. We assessed reflection on success and failure with two items for each.

The second aspect is "extraction of success principle." People were asked to what degree they are able to confirm their principles for succeeding (a knack for success), using four items related to success and four related to failure.

Responses ranged from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal).

(3) Future-oriented factors (Clarity in goal setting)

To examine the effects of goal setting, a future-oriented activity, on motivation, we asked people to report the degree to which they set short-term goals (classified as six months to one year) and long-term goals (5 to 10 years). These responses

ranged from 1 (did not set goals) to 5 (set very clear goals).

RESULTS

1. Degree of motivation

We examined the level of motivation people have for a subsequent trial after either success or failure (Figure 1). The mean degree of motivation was 3.69 after success and 3.60 after failure. Each of these exceeded 3.00 (somewhat high), while also revealing that people have higher motivation after experiencing success rather than failure ($t_{(258)} = 2.10, p < .05$).

Next, we classified motivation into two types (continuance-focused and outcome-focused) and examined the levels of motivation after both success and failure.

For motivation after success, the mean degree of continuance-focused motivation was 3.74, while it was 3.65 for outcome-focused motivation. Each type of motivation was at almost the same degree and was somewhat high, but continuance-focused motivation was significantly higher than outcome-focused ($t_{(258)} = 2.28, p < .05$).

In contrast, after failure, the mean for continuance-focused motivation was 3.41, while it was 3.79 for outcome-focused motivation. Each type of motivation was relatively high, but continuance-focused was specifically lower than any other type of motivation, and it was also significantly lower than outcome-focused ($t_{(258)} = 10.17, p < .001$).

These results reveal that both continuance-focused and outcome-focused motivation are higher after success, while outcome-focused is higher

than continuance-focused after failure.

2. Past-oriented factors (Reflection on experience)

Next, we examined to what degree mental rewards and lessons were acquired after reflection on success and failure.

The mean degree for acquisition of mental rewards was 2.93 for success and 2.37 for failure. Both of these scores exceeded 2.00, which represents a level of "some degree." This indicates that people acquire at least some degree of mental reward after reflection on both success and failure. It also reveals that people acquire more mental rewards after reflecting on success than failure ($t_{(258)} = 13.12, p < .001$).

The mean degree for lessons was 2.89 for success, which exceeded 2.00 but did not quite reach 3.00, showing that people do acquire lessons after reflecting on success. However, the mean for failure was 3.60, which exceeded 3.00, suggesting that people also acquire lessons by reflecting on failure. These results revealed that people acquire more lessons after reflecting on failure than on success ($t_{(258)} = 12.91, p < .001$).

These results suggest that people acquire mental rewards and lessons by reflecting on past experiences. Specifically, more mental rewards are acquired from reflecting on success, while failure results in greater acquisition of lessons.

3. Future-oriented factors (Goal setting)

We examined how clearly people set short-term and long-term goals. The mean degree of goal setting was almost the same, very close to 3.00, for both short-term ($M = 3.19$) and long-term ($M = 2.97$) goal setting, revealing that people set short-term goals that were clearer than long-term goals ($t_{(258)} = 4.64, p < .001$).

4. Effects of past-oriented and future-oriented factors on motivation

Finally, in order to clarify the sources of motivation, we examined the effects of mental rewards and lessons acquired by reflection and goal setting (short-term and long-term) on motivation (continuance-focused and outcome-focused). Table 1

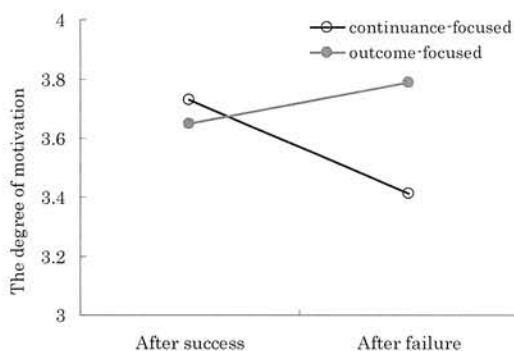


Fig. 1. The degree of motivation after success and failure.

Table 1. The effects of past-oriented (reflections on experience) and future-oriented (goal setting) on motivation after success and failure (Results of multiple regression analysis)

	Motivation after success		Motivation after failure	
	Continuance-focused	Outcome-focused	Continuance-focused	Outcome-focused
Reflections on success				
Mental rewards	.40***	.32***	.09	.14*
Lessons	.05	.00	.01	-.02
Reflections on failure				
Mental rewards	-.03	-.03	.12	.03
Lessons	.18**	.15*	.26***	.35***
Goal setting				
Short-term goal	.14*	.14	.18*	.22**
Long-term goal	.04	.13	.11	.10

Note. $N=259$, subjects are businesspeople.

All the numbers are standard coefficients. *** $p<.001$, ** $p<.01$, * $p<.05$.

lists the results of a multiple regression analysis we conducted.

(1) Motivation after success

Regarding types of motivation after success, the factors affecting continuance-focused motivation were the acquisition of mental rewards by reflecting on success ($\beta=.40$, $p<.001$), lessons from reflection on failure ($\beta=.18$, $p<.01$), and short-term goals ($\beta=.14$, $p<.05$). In contrast, the factors affecting outcome-focused motivation were acquisition of mental rewards by reflection on success ($\beta=.32$, $p<.001$) and lessons from reflection on failure ($\beta=.15$, $p<.05$).

These results suggest that people maintain a higher level of motivation after success and that this is related to mental rewards acquired from success and lessons from failure. In particular, continuance-focused motivation after success had an additive effect in combination with short-term goal setting.

(2) Motivation after failure

Regarding motivation after failure, the factors affecting continuance-focused motivation were lessons gained through reflection on failure ($\beta=.26$, $p<.001$) and short-term goal setting ($\beta=.18$, $p<.05$). In contrast, the factors affecting outcome-focused motivation were lessons from failure ($\beta=.35$, $p<.001$) and short-term goal setting ($\beta=.22$, $p<.01$). Mental rewards from success also had a significant effect ($\beta=.14$, $p<.05$).

These results suggest that people maintain a

higher level of motivation after failure and that this is connected to lessons learned from failure and short-term goal setting. Specifically, outcome-focused motivation after failure had an additive effect in combination with mental rewards from success.

DISCUSSION

Most of the previous studies on work motivation have mainly concerned task continuance-focused motivation. However, recently motivation connected to the quality of task outcome has been increasingly viewed as essential. This study focused on both continuance-focused motivation, which was previously seen as important, and on outcome-focused motivation, which recently has become a significant issue. We also examined the effects of reflection on experience, as past-oriented, and goal setting, as future-oriented, on two types of motivation. The results are discussed below.

First, people maintained both continuance-focused and outcome-focused motivation at a higher level after success, while outcome-focused motivation was higher than continuance-focused motivation after failure. This indicates that people would engage in continuous effort at the same level when focusing on the outcome after a success, whereas people would expend greater effort on a task when focusing on the outcome after failure. Given the finding that continuance-focused

motivation after failure was seen at a far lower level than any other type of motivation, people tend to have difficulty in sustaining effort after failure, but focusing on an outcome would help motivation to be sustained or improved.

Second, we examined the degree to which the mental rewards and lessons people acquire through reflection on past experiences affect past-oriented motivation. The results indicated that people acquire mental rewards from success and lessons from failure. This suggests that the two types of reflection, on success or failure, might have different effects on motivation.

Third, we examined how clearly people were able to set short-term and long-term goals and the effect of this on future-oriented motivation. The results showed that people set short-term goals more clearly than they do long-term goals. This would suggest that people tend to shape their future using short-term goals as a guide.

Fourth, we examined the effects of mental rewards and lessons gained from past experiences and goal setting on motivation. The results indicated that motivation after success is strongly affected by mental rewards gained from reflecting on success and lessons acquired through reflection on failure. People have a higher level of motivation after success gained through acquiring mental rewards from success and lessons from failure. According to Rosenberg (1964), this result might suggest that people would continue to make efforts with the support of a positive self-image based on mental rewards, and according to Locke & Latham (1984), people would improve motivation in subsequent trials by applying the lessons from failure to how to accomplish a given task.

In contrast, continuance-focused motivation after failure was strongly affected by lessons from failure and short-term goal setting, while outcome-focused motivation was also affected by mental rewards from success. Specifically, people achieved continuance-focused motivation after failure through acquiring lessons from failure and setting short-term goals, and achieved outcome-focused motivation by additionally acquiring mental rewards from success. These results sug-

gest that the source of motivation after failure is based on lessons from failure and short-term goal setting. Moreover, people would be conscious of the direction of task accomplishment through adding the effects of mental rewards from success.

Based on these results, we propose that business people have two types of motivation, continuance-focused and outcome-focused, and that we need to focus on both of these in future research on motivation. Additionally, people maintain both continuance-focused and outcome-focused motivation at a higher level after success, while outcome-focused motivation remains higher than continuance-focused after failure. Regarding this, we need to confirm that business people have different methods for approaching tasks after experiencing either success or failure.

Finally, continuance-focused motivation after success and failure was affected by mental rewards from success and lessons from failure, and outcome-focused motivation after success and failure was affected by both mental rewards and lessons from past success and failure experiences. Lessons from failure tended to promote both continuance-focused and outcome-focused motivation. This suggests that future research on work motivation should be concerned with learning lessons and developing strategies.

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