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Regulatory Focus Theory

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What is Regulatory Focus Theory?

Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT) has been found to predict motivation, memory, task enjoyment, creativity and emotion (Förster et al., 2009). According to RFT, human behavior and motivation is underpinned by two unique systems of self-regulation: promotion focus, which is concerned with aspirations and accomplishments of ideals, and prevention focus, which is concerned with avoiding mistakes and fulfilling obligations (Higgins, 1997; Watling et al., 2012). Understanding this distinction has important ramifications on the content and delivery of effective feedback.

Key Concepts and Dimensions

Promotion is primarily concerned with accomplishments and achievements; goals are perceived as wishes or desires and individuals are motivated by achieving these goals (Watling et al., 2012).

Prevention focuses on responsibilities and safety; goals are perceived as obligations or necessities and individuals are motivated by avoiding pain or punishment as a result of not achieving these goals (Watling et al., 2012).

Regulatory Fit: For each regulatory focus, there is a preferred strategy during goal pursuit (Shah, Higgins, & Friedman, 1998). Eagerness strategies that support gains or advancements are preferred in promotional focus. Vigilance strategies that prevent losses are preferred in prevention focus. **Regulatory fit occurs** when an individual applies the preferred strategy during goal pursuit. Studies from various fields have shown that a message, information or instruction, is more effective in regulatory fit conditions compared to non-fit conditions.

Measurements

Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (RFQ) is an 11-item instrument developed by Higgins et al. (2001) to measure individuals' regulatory focus. The questions ask the respondents to indicate HOW FREQUENTLY specific events actually occur or have occurred in their lives.

The Self-Guide Congruencies Measure by Higgins et al. (1997) is another tool to determine individuals' regulatory focus. This method was adopted by Shu and Lam (2011) in their study on



the effects of success and failure feedback in a higher education setting.

Two other measures for Regulatory Focus:

- Regulatory Focus Measure - Abridged Version (8 items) (Hamstra et al., 2014)
- Regulatory Focus Scale - Translated Version (30 items) (Fellner et al., 2007)



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