Giving and Summoning Autonomy Support in Hierarchical Relationships

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Abstract

It is not easy to motivate and engage others in a way that is welcomed, effective, and relationship-enriching. In a hierarchical relationship, supervisors' motivating styles and supervisees' agentic engagement–disengagement are often in conflict, rather than in synch. Still, reciprocal causation appears to be a naturally occurring process within these relationships, as supervisors' motivating styles longitudinally transform supervisees' engagement–disengagement, just as supervisees' engagement–disengagement transforms and summons the supervisors' motivating styles. Recognizing this, the article highlights an intervention-based program of research designed to help infuse greater autonomy support and greater agentic engagement into the supervisor–supervisee relationship. When an experimentally based intervention helps supervisors learn how to become more autonomy supportive, interaction partners become more in synch, and this mutually supportive relationship dynamic yields numerous benefits for the supervisor, the supervisee, and the relationship. Future interventions are needed to understand what happens when supervisees learn how to become more agentically engaged. The conclusion is that relationships need and benefit from infusions of both the giving and the summoning of autonomy support.

Hierarchical relationships are those in which caretakers have responsibility for the safety, functioning, productivity, and well-being of those for whom they care. Within the context of these relationships (e.g., teacher–student, parent–child, doctor–client, coach–athlete, manager–worker), the supervisor's effort to motivate the supervisee is an everyday occurrence. It is too often done rather poorly, however. Commonly, the engagement request (e.g., brush your teeth, greet each customer warmly) creates conflict within the relationship. Such conflict need not occur, as the empirical study of how one person can nurture and support the volitional engagement of another is now a sophisticated literature (Assor, Kaplan, & Roth, 2002; Barber, Stoltz, & Olsen, 2005; Reeve & Cheon, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Soenens, & Matos, 2005). The two-fold purpose of this article is, first, to look into that literature to understand how motivating others can be done in a way that is welcomed, effective, and relationship-enriching and, second, to present an intervention-based program of research on the benefits of giving and summoning autonomy support within a hierarchical relationship.

Before pursuing these two purposes, try this introductory exercise. Take a moment to observe an interaction in which one person tries to motivate another (e.g., a tutor encourages a tutee to try something new). You will see a motivating style emerge from the supervisor and, soon after, an engagement versus disengagement reaction from the supervisee. As the supervisee's engagement versus disengagement becomes apparent, you will then see a supporting versus controlling reaction from the supervisor. After a few minutes, this transactional process (e.g., tutor influences tutee, tutee influences tutor) will become apparent and reveal how "in synch" or in conflict the two interaction partners are.

Motivating Style

Motivating style is the orientation toward autonomy or control a supervisor adopts while trying to engage a subordinate in an activity or goal pursuit (Deci, Schwartz, Sheinman, & Ryan, 1981). It exists along a bi–polar continuum that ranges from a highly controlling style on one end through a somewhat controlling to a neutral or mixed style through a somewhat autonomy–supportive style to a highly autonomy-supportive style on the other end of the continuum (Deci et al., 1981; Reeve, 2009). Because motivating style exists along a bi–polar continuum, what autonomy–supportive supervisors say and do during social interaction is typically the opposite of what controlling supervisors say and do.

Autonomy support and interpersonal control express themselves publically through a collection of distinct and widely studied behaviors (discussed below), but the defining characteristic of a supervisor's motivating style is the interpersonal tone that saturates these behaviors (Reeve, 2015). For some supervisors, the controlling aspect of what they say and do is salient, as the supervisor is prescriptive, inflexible, and rather insistent about what the subordinate should think, feel, and do. The interpersonal tone during the social interaction is one of pressure: "I am your boss; I am here to change you". For other supervisors, the supportive aspect of what they say and do is salient, as the supervisor respects the subordinate's perspective, input, and initiatives. The interpersonal tone during the social interaction is one of understanding: "I am your ally; I am here to support you and your strivings".

Autonomy support is a coherent cluster of supervisory behaviors that collectively create that interpersonal tone of support and understanding. The behaviors that collectively yield this interpersonal message include the following: (i) conduct a formative assessment so to take the supervisee's perspective (ask what they need, ask what they are thinking and wanting, ask for their input, preferences, and suggestions); (ii) vitalize their sometimes latent or dormant psychological needs; (iii) provide explanatory rationales for requested actions; (iv) utter non–pressuring and informational language; (v) acknowledge and accept expressions of resistance and negative affect; and (vi) display patience to allow the supervisee the time and space he or she needs to work in their own way (Assor et al., 2002; Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994; Reeve, 2009, 2015; Su & Reeve, 2011). These are categories of autonomy-supportive behaviors, and they are complementary, mutually supporting, and synergistic (Deci et al., 1994). They are also highly positively intercorrelated with each other, which suggests that supervisors display an overall autonomy-supportive style more than they enact discrete acts of autonomy support (Cheon & Reeve, 2013, 2015; Cheon, Reeve, & Moon, 2012; Cheon, Reeve, Yu, & Jang, 2014). When these autonomy-supportive behaviors co-occur, they create relationship conditions that reliably support and satisfy the supervisee's psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. All three of these needs are central to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), but the present paper focuses specifically on how autonomy may be supported and satisfied within the context of a relationship.

Interpersonal control is the exertion of psychological and behavioral pressure to coerce someone to change the way they think, feel, or behave. It is an autonomy-suppressing interaction style that is insensitive to the other's needs and uses strategies such as shaming and guilt induction to restrict what another can express while simultaneously applying pressure to meet supervisor-imposed standards (Barber, 1996; Barber et al., 2005). Such psychological pressure often takes the form of conditional regard (Roth, Assor, Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009), which is the with-holding of approval following noncompliance (negative conditional regard) and the unleashing of approval following compliance (positive conditional regard) (Roth et al., 2009). Behavioral pressure is what supervisors say and do to intrude upon the supervisee's behavioral activity. It pushes and pulls the supervisee toward desired behavior (i.e., prescriptions: "do this") and away

from undesired behavior (i.e., proscriptions: "don't do that"). The "directly controlling behaviors" (Assor, Kaplan, Kanat-Maymon, & Roth, 2005) that collectively yield this interpersonal message of pressure include the following: (i) controlling use of incentives and rewards; (ii) pressuring language (e.g., "you should, must, have to, got to…"); (iii) power assertive techniques such as intimidation and criticism-suppression; (iv) intrusive monitoring and the imposition of strict rules; (v) directives without rationales or discussion; and (vi) impatience that demands quick and unconditional compliance (Assor et al., 2002; Assor et al., 2005; Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2010; Reeve, 2009). These directly controlling behaviors are also positively intercorrelated with each other, which again suggests that supervisors display an overall controlling style more than they enact discrete acts of control. When these controlling behaviors co-occur, they create relationship conditions that reliably frustrate and thwart the supervisee's psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2011; Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, Bosch, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2011; Costa, Ntoumanis, & Bartholomew, 2015). Again, all three needs are important to self-determination theory, but the present focus will be on how autonomy may be frustrated within the context of a relationship.

Autonomy support nurtures engagement, positive functioning, and well-being by vitalizing psychological need satisfaction. That is, psychological need satisfaction energizes engagement and positive functioning, so supervisors indirectly affect supervisees' engagement by providing and creating psychological need-supportive conditions (i.e., autonomy support). In contrast, a controlling motivating style rather explicitly seeks to divorce people from their autonomy and sense of personal causation so as to substitute either internally controlling motivations (e.g., guilt, anxiety, shame, disappointment, introjection, perfectionism, obligation) or external regulation (e.g., incentives, rewards, threats of punishment, negative reinforcers such as staring and yelling). The controlling supervisor seeks to change the supervisee's self-regulated activity into supervisor-regulated activity. Instead of supporting the supervisee's needs, thoughts (goals, opinions, values, beliefs), feelings (emotions, affect), and activity, the controlling supervisor invalidates them so as to establish replacement ways of wanting, thinking, feeling, and behaving that are more acceptable to the supervisor.

Agentic Engagement

Agentic engagement is part of the larger construct of engagement (Reeve, 2012), which refers to how actively involved a person is in an activity or goal pursuit (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012). Engagement functions as a self-generated pathway to attain the valued outcomes one seeks, such as to attain a goal, develop a skill, or learn something new (Skinner, Kindermann, Connell, & Wellborn, 2009). The quality of a supervisee's engagement is an excellent marker (a tell-tale sign) of how well versus how poorly he or she is functioning, as engagement foreshadows personal progress in terms of learning, performing, developing, and achieving, while disengagement foreshadows little or no personal progress (Hughes, Wu, Kwok, Villarreal, & Johnson, 2012; Ladd & Dinella, 2009; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012).

Because multiple pathways to enhanced functioning exist, engagement is necessarily multifaceted; it includes behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and agentic aspects (Christenson et al., 2012). Behavioral engagement refers to how effortfully involved the supervisee is in the activity in terms of concentration, effort, and persistence (Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009). Emotional involvement refers to the presence of positive emotions during task involvement, such as interest, and to the absence of negative emotions, such as anxiety (Skinner et al., 2009). Cognitive engagement refers to how strategically the supervisee attempts to learn

in terms of using sophisticated rather than superficial learning strategies and mental simulations, such as elaboration rather than memorization (Walker, Greene, & Mansell, 2006). Agentic engagement refers to the extent of the supervisee's constructive contribution to the personalization of the environment in which he or she functions (Reeve, 2013). The present paper focuses on the latter variant, because agentic engagement is uniquely social among the four types of engagement and because agentically engaged supervisees are uniquely able to take the actions necessary within a relationship to create a more motivationally supportive environment (relationship) for themselves (Reeve, 2013).

An "agent" is someone who intentionally influences his or her functioning and life circumstances (Bandura, 2006). Agentic engagement is an important construct because it facilitates the following three processes: (a) promotes gains in desired outcomes, such as learning, skill development, and performance; (b) creates gains in psychological need satisfaction, and in autonomy need satisfaction in particular; and (c) orients supervisors to provide supervisees with a more autonomy-supportive motivating style (Reeve, 2012).

When agentically engaged, the person envisions an improved or ideal set of circumstances, formulates action plans and strategies, and then acts purposively to select, change, alter, or improve upon the environment in which he or she functions (Bandura, 2006). In a relationship, each partner is a key part of the other's environment, so the agentic person selects, changes, alters, and improves the relationship he or she is in (i.e., the social conditions under which he or she functions). Agentic engagement can be as subtle as intentionally sitting in the front of the classroom or voicing a preference about how to go about one's work, but it can also be as dramatic as moving or changing one's job or relationship partner. More typically, agentic engagement involves the undertaking of intentional environment-enriching acts, such as expressing one's preferences and opinions, asking for needed resources, asking questions to help one's planning and learning, and letting one's supervisor know what one is interested in and what one needs and wants. One way to get a glimpse into a prototypical expression of agentic engagement might be to glance over the shoulder of a child or adolescent playing "Minecraft" as he or she is engrossed in selecting, creating, changing, altering, shaping, and improving the virtual world before him or her.

In the context of a supervisor–supervisee relationship, agentic engagement involves joining forces with the provider of the environment (e.g., the teacher, parent, workplace manager) to create for oneself a more motivationally supportive environment. The agentically engaged supervisee does not act unilaterally but instead seeks to join forces and negotiate with the supervisor, because the supervisor – like the supervisee – has goals, priorities, preferences, and an agenda of his or her own. In the classroom, for instance, the teacher wants to cover particular content, teach particular skills, promote prosocial behavior, keep order, etc. The needs, goals, and preferences of the supervisor and supervisee are both important, so the agentically engaged supervisee negotiates for greater autonomy support while simultaneously respecting the necessity of the supervisor's structured environment (i.e., "freedom within limits", Rogers, 1969; "autonomy support and structure, not autonomy support or structure", Jang, Reeve, & Deci, 2010). Within this context, the agentically engaged supervisee probes for support, and for autonomy support in particular. Agentic engagement is therefore taking action to summon greater autonomy support.
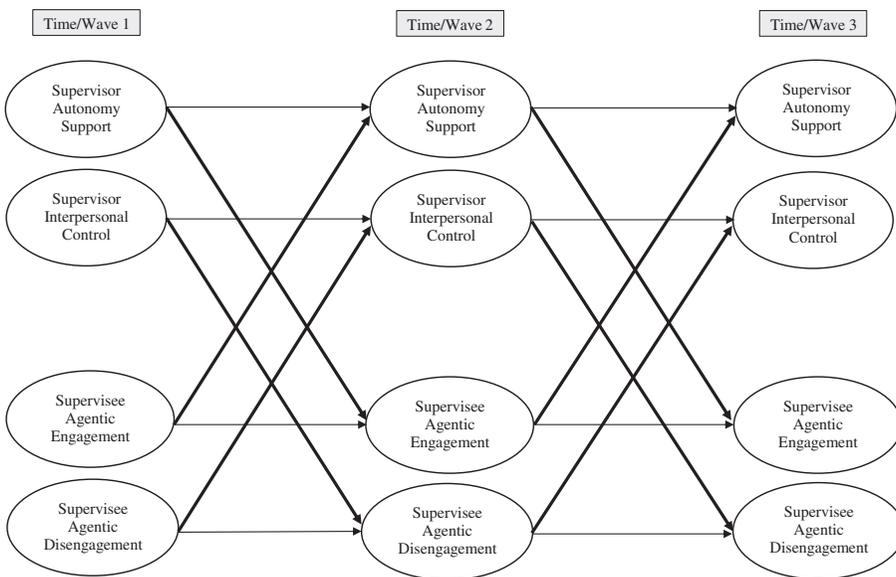
Reciprocal Causation

A close relationship exists between motivating style and agentic engagement (Reeve, 2013). Autonomy support catalyzes another's agentic engagement because it directly vitalizes the psychological need satisfaction from which agentic engagement arises. Control, on the other

hand, suppresses agentic engagement because it directly frustrates psychological need satisfaction and, hence, all types of engagement, including agentic engagement. Similarly, agentic engagement is action taken to bring about greater autonomy support from another, as the agentically engaged person proactively and intentionally seeks to transform the relationship into something more need supporting and less need frustrating. Agentic disengagement, in contrast, brings out greater interpersonal control, as supervisors react rather directly and quickly to signals of disengagement with reactive, often punitive, interpersonal control (Jang, Kim, & Reeve, 2015; Sarrazin, Tessier, Pelletier, Trouilloud, & Chanal, 2006).

Reciprocal causation appears to be a naturally occurring process within supervisor–supervisee relationships (Jang et al., 2015), though this assertion needs to be qualified to the teacher–student domain in which it has so far been empirically investigated (Jang et al., 2015; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Reciprocal causation between interaction partners means that what one person says and does transforms what the other says and does, and vice versa (Sameroff, 2009). That is, what one person says and does changes because of interaction with the other, as students become more or less agentically engaged when teachers offer autonomy support versus interpersonal control, just as teachers become more autonomy supportive or more controlling when students display agentic engagement versus disengagement.

A graphical representation for an empirical test of reciprocal causation within a transactional relationship appears in Figure 1 (based on Jang et al., 2015). The upper part of the figure shows the autonomy-supportive and controlling motivating styles of the supervisor over time, while the lower part of the figure shows the agentic engagement and disengagement of the supervisee over time. Both motivating styles and engagement–disengagement are relatively stable (e.g., a controlling manager today tends to be a controlling manager tomorrow), so the thin horizontal lines in Figure 1 communicate the temporal stability of these variables. But transactional interactions stir change in both the supervisor and supervisee. The downwardly sloped lines in Figure 1 communicate how supervisors affect changes in supervisees, as autonomy support and changes in autonomy support nurture changes in agentic engagement, while interpersonal

Figure 1 Reciprocal causation within a relationship (supervisor influences supervisee, supervisee influences supervisor).

control and changes in control exacerbate changes in agentic disengagement. Similarly, the upwardly sloped lines in Figure 1 communicate how supervisees affect changes in supervisors, as agentic engagement and changes in agentic engagement invite changes in autonomy support, while agentic disengagement and changes in agentic disengagement exacerbate changes in interpersonal control. Reciprocal causation can therefore be seen as the V-shaped and inverted V-shaped patterns of paths within the figure.

One scorecard to diagnose the quality of a relationship is the extent to which the two are in synch versus in conflict. In synch, interaction partners come together and benefit each other. They join forces to move each other toward higher-quality motivation and engagement and toward a higher-quality motivating style. Together, they experience gains in their mutual relationship satisfaction, as both report greater enjoyment of the other, greater attachment security with the other, greater emotional reliance on the other, greater vitality when with the other, and greater inclusion of the other in one's own self-concept (Deci, La Guardia, Moller, Scheiner, & Ryan, 2006). As relationship partners gain autonomy, agency, and autonomy support, the two function in more constructive ways. The two become motivational and environmental assets for each other.

In conflict, interaction partners move apart and undermine each other. They oppose each other, lose engagement, and move toward a lower-quality motivating style. As relationship partners lose autonomy, agency, and autonomy support (replaced by compulsions, compliance, and control), the two function in diminished ways (i.e., poor internalization, ill-being, compromised relationship functioning, interpersonal distance, oppositional defiance; Costa et al., 2015; Van Petegem, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, Beyers, & Aelterman, 2015; Vansteenkiste, Soenens, Van Petegem, & Duriez, 2014). The two become motivational and environmental liabilities to each other.

Infusions of autonomy support and agentic engagement into a supervisor–supervisee relationship allow the interaction partners to become more in synch with one another. These infusions orient the relationship toward constructive reciprocal causation. The supervisor strives to understand and support the supervisee. Experiencing such support, the more agentically engaged supervisee experiences a metaphorical green light to make his or her wants, needs, and interests clearer (which is what agentic engagement is) and hence easier to support. This mutually supportive relationship dynamic yields numerous benefits for both (Cheon et al., 2014).

Infusions of interpersonal control and agentic disengagement into a supervisor–supervisee relationship, however, put interaction partners in conflict. These infusions orient that relationship toward unidirectional causality. A controlling style moves relationship partners toward unidirectional causality because it seeks to silence or shut down the supervisee's autonomy and agency. Experiencing such control, the agentically disengaged supervisee experiences a metaphorical red light against expressing his or her wants, needs, and interests (which is what agentic disengagement is). Such disengagement tends to bring out more autonomy-stifling interpersonal control from the supervisor. This one-against-the-other relationship dynamic yields numerous costs for both.

The counter-argument to the above is that interpersonal control is sometimes necessary and situationally appropriate, as in:

> Sometimes you just have to stop the complaining and back-talk and just make sure people get the job done – that they do what they are supposed to do and that they do it right and they do it on time.

But the empirical findings are clear: Interpersonal control increases disengagement, not engagement (Jang et al., 2015; Sarrazin et al., 2006).

Improving Hierarchical Relationships with an Infusion of Autonomy Support

Intervention programs can be created and implemented to help people (e.g., teachers, coaches, parents, dentists) become significantly more autonomy supportive to those they wish to motivate and engage (Chatzisarantis & Hagger, 2009; Cheon et al., 2012; deCharms, 1976; Edmunds, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2008; Moustaka, Vlachopoulous, Kabitsis, & Theodorakis, 2012; Tessier, Sarrazin, & Ntoumanis, 2010). We refer to our teacher-focused, self-determination theory-based intervention as the autonomy-supportive intervention program, or ASIP (Reeve & Cheon, 2014). We created ASIP to offer a formal, carefully designed and implemented program to help teachers become more autonomy supportive and less controlling toward their students during instruction. Our earlier intervention work in the classroom (Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon, & Barch, 2004), workplace (Hardre & Reeve, 2009), and home (Weber-Gasparoni et al., 2013) led us to three conclusions, namely that: (i) autonomy-supportive behaviors were not commonly occurring events within supervisor–supervisee relationships; (ii) supervisors could learn autonomy-supportive behaviors – and quite masterfully so; and (iii) when supervisors became more autonomy supportive, the people they supervised experienced and displayed numerous benefits, as did the supervisors themselves.

The ASIP we offer to teachers appears in outline form in Figure 2 (based on Cheon et al., 2014). The upper part of the figure shows that the ASIP relies on an experimental research design and also that the intervention is longitudinally based. The lower part of the figure overviews the content and events that take place within the three-part teacher-focused workshop that is so central to the ASIP.

During Part 1 of the ASIP, teachers learn what autonomy support is, why it is important, the empirical evidence on the effectiveness of autonomy support and the costs of interpersonal control, and how to implement autonomy-supportive teaching in the classroom. One sample script for the autonomy-supportive instructional behavior of "acknowledge and accept negative
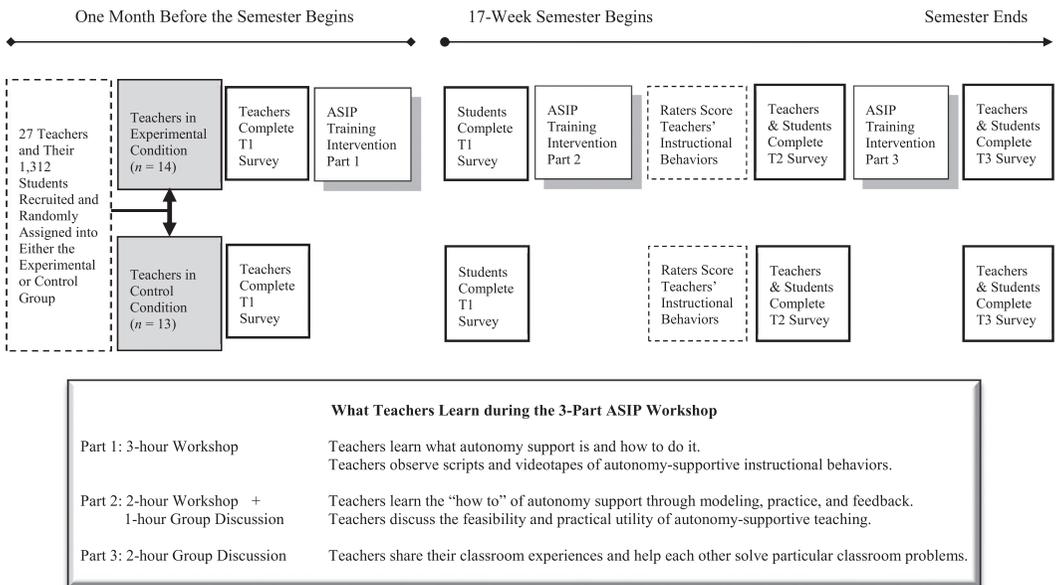
Figure 2 Experimental, longitudinal design of the three-part ASIP intervention to help teachers learn how to support students' autonomy during instruction with three waves of data collection.

affect" appears in Table 1 to provide illustrative content. During Part 2, the focus shifts to a "how to" workshop to help teachers develop the practical context-specific skill that is autonomy-supportive teaching. Part 2 is skill-based, but it also adds an internalization-faciliating group discussion in which teachers express their doubts, identify potential obstacles, ask what is wrong with controlling teaching, and debate the practical utility of autonomy-supportive teaching. During Part 3, teachers share and exchange their classroom experiences, instructional strategies, ideas, tips, and insights. Teachers in the control group are placed on a waiting list to receive ASIP after the semester, and they thus provide instruction during the semester in a way that represents "standard practice" for that teacher and school.

If ASIP works, it should produce two key outcomes. Notice that Figure 2 also includes our data collection strategy, as teachers and students complete questionnaires at waves 1, 2, and 3, and trained raters score teachers' post-intervention motivating style objectively.

First, teacher participation in ASIP should provide teachers with the professional developmental opportunity they need to significantly upgrade the quality of their motivating style. To assess whether or not teachers become more autonomy supportive and less controlling, we have trained raters who are blind to the teacher's experimental condition visit each classroom (unannounced) at mid-semester to score that teacher's actual, objective autonomy-supportive and controlling instructional behaviors. Raters routinely score teachers in the experimental group as significantly more autonomy supportive during instruction than teachers in the control group (Cheon & Reeve, 2013, 2015; Cheon et al., 2012; Cheon et al., 2014). We also ask the students to report their perceptions of their teacher's autonomy-supportive and controlling teaching at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. Students consistently score teachers in the experimental group as significantly more autonomy supportive and as significantly less controlling than teachers in the control group at both mid-semester and end of semester (Cheon & Reeve, 2013, 2015; Cheon et al., 2012; Cheon et al., 2014). And, we ask teachers to report on their own motivating style. In doing so, we find that practically all teachers in the experimental group report a developmental change in their motivating style toward greater autonomy support (Cheon & Reeve, 2013; Reeve & Cheon, 2015).

Second, if ASIP works, it should help teachers transform their students' need satisfaction, agentic engagement, and positive functioning. To assess these effects, we ask students to report

Table 1. A sample script used in ASIP to help teachers learn how to acknowledge and accept students' expressions of negative affect

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When students (a) express negative emotion such as boredom, stress, anxiety, confusion, apathy, or anger, (b) complain, (c) resist a request, or (d) display disengagement, the teacher might:
Acknowledge the negative affect
"I see that you are not very enthusiastic about today's lesson. Do I have that right?"
As the student and teacher both acknowledge the negative affect, the teacher might then accept it as a potentially valid reaction to a request that the student perceives to be unfair, unreasonable, or simply asking too much of the student.
Accept the negative affect
"Yes, we have practiced this same skill many times before, haven't we?"
Once the negative affect (and the problem that caused it) have been acknowledged and accepted, the teacher and student can then begin to work collaboratively to soothe it.
Attempt to diagnose and solve the problem that caused the negative affect
"Okay. Let's see. What might we do differently this time? Any suggestions?"
These key words ("Yes"; "Okay"; "Any suggestions?") become the teacher's starting point to find the source of the negative affect and to extinguish it.

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their experiences of need satisfaction, need frustration, engagement, and disengagement at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. Students in the experimental group routinely report greater need satisfaction, lesser need frustration, greater engagement, and lesser disengagement than do students in the control group at both mid-semester and end of semester (Cheon & Reeve, 2013; Cheon et al., 2014). To assess effects relating to students' transformed functioning, we assess and find that students of teachers who participate in ASIP show greater skill development (Cheon & Reeve, 2013), lesser amotivation (Cheon & Reeve, 2015), and greater achievement (Cheon et al., 2012). In one ASIP involving paralympic coaches and their elite athletes, the athletes of coaches who participated in ASIP won significantly more Olympic medals than did the athletes of coaches in the control group (Cheon, Reeve, Lee, & Lee, 2015).

We have further tested if the positive outcomes observed in these studies endure over time. Findings show that the benefits observed during ASIP do endure for at least one year (Cheon & Reeve, 2013). We have also looked at ASIP-enabled benefits for the teachers themselves, and the findings rather clearly show large benefits in teachers' motivation (e.g., passion), skill (e.g., teaching efficacy), and well-being (e.g., job satisfaction) (Cheon et al., 2014). The take-away from this program of research is that the infusion of greater autonomy support into the supervisor–supervisee relationship is possible and produces meaningful, wide-ranging, and long-lasting benefits for the supervisor, for the supervisee, and for the supervisor–supervisee relationship.

Improving Hierarchical Relationships with an Infusion of Agentic Engagement

To date, we have not yet conducted a program of research designed to infuse supervisees' agency into the supervisor–supervisee relationship. So, it remains an open question as to the extent to which a carefully designed intervention can help students become more agentically engaged in their schooling, teenagers become more agentically engaged in how they are parented, workers become more agentically engaged in how they are managed, athletes become more agentically engaged in how they practice and train, or patients become more agentically engaged in their health care. Such interventions would encourage individuals to envision an improved set of circumstances, formulate action plans and strategies to bring those circumstances to fruition, and act purposively and collaboratively to select, change, alter, and improve upon the environment in which they function.

We suspect that intervention-infused agentic engagement would prove fruitful and constructive. We base this confidence on two empirical results – one from our own research and a second from the pioneering work of Richard deCharms. In our work, we assess students' naturally occurring agentic engagement and observe how changes in agentic engagement and disengagement produce subsequent changes in students' motivation and in students' perceptions of their teachers' motivating styles. When agentic engagement rises during the first half of the semester (for whatever naturally occurring reason), students experience significantly greater late-semester autonomy need satisfaction (Reeve & Lee, 2014) and greater late-semester perceived autonomy support from their teacher (Reeve, 2013). Because these benefits naturally occur, it makes sense that students might be able to intentionally produce these same benefits for themselves by learning how to become more agentically engaged.

Over the course of an academic year, Richard deCharms (1976) worked successfully with middle-school students to help them transition themselves from disengaged "pawns" to become engaged "origins". deCharms and his colleagues further developed the Hit–Steer Observation System (Fiedler, 1975; Koenigs, Fiedler, & deCharms, 1977). This system assesses the frequency of students' attempts to constructively influence the teacher (a "hit") as well as whether those influence attempts actually transform the teacher's subsequent behavior (a "steer"). A "hit"

(influence attempt) reflects what students do, and it typifies agentic engagement. A "steer" reflects how teachers respond to students' suggestions and inputs, and it typifies a change in the teacher's motivating style (autonomy supportive versus controlling). When trained raters used the Hit–Steer Observation System to score students' classroom agentic engagement, they found that students' agentic engagement (a) correlated positively with a perceived origin (i.e., autonomy-supportive) learning climate, (b) occurred more frequently in the classrooms of autonomy-supportive rather than controlling teachers, and (c) correlated positively with students' academic achievement (Fiedler, 1975; Koenigs et al., 1977; Reeve et al., 2004).

Perhaps in the same way that teachers can learn how to take their students' perspective, provide explanatory rationales, use non-controlling language, and acknowledge and accept negative affect (i.e., autonomy supportive behavior), students too can learn how to express their preferences, let the teacher know what they want and need, offer input, offer suggestions, communicate their level of interest, make a contribution, ask questions, communicate what they are thinking and needing, recommend a goal, solicit resources, request learning opportunities, seek ways to add personal relevance to the lesson, ask for a say in how problems are solved, seek clarification, ask for an example, generate options, communicate likes and dislikes, and request assistance from their teacher such as modeling, tutoring, or feedback.

Conclusion

In their self-determination theory, Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (Ryan & Deci, 2000) conceptualize the individual's needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness as psychological nutriments to well-being (for the specific example, see Ryan, 1995). We all need and benefit from a daily dose of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Sheldon, Ryan, & Reis, 1996). Moving from individual well-being to relationship well-being, it makes sense to propose that the giving, receiving, and summoning of autonomy support can be conceptualized as social nutriments to relationship functioning and well-being.

Short Biography

Johnmarshall Reeve is a Professor in the Department of Education and a member of the Brain and Motivation Research Institute (bMRI) at Korea University in Seoul, South Korea. While in the USA, he received his PhD from Texas Christian University, completed postdoctoral work at the University of Rochester, and served on the faculty at the University of Iowa and the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. Professor Reeve's research interests center on the empirical study of all aspects of human motivation and emotion with particular emphases on teachers' motivating styles, students' motivation during learning activities, agentic engagement, and the neuroscience of intrinsic motivation. He has conducted workshops on teachers' motivating styles in ten different nations. For his work on teachers' motivating styles, he received (a) the Thomas N. Urban Research Award given by the FINE (First in the Nation in Education) Foundation to recognize how research can be used to enhance educational practice and (b) 2014 Excellence in Research Award from the NASPSP for the outstanding article published in the *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*. He has published over 50 articles in journals such as the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 20 book chapters, and three books, including *Understanding Motivation and Emotion*, sixth edition. Since 2011, Prof. Reeve has served as Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Motivation and Emotion*. Additional information is available at http://johnmarshallreeve.org.

Note

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