



Motivation is *not binary*

A design audit based on Self-determination Theory

Map Your audience

Before designing, place your audience on the motivation spectrum. Most cohorts span several positions at once. Be honest about where most people are actually starting, not where you'd like them to be.

Position	What it looks like	What drives it	Who's here in your cohort?
Amotivation	Not engaging, or just clicking through	Doesn't see the point; doesn't feel capable	
External regulation	Complying because it's required	Deadline, compliance dashboard, manager pressure	
Introjected regulation	Engaging out of anxiety or guilt	Fear of falling behind; contingent self-worth	
Identified regulation	Choosing to engage because it connects to their work	Personal relevance; own goals	
Integrated regulation	Engaging because it fits who they are	Professional identity; values alignment	
Intrinsic motivation	Genuinely interested in the activity itself	Curiosity; real enjoyment of the content	

Audit the Three Basic Needs

Internalization happens when three basic psychological needs are satisfied: **competence** (feeling effective), **autonomy** (feeling like you have a genuine say), and **relatedness** (feeling like the design sees you).

COMPETENCE

- Does this design assume a skill level that fits the actual range in this cohort?
- Where does a person with prior knowledge encounter something that recognizes what they already know?
- Are failure states framed as information or as judgment?

AUTONOMY

- Where does the person have a real choice about how they engage?
- Is the rationale framed around what the audience cares about or around organizational needs?
- Does the design acknowledge that some of this content might not be interesting?

RELATEDNESS

- Does the design take the person's actual work context seriously, not a generic version of their role?
- If there are anxieties common to this topic, does the design acknowledge them or talk past them?
- Would a person feel that the people who built this thought about people like them?

Answer the Three Questions

These questions are based on research on what actually moves people from external compliance toward identifying with a behavior (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick & Leone, 1994).

Question	What to look for	Red flag
Does the design connect to something the person actually values?	The design is framed in terms of the person's own goals, challenges, or professional identity, not the organization's compliance needs.	Rationale reads as: "this is important for the company."
Does the rationale acknowledge that this might not be interesting, but it's necessary?	The rationale is honest about the nature of the content and doesn't pretend everything is fascinating.	Opener tries to convince people they'll love this.
Where is the person making a real choice?	At least one point in the experience gives the person genuine agency: sequence, depth, application context, reflection prompt.	The only choice is pass/fail on the knowledge check.