Motivational Characteristics of Job Roles:
Regulatory Focus of a Job Role
and Regulatory Fit between Job Role and Work Manner

It is posited that a job role itself intrinsically has its own motivational characteristics. The motivational aspects of a job role influence our preferences and evaluation of that role (or related work) and our feelings about the manner of working. This study examines the motivational nature of job roles in terms of a regulatory focus (Higgins, 1997), where a promotion focus refers to approaching a desired state and a prevention focus refers to avoiding an undesired state. In other words, those who are promotion focused are motivated by rewards instead of punishments, and vice versa for those who are prevention focused.

Study 1 explores general feelings about different lines of work based on regulatory focus, showing that job roles in areas such as design, sales, promotions, planning/strategy, and R&D are perceived as promotion-focused, whereas job roles in areas such as customer service, quality assurance, production, finance, and HRD are prevention-focused.

Study 2 examines the preferences and evaluations of promotion-focused and prevention-focused jobs. We found that participants were likely to prefer a promotion-focused job role even though, when asked, they assigned a higher valuation to a prevention-focused job role. However, when participants were presented with hypothetical work scenarios, they judged promotion-focused job roles as more reward-worthy but judged prevention-focused job roles more severely. For example, participants typically judged failures in prevention-focused job roles harshly but successes in those same roles in a neutral manner. On the other hand, they typically valued successes in promotion-focused job roles highly and judged failures lightly.

In Study 3, we observed the effects of the regulatory fit between a job role and the manner of performing the job role. With prevention-focused job roles, confidence in the working manner was greater when a vigilance strategy was adopted, which suited the prevention focus of these tasks, as compared with the eagerness strategy, which did not suit the regulatory focus of these job roles. No significant differences between the working manners were found for promotion-focused jobs.

These study results suggest that motivational characteristics of work can play an important role in the productivity and satisfaction of employees (e.g., person-job fit, person-supervisor fit, etc.) and cooperation between work roles (e.g. intergroup dynamics in an organization).