

Motivation to Learn

Excerpted from Knowles, Holton, & Swanson (1998), p. 149-150.

The andragogical model of adult learning makes some fundamentally different assumptions about what motivates adults to learn. Adults tend to be more motivated toward learning that helps them solve problems in their lives or results in internal payoffs. This does not mean that external payoffs (for example, salary increase) have no relevance, but rather that the internal need satisfaction is the more potent motivator.

Wlodkowski (1985) provides a partial explanation for this difference. He suggests that adult motivation to learn is the sum of four factors:

1. *Success*—adults want to be successful learners.
2. *Volition*—adults want to feel a sense of choice in their learning.
3. *Value*—adults want to learn something they value.
4. *Enjoyment*—adults want to experience the learning as pleasurable.

The first principle of andragogy states that “adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it.” Knowing why they need to learn something is the key to giving adults a sense of volition about their learning. Principle 6 states that the most potent motivators for adults are internal ones: for example, quality of life, satisfaction, and self-esteem. Said differently, the learning that adults value the most will be that which has personal value to them.

This position is also quite consistent with expectancy theory (Vroom, 1995), a classic theory of adult motivation in the workplace. Expectancy theory posits that an individual’s motivation is the sum of three factors:

- *Valence*—the value a person places on the outcome.
- *Instrumentality*—the probability that the valued outcomes will be received given that certain outcomes have occurred.
- *Expectancy*—the belief a person has that certain effort will lead to outcomes that get rewarded.

Put into learning terms, adult learners will be most motivated when they believe that they can learn the new material (expectancy) and that the learning will help them with a problem or issue (instrumentality) that is important in their life (valence).

Wlodkowski (1985) suggests a model of characteristics and skills for instructors who are good motivators of adults. They are grouped into four categories: expertise, empathy, enthusiasm, clarity (see Table 7-3). Adult learning facilitators who develop these characteristics are likely to be highly motivating.

Table 7-3
Characteristics and Skills of Motivating Instructors
(Wlodkowski, 1985)

<p>1. Expertise: The power of knowledge and preparation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows something beneficial to adults • Knows it well • Is prepared to convey it through an instructional process
<p>2. Empathy: The power of understanding and consideration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a realistic understanding of learner's needs and expectations • Has adapted instruction to the learner's level of experience and skill development • Continuously considers learners' perspectives
<p>3. Enthusiasm: The power of commitment and animation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cares about and values what is being taught • Expresses commitment with appropriate degrees of emotion, animation, and energy
<p>4. Clarity: The power of language and organization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be understood and followed by most learners • Provide for learners a way to comprehend what has been taught if it is not clear in the initial presentation.

Wlodkowski, 1985

References

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Vroom, V. H. (1995). *Work and Motivation (classic reprint)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Wlodkowski, R. J. (1985). *Enhancing adult motivation to learn*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.