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MOTIVATION IN THE UNIVERSITY EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

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Abstract

The educational process is a conscious transformation through knowledge. Each individual should be well aware of his/her qualities and skills and leverage on his/her potential. Motivation is the extent to which a persistent effort is directed to achieving a well-defined goal. A person works, perseveres in work and directs his/her behaviour toward the right results. The main research objectives of this paper are: - assessment of a group of students in order to determine the motivational factors in education; analysis of students' opinions; - how do I motivate a student to achieve his/her goals; - how do I determine ambition-motivation-passion; - Human role models who achieved success in their carrier. A group of 100 students of UTCB [*Technical University of Civil Engineering of Bucharest*], last year of studies, and 50 Master's students, was studied in order to analyse the building of motivation to succeed in life and career, and the motivation to learn over a two-year period. The questionnaires they answered show that the motivational attitudes towards work (study) are: the work itself (faculty, study), salary (or other financial or material rewards, scholarship), promotions, recognition, benefits, work conditions (the atmosphere in class), supervision (professors, manager), co-workers (school colleagues), organisational culture.

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Keywords: Education, motivation, human models, objectives, obstacles, success in career.



1. Introduction

Education is complex. It means that you have to maximise the potential that you possess in this life, to be able to use all your skills, knowledge and virtues, to bring them to light, to be a true human being.

Motivation is the extent to which a persistent effort is directed to achieving a well-defined goal (Johns, 1998). A person works, perseveres in work and directs his/her behaviour toward the right results.

Human beings possess a built-in “Intrinsic Motivation” which enables them to design projects, nurture their ideals and believe in their future. By its nature, the human being is very sensitive to the content of his/her work and to everything that allows him/her to evolve. The information we receive shapes our personality and determines our behaviour. Extrinsic motivation is that which comes from the work environment outside the task; it is usually applied by others (Cucuş, 2005).

Some of the doctrines that studied motivation and human behaviour are (Johns, 1998):

- Douglas McGregor’s “Theory X and Theory Y”;
- Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs” Theory;
- Herzberg’s “Two Factor Theory”.

2. Problem Statement

The main research objectives of this paper are:

- Assessment of a group of students in order to determine the motivational factors in education; analysis of students’ opinions;
- How do I motivate a student to achieve his/her goals;
- How do I determine ambition-motivation-passion;
- Human role models who achieved success in their carrier.

3. Research Questions

A group of 100 students of the Technical University of Civil Engineering of Bucharest, last year of studies, and 50 Master’s students was studied over a two-year period in order to analyse the building of motivation to succeed in life and career, and the motivation to learn. A 40-question questionnaire was designed and filled in gradually by each student throughout the semester, adapted from (Study on “Motivation in learning”, 2011; Burnett & Jarvis, 2012). This paper presents the answers to those questions, depending on the results obtained. The main motivational factors in the student’s opinion, which were analysed in the questionnaire, are:

A. Success in life means:

1. a successful career;
2. good relations with the colleagues, family, friends;
3. the financial situation;
4. starting a family;
5. fame.

B. What contributes to building a successful career?

1. level of training and obtained results;
2. intelligence, smartness;

3. motivation (will, perseverance) at work;
4. positive attitude toward work (seriousness, passion, involvement, optimism, responsibility, confidence, commitment, interest, patience, creativity);
5. work effort;
6. family support;
7. overcoming obstacles;
8. self-confidence.

C. Students consider that they learn:

1. to have a successful career;
2. to obtain recognition and be respected by the others, to obtain fame;
3. useful subjects in the future;
4. interesting and attractive subjects;
5. to be the best professional;
6. to take good grades, a scholarship;
7. the professor is a role model for me;
8. role model in the family in terms of learning, attitude of the family;
9. parents insist on graduating faculty;
10. the professor inspires fear.

D. The way you learn:

1. when I learn my aim is to understand what the professor teaches us in class;
2. when I study I associate new knowledge with what I already know;
3. in order to learn better, I try to assimilate taught information logically (diagrams, tables, formulas etc.);
4. when I learn, I try to find the usefulness of the information in the everyday professional life;
5. learning taught information as a computer game;
6. I resort to other information sources;
7. I usually learn by heart.

E. What would determine you more to learn?

1. to know that the information taught will be useful to me;
2. the atmosphere in class;
3. to apply what I have learnt in practice;
4. rewarding by praises, positive appreciation, encouragement;
5. courses should be exciting;
6. my opinion be considered by the professors;
7. rewarding in gifts, money, scholarship, other material benefits;
8. having role models;
9. introduction of the “another type of school” week (trips, creative activities, professional visits, socialising activities).

Note: Distribution of answer by order of occurrence frequency (1 - high frequency of answer)

4. Purpose of the Study

This paper proposes several methods to boost student motivation in the educational process.

4.1. Steps to be followed in order to increase motivation:

A professor may consider the following aspects to support a student's motivation during the educational process (Constantinescu, 2017):

1. Establishing of ambitious objectives that are gratifying when reached.
2. Analysis of S.M.A.R.T. (Specific. Measurable. Attainable. Relevant. Time-bound) objectives. A S.W.O.T. (Strengths. Weaknesses. Opportunities. Threats) analysis is necessary for more options.
3. Finding the Meta-objective. Knowing the emotions, feelings, positive aspects involved to be motivated to reach the objective. When the objective is achieved, how does the subject think s/he will feel?
4. Short list of motivational factors (three up to five) and what can be done to support the same.
5. Motivational factors are mentioned in the reward system by those involved.
6. Regular meetings and discussions (on a weekly basis) with each student designed to go through the stages required to attain the objective.
7. Delegation of students to solve certain tasks and building confidence.
8. Rewarding of those who reach the milestones of the objective, appreciation of success.
9. Permanent feedback on the stage of reaching the intermediary or final objectives.
10. Establishing a creative environment in the work team by offering more freedom in decision making. Involving students in the decision-making process.
11. Encouraging initiative and novelty.
12. Celebrating the results.

4.2. Ways to stimulate motivation, ambition and passion

Those motivated to pursue the set goals will make a greater effort and persevere despite obstacles, compared to those who are motivated by obtaining favourable evaluations (who, in general, will avoid challenges). Those in the second category will have a limited motivational persistence.

Motivational involvement in achieving a known goal may determine motivational persistence. "Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life" (Frankl, 2009). Leveraging on strengths, virtues, personal skills and use of innate resources may naturally induce personal and professional performance and development. According to (Cucuș, 2005; Constantinescu, 2017), the main elements involved in increasing motivation to reach objectives are:

- Effort - energy used to reach certain motivational objectives;
- Purpose - searching for and choosing the right objectives, use of multiple solutions, paying attention to new opportunities that may arise on the way to reaching the objective;
- Self-confidence - student's ability to use his/her skills, strengths, virtues and personal talents to achieve objectives and overcome obstacles;
- Meta-objective - combining reason and emotion, the emotional side of the objective;
- Perseverance - motivational endurance despite obstacles, difficulties or duration of the task, tenacity aimed at reaching previously established objectives;

- Organisation - planning and channelling effort and resources to achieve the objectives, step-by-step application of planned stages;

- Focus - focusing on the goal pursued, essentially on resisting disturbing factors;

- Obstacle - disturbing factor, identification of the best solution/overcoming of the problem;

- Self-competitiveness - knowing “what you are”, being aware of your innate qualities, personality, limits, may generate the possibility to outdo yourself.

Choosing objectives and tasks that are in line with an individual’s personality is the primary factor that generates motivation and this is achieved by careful observation of that person in various environments.

Stimulation of motivation in any field can be seen as a computer game. Just as the game designers look for solutions to attract the player and keep him/her in front of the display, to play level after level after level, in everyday life, the professor or the employer searches for reasons and solutions to stimulate motivation. Account is taken of the fact that each individual is unique. Individuals are born with different personalities and talents, which are shaped by experience and lifelong learning. Motivation reasons may vary from one person to another.

4.3. Role models who influence motivation in education.

Parents are the role models with the most important impact on a child’s education and they can best instil perseverance through guidance. “Children absorb knowledge from their surroundings” (Montessori, 1920). Finding out *who you are* is a complex process, with many variables and new information, often discovered due to a context. Family plays an important part in this process. Some examples of role models with successful careers achieved by overcoming obstacles and failures (Constanda, 2016):

- Michael Jordan: was kicked out of the high school basketball team;

- The Beatles: rejected by record labels, which saw no musical future for them;

- Steve Jobs: removed from the management of the company that he himself founded;

- Walt Disney: fired from a newspaper as he was seen as lacking imagination and good ideas;

- Albert Einstein: did not speak until the age of four, with no particular achievements in school, with communication and behavioural issues;

- Steven Spielberg: dismissed several times by the University of South Carolina;

And the list can go on ...

When going through difficult times, it is good to tell yourself that celebrities experienced failure before knowing success. It is good to have role models and goals. Albert Einstein said, “I am thankful for all of those who said NO to me. It’s because of them I’m doing it myself” (Einstein, 2000). These examples are edifying for never giving up, recovering from failures and reaching your objectives.

5. Research Methods

Students want a successful career and good relations with the others, thus obtaining financial security with a view to starting a family, all of these leading in time to social prestige, fame and respect from the others. The level of training and the satisfactory results obtained, along with intelligence and smartness, are the most important factor in building a successful career. Motivation, hand in hand with a positive attitude toward work, determines a sustained work effort and overcoming of obstacles. The

thinking process of optimists is more realistic, and they have greater chances to be motivated and to have positive attitudes towards work and effort. They have bigger chances to have a successful career.

A very high percentage of students are motivated to learn in the perspective of a successful career. Students need to feel the benefits of a subject matter and of the quality of the information delivered for their future career, to understand the concrete usefulness of what s/he learns on his/her professional path. In students' opinion, the usefulness of subject matters dealing with personal and professional development, a successful career and respect from the others are a strong source of motivation.

In most cases, students associate new knowledge with already known knowledge and, in order to manage time efficiently, they try to understand in class what the professor teaches and to assimilate information logically. Students try to explain in practice what they learn and to find the usefulness of the information in their day-to-day professional life, having the ability to correlate theoretical and practical aspects. Information is assimilated logically, rather than "mechanically".

The questionnaire shows the importance of appreciating the students as an encouraging factor to boost self-esteem and one's potential to perform a task. Teaching in college in the form of a computer game is a highly used practice nowadays, when young people are fascinated by IT, which keeps them motivated.

Students believe that the introduction of the "another type of school" week in a semester could be useful, the same as in pre-university studies. Trips, creative activities and professional visits can result in pleasant and balanced social relations, friendships, relaxation and good mood. All these have a positive impact on learning, motivation, ambition, perseverance, emotional balance. The importance of good relations between individuals, getting to know your colleagues in different environment than the professional one, is also acknowledged by large companies through team building activities (for instance, a weekend in the mountains with the colleagues offered by the company together with a coordinator of group activities: entertaining and creative activities, visits to sites of interest for the company, etc.

6. Findings

The answered questionnaires show that the motivational attitudes towards work (study) are: the work itself (faculty, study), salary (or other financial or material rewards, scholarship), promotions, recognition, benefits, work conditions (the atmosphere in class), supervision (professors, manager), co-workers (school colleagues), organisational culture.

To educate means to focus on the evolution of each and every individual.

The conclusions of the research in this paper on building motivation in the educational process are:

- The importance of being aware of individual needs, path in life and learning objectives;
- Existence of role models to determine a boost in the motivation to learn;
- Importance of family attitude toward learning;
- Involving students in extracurricular activities (trips, visits) with themes adapted to the major subject matters, which can be useful and pleasant at the same time, with concrete application of theoretic information in the practical professional activity;
- Positive influence of the teaching approach on the motivation to learn (applying theoretical aspects, presenting essential and concise information, participative and active teaching, teaching process that is upgraded and permanently improved in terms of quality);

- Influence of the organisational culture of the school on the motivation to learn;
- Offering rewards (praise, prizes, trips, scholarships);
- Importance of introducing the “another type of school” week in a semester, the same as in pre-university studies.

The educational process is a conscious transformation by knowing and encouraging the student to be his/her best self. Each person should know him/herself well, appreciate his/her potential as accurately as possible and make the best use of his/her will to exploit his/her self-control, creativity and communication skills.

All these lead to building motivation in education and, consequently, to obtaining professional performance.

7. Conclusion

The methods of increasing motivation in the educational process presented in this paper result in positive feedback through implementation. Learning is determined by motivation. Keeping motivation alive is like a game, one should find methods to maintain interest. Motivational perseverance (ambition) can be cultivated by exercising the elements presented in the paper, leading to reaching the goal and the objectives of the task chosen. To educate means to focus on the evolution of each and every individual. “Think like a man of action, act like a man of thought” (Bergson, 1928).

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