

MOTIVATED STUDENTS COULD BE THE FUTURE SUCCESSFUL MANAGERS

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to argue that it exists a natural correlation between college learning and the corporate work settings, and students can be motivated to be active participants in their own education. Students can be shown that through the natural course of college learning, they are acquiring valuable core skills or transferable competencies that will be of later use in their corporate lives. The article presents this theme by analyzing and elaborating on four main competencies, the same skills needed in corporate structures, which are naturally acquired during the course of college learning.

Key words: motivation, transferable skills, incentives

JEL classification: I250 Education and Development

1. Introduction

Motivation is a theoretical construct used to explain the initiation, direction, intensity, persistence, and quality of behavior, especially goal-directed behavior. *Motives* are hypothetical constructs used to explain why people are doing what they are doing. Motives are distinguished from related constructs such as *goals* (the immediate objectives of particular sequences of behavior) and *strategies* (the methods used to achieve goals and thus to satisfy motives).

Motivation has been widely studied in Education, Human

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Resources Management and in other many fields.

Researchers have explored motivation from various theoretical perspectives, such as *behavioral* (Skinner, 1953, 1978), *social* (Bandura, 1977, 2011), *cognitive* (Festinger, 1957), and *humanistic standpoints* (Maslow, 1968, 1970; Rogers, 1969). Lately, researchers have advanced various dimensions of motivation, such as *self-efficacy* (Bandura, 1997), *values* (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992), and *goals* (Ames, 1992; Locke & Latham, 1990), and more comprehensive macro-theories such as *self-determination theory* (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and *social-cognitive theory* (Bandura, 1986).

Although many significant psychological components influence student behaviors, motivation is considered one of the most important foundations essential for students' academic development (Steinmayr & Spinath, 2009).

Motives, goals, and strategies can be difficult to distinguish in situations that call for intentional learning of cognitive content, because optimal forms of motivation to learn and optimal strategies for accomplishing the learning tend to occur together. In the classroom context, the concept of *student motivation* is used to explain the degree to which students invest attention and effort in various pursuits, which may or may not be the ones desired by their teachers.

Student motivation is rooted in student's subjective experiences, especially those connected to their willingness to engage in lessons and learning activities and their reasons for doing so (Brophy, 2004).

Researchers have often showed that academically motivated students tend to perceive school and learning as valuable, like to learn, and enjoy learning-related activities (Eccles, Wigfield, 2002). And also, lack of motivation was found as a primary reason for underachievement (Scheel et al., 2009; Wigfield, Lutz, Wagner, 2005). (Rowell, 2013)

In the last few decades the manner in which students are motivated to engage in higher education has been changing and will continue to change rapidly.

The priority students' affix to their education is too often usurped by increasingly demanding and time-intensive life priorities such as work, family, or emotional/psychological needs. Many members of this generation of students continue to live in an age of convenience and consumption. A college education has become commodified, understood as yet another acquisition to

be made rather than a process in which you engage (Crone, MacKey, 2007, p.18).

However, students need to become intentional architects of their own learning, actively setting goals, exploring, reflecting, and integrating acquired knowledge and experiences into existing worldviews. In today's environment of convenience and consumption, how can students be persuaded to move beyond "commodity" thinking and fully engage both in and out of the classroom in activities that enhance their learning? How can they be inspired to become immersed in learning? (Crone, MacKey, 2007, p.18)

In fact, motivating students to participate in their own education is one of the biggest challenges to overcome. As a result, this issue has been researched across various disciplines in hopes of exploring the reasons why a lack of motivation exists and of eventually prescribing ways for improvement. An abundance of literature is readily available on the topic of motivation, ranging from the psychological to sociological causes and effects.

It stands to reason that the issue of motivation needs to be explored from the point of view of why high school students decide to pursue a college education. Once their intentions are understood, perhaps then motivational efforts can be channeled in the proper direction. Some studies attempted to uncover these intentions by questioning students to probe their main reason for deciding to attend college. (D'Aloisio, 2007, p.225)

Students' answers were classified into three categories: "**stop gap**", "**personal development**," and "**means to an end**". Ten percent answered in the *stop gap* category, which included reasons such as *avoiding work or military service, laziness, allowing time to decide on a career, social life, fun, and enjoyment*. Twenty-four percent answered in the *personal development* category, which included reasons such as *improving life skills, reaching personal potential, gaining knowledge for its own sake, furthering academic interest, and gaining control of their own life*. Sixty-six percent answered in the means to an end category, which included reasons such as *improving one's standard of living, improving one's chances of getting a job, developing a career, getting good qualifications, and obtaining a worthwhile job*.

Although this study is representative of a cross section of only one university, it does show that the majority of students are extrinsically motivated - motivated by the external rewards of studying, apart from acquiring knowledge in and of itself - to attend college and as a result develop "surface studying," characterized by "rote learning of material, with the

intention of reproducing [the material] in another context, i.e., an exam.” Intrinsically motivated students (motivated to study in the absence of any apparent reward except the acquirement of knowledge itself), on the other hand, develop “deep study” habits characterized by “a concern with conceptual understanding of the material and incorporating [the material] into one’s existing knowledge” (Newstead, Hoskins 2003, p.64-65).

Since more than 50 percent of students are extrinsically motivated, how can we encourage students to appreciate the value of the actual learning process and not see college as the simple processing of facts and figures, undoubtedly to be forgotten before the end of the semester?

The intention of this article, therefore, is to demonstrate that if students (especially those extrinsically motivated) are made aware of the direct correlation between the skills they naturally learn from a college classroom environment and those core competencies or transferable skills needed to succeed in various positions within the business world, they may be motivated to actively participate in their education or even perhaps strive toward some form of intrinsically motivated behavior. (D’Aloisio, 2007, p.226)

2. Transferable skills or core competencies

Interestingly, corporations have been challenged to find ways to directly motivate their employees to perform at optimal levels through an understanding of what is expected of them by utilizing performance management systems. Business literature on the issue of performance management explains that “performance management is an ongoing communication process between an employee and his or her immediate supervisor that involves establishing clear expectations and understandings about: the essential job functions ... how to improve or build on existing employee performance and how job performance will be measured” (Bacal 1999, p.3). Employees are shown exactly what is expected of them by the standards that have been established for each position with the optimal goal of motivating employees to perform at their peak.

In many organizations, the performance management system introduces a set of transferable skills or core competencies that employees must achieve, skills that go beyond the technical talent needed to complete their jobs. The career-minded individual comes to understand the specialization and required technical skills or dynamics of completing his job.

These competencies are so important to the overall performance management process that organizations use them to document and determine promotions, pay levels, and at times even disciplinary action. It is these transferable skills or core competencies that are instilled through the very nature of a college- learning environment. Students who recognize and acquire these skills are on their way to obtaining expertise needed to succeed in the corporate world. If students are made aware that the attainment of these skills are needed for their future jobs and career growth, students may develop deep study habits although they may still be extrinsically motivated (see Lowman 1990).

In his *A Manager's Handbook* (2002), Robert Heller - corporate management consultant and founding editor of *Management Today* magazine, identifies several transferable skills or core competencies. Heller categorizes these core competencies into several key categories, including self-management, information management, communication, and teamwork. The correlation between the skills acquired naturally through college learning and the skills needed in corporate settings are readily evident when these core competencies are compared to the skills needed for each environment. The comparisons that follow assume the minimum skills needed to complete tasks or assignments at an assistant manager level, or entry-level, in a traditional white collar position and assume that the employee is on a career path for advancement. The comparisons subsequently assume how students obtain these skills during the process of completing college work. (D'Aloisio, 2007, p.226)

3. Transferable skill of self-managemen

The first transferable skill of self-management is an individual's ability to show enthusiasm and pride in his or her work, and to learn from his or her own performance and achievement. Today's corporate climate calls for employees to be effective and demonstrate high levels of productivity. Employees need to achieve excellence in all areas of their job responsibilities, as well as to exceed expectations in terms of quantity and quality of work. Individuals need to learn from their prior mistakes and take all necessary precautions to avoid similar errors. Although attaining excellence may be difficult at times, employees need to clearly focus on their goal: to achieve success in their chosen career through advancement in status and salary. (D'Aloisio, 2007, p.226)

A successful education demands that it's not enough to simply fill students' brains with facts, but their character needs to be developed as well. Students must be helped to develop the skills to manage their emotions, resolve conflict nonviolently, and make responsible decisions.

Although family, community, and society are significant factors in fostering emotional intelligence and character development, educators must create a safe, supportive learning environment. Research shows that promoting social and emotional skills leads to reduced violence and aggression among students, higher academic achievement, and an improved ability to function in colleges and in the workplace. Students who demonstrate respect for others and practice positive interactions, and whose respectful attitudes and productive communication skills are acknowledged and rewarded, are more likely to continue to demonstrate such behavior. Students who feel secure and respected can better apply themselves to learning.

Self-reflection is self-assessment, and one of the most significant learning tools we can model for our students. Ultimately, we want our children and adolescents to be the self-assessors of their work, dispositions, and goals. Research repeatedly reports that the difference between good teachers and superior teachers is that superior teachers self-reflect.

The brain is wired for this strategy, and it has been a part of our evolution. When we teach to a child's or adolescent's brain, we empower that student with the "inner resources" that directly affect his or her ability to pay attention, engage, and create meaningful learning experiences. College culture is simply about relationships, and the brain is a relational organ designed to survive, think, and feel.

Obviously, we have important content our students need to master, but teachers has to let students see the process of improvement. To engage students in mastery, they has to create rubrics that show the progress from novice to master. We can also create quality indicators for those objectives that students can understand, and we have to reward students for their work with performance and public celebration.

The quantity and quality of work may be hampered, however, by a lack of *time management* skills. Although they are critical to success, organization and time management skills are not typically taught in the

workplace.

Developing time management skills is a journey that may begin in school, but needs practice and other guidance along the way. One goal is to help students become aware of how to use their time as a resource in organizing, prioritizing, and succeeding in their studies in the context of competing activities of friends, work, family, etc.

It is up to the individual to acquire the skills of working under deadlines and being responsible for completing reports and other materials at agreed-upon times. Additionally, the importance of arriving promptly for work and meetings cannot be underrated; tardiness and absences are frowned on in the workplace. These practices may wave a red flag at promotion time and can mark individuals as unreliable and unenthusiastic about their job (Chambers 1999).

Similarly, students are automatically instilled with a need for self-management during college life. Through the process of instructional feedback, students understand what is expected and are shown what constitutes excellent work. A criterion for work is thoroughly explained so students have a clear vision of what is defined as quality work.

Some professors adapt the process of mastery learning, and allow students to redo an assignment on multiple occasions until understanding occurs at a proficient level. Experts in the field of education clearly show that the opportunity to self-correct is essential to self-improvement and the development of lifelong learning skills (Huba, Freed 2002). In addition, the practice of mastery learning forces students to take ownership of their work by recognizing that it is within their power to change an unsatisfactory grade. This can cause some students to motivate themselves to become better learners and, in the long term, be able to continuously produce high quality work and feel proud of their accomplishments.

The issues of attendance and class participation are typically addressed at the beginning of each semester. Expectations are stipulated in the course syllabus and built into the overall grade structure. The reinforcement of these expectations conveys the message that it is important to attend class and be an active participant. Instructors who follow a Socratic method of teaching strictly reinforce participation by penalizing students with percentage deductions to their final grade; a review of syllabi from your own college may even indicate deductions for late arrivals with penalties built into the instructor's grading system (Royse, 2002). Consequently, college life serves

as an ideal opportunity to refine time management skills by learning how to balance research, readings, and writing assignments. (D'Aloisio, 2007, p. 227)

4. Transferable skill of information management

Information management, the next transferable skill, is an individual's ability to gather and interpret information and process that into valuable knowledge, as well as to critically analyze ideas and concepts. Employees may have to gather data from various sources, analyze the information, and present their findings to various publics: employees, customers, or shareholders.

Additionally, data is routinely evaluated to arrive at effective decisions one course of action among many or problem solving solutions an unexpected disruption necessitating a decision. In both cases, it is necessary for employees to gather relevant information pertaining to the situation. At times, making these decisions may involve breaking away from traditional systems, and spending hours creatively brainstorming suitable alternatives.

Similarly, students across all disciplines are asked to write papers that involve acquiring raw information from the library or Internet, analyzing or interpreting the materials, and discovering the application. Bloom's Cognitive Taxonomy illustrates the dimensions of educational objectives achievable for students. In categories ranging from concrete and simple development of student assignments to abstract and complex levels, Bloom categorizes students mastering, at various stages, "Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation" (Royse 2002, p. 98-99). The application of Bloom's cognitive objectives demonstrates the capacity for college student work. College assignments prepare students with the ability to seek out, organize, and use new information, skills similar to those needed in the corporate world to synthesize all forms of raw data.

Two fundamental goals of higher education are to instill in students a capacity to critically analyze information, and to teach students to find creative solutions to problems by examining, evaluating, and challenging assumptions or premises. The ability to think critically helps students think creatively, examine alternative ways of viewing problems and discovering new solutions (Royse 2002). Corporate employees need to cultivate these same skills, which are greatly valued by their employers. (D'Aloisio, 2007, p.226)

5. Transferable skill of communication

The third competency in a performance management system is communication, which here refers to an individual's ability to speak effectively in a variety of formal and informal contexts. These include communicating in an articulate and effective manner in various situations, such as formal meetings, oral presentations, and preparing and disseminating information by means of letters, memos, or reports. Developing strong communication skills is essential to continuing on an upward career path, shows the outside world your level of knowledge on given topics, and is the core of leadership and management (Heller 2002).

An important aspect of learning is for students to be able to communicate what they know, or think they know. The best way for teachers to encourage communication from all students is through classroom discussion or small group work (Rika, 1996). There has always been the notion that you learn best when you actually have to teach or explain a concept to someone else. This means being able to verbalize what you know. So teachers need to encourage their students to verbalize their own knowledge so that they can learn more efficiently. Students on the listening end also benefit from hearing their classmates explanations. When students listen to each other, they often benefit from hearing concepts being explained from different points and in ways that might be closer the students' way of thinking. When students listen effectively they generate questions to further everybody's thinking and learning.

In order to have good discussions teachers need to provide problems that have multiple solutions or methods of solution. These types of problems are best in simulating discussion, creativity and risk taking. When teachers are trying to encourage a meaningful discussion it is crucial that they give their students plenty of time to respond and think about what they want to say. Teachers should avoid yes/no questions and short answered question if they want to have a quality discussion. Open-ended higher-level thinking questions are the best choice to get students thinking and communicating their ideas. The teacher should stay involved in the discussion to correct wrong information but should be careful when pointing out mistakes. It is very important to create and maintain an environment that students feel comfortable participating.

Another way to encourage students to communicate, especially if they are too shy to speak up, is to have them journal. Research suggests

(Terrell Young, 1990 that dialogue journals provide a purposeful activity in which students communicate their thoughts and feelings. It is important that teachers collect these journals and respond to them. The teacher doesn't necessarily need to evaluate them, but she/he could ask the students questions to further their thinking. Such as, "Why do you think that?", "What could be another reason?", and so on. Students can also exchange journals to share their ideas and get responses from others.

Debate is another way teachers can provide their students with the opportunity to practice their communication skills. Research suggests that debate encourages different types of responses, helps students to develop convincing arguments, and allows teachers and students to learn from one another (Leonard, 1999). This also encourages students to back up what they believe and it allows teachers to really get a good idea of what kind of conceptual knowledge students have about certain topics.

Furthermore, business writing follows the dictates of effective, functional writing including efficient sentence structure, clear and active voice, and conversational tone, as well as the proper usage of grammar and punctuation. Individuals project their level of professionalism through polished communications, consisting of accurate information and a lack of grammatical errors and typos (Bienvenu and Timm 2002). These writing skills should not be confused with the technical abilities needed to complete jobs such as advertising copywriting or journalism. The inclusion of communication as a transferable skill is meant in its most basic form of proficiency: the minimum requirement every employee needs in order to perform effectively. (D'Aloisio, 2007, p.226)

Similarly, college students need to develop and show a mastery of their native language, managing information and being apt for posing problems and pursuing the answers, supporting a thesis, and knowing a proper sentence structure, usage issues, and punctuation.

An additional facet is oral communication, especially formal communication through participation and presentations in meetings. Employees need to converse in language and sentence structure that is articulate and clear and demonstrates their intelligence (Heller 2002).

Actively participating in meetings gives employees an opportunity to demonstrate their grasp of the information as well as their creative and critical thinking abilities. Equally important is an employee's ability to present information orally to various publics. This ability is crucial to a company's

growth, especially when information is conveyed to stockholders and prospective clients (Heller).

Likewise, students must feel comfortable expressing themselves before a group of their peers as well as audiences of students and faculty. The practice of conversing, whether from their seats or in front of the classroom, will help students build self-confidence and master the articulation of ideas and thoughts. At times, students' lack of oral participation during classroom lectures may be due to shyness or feeling inadequate in front of their peers or the professor. Schneier and Welkowitz classify shyness as a social phobia that typically entails "embarrassment and an involvement of how you might be evaluated negatively by others and concern [over] the consequences of such an evaluation" (1996, 10). A study conducted among people who attended a clinic for treatment of social phobias showed that 85 percent believed their shyness interfered with schoolwork (Schneier and Welkowitz 1996). Although shyness is a serious issue for some, the picture is not entirely bleak. Schneier and Welkowitz show that a constructive approach for overcoming shyness can be implemented, and demonstrate that individuals can overcome their shyness and reap benefits that will serve them well in their college years and as social individuals pursuing a fulfilling career. (D'Aloisio, 2007, p.226)

6. Transferable skill of team work

The final competence present in a performance management system is team-work, which involves working cooperatively in groups, sharing decision making, and listening and respecting others' point of views and ideas (Heller 2002). Corporate management experts stress that employees need to demonstrate their eagerness and ability to work effectively in teams, as well as accept diversity in ideas and styles, offer positive contributions in discussions, and be willing to accept positive criticism (Chambers, 1999).

Living in a global society demands that we respect the viewpoints of all individuals regardless of their race, age, or gender. According to experts, the higher you ascend the organizational ladder, the more diverse the community of people who report to you. Presenting yourself as intolerant of others' differences, will not only prevent promotions, but could show signs of discrimination and may cost you your job (Chambers, 1999).

Likewise, students are often challenged with the task of group projects, which provide an opportunity for students to develop the interpersonal and problem-solving skills needed in group environments. The

experience helps students learn about group expectations, roles and conflict resolution techniques (Huba, Freed, 2002).

Students who have been shamed or belittled by the teacher or another student will not effectively engage in challenging tasks. To learn and grow, students must have a supportive, collaborative learning environment.

When all students are engaged in arguing about the best approach of one assignment, using questions and problems that allow for multiple strategies to reach a successful outcome, students have the opportunity to make choices and then compare their approaches. This strategy challenges them to operate at a higher level of thinking than when they can share only the "correct" answer.

College teachers have to manage classroom situations to avoid any student treating a group of individuals judgmentally; students need to learn to show respect to their classmates' points of view and opinions. Communication skills should "emphasize openness and respect to other's culture differences and a willingness to continue conversations with all individuals in the classroom" (2002, 8). Professors need to devote time to explaining the importance of respecting diverse ideas, experiences, and values. Students are under no pressure to agree with others but to simply respect what others say, and their right to say it (Carl, Wood, 2002). This practice will undoubtedly help students show respect and consideration to those they encounter in their professional lives.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of the correlation between skills acquired during college learning and skills needed in corporate settings is not intended to solve the problem of student motivation, although it may move students one tiny step in that direction. Mentioning a few transferable skills in class may help students recognize what is needed to succeed in the corporate world, and, to that end, help with student motivation.

It should be mentioned, however, that the list of transferable skills is by no means a complete picture of what is needed to succeed in the corporate world or in a college classroom.

As varied as the corporations that may or may not engage in performance management systems, students' behaviors cannot be predicted, and no doubt students will react as differently to the acknowledgement and acceptance of these transferable skills as the number of universities.

However, the issue of motivating students is increasingly present in general education courses that are mandatory for most baccalaureate degrees. Students attending a history, biology, foreign language, art, or music class are all, to a certain degree, involved in an adherence to a traditional college learning environment: self-management, information management, communication, and teamwork. If students are aware of the transferable skills they are acquiring in these classes, it may help them stay focused on their ultimate goal as well as reduce their levels of frustration.

Negative thoughts such as, “I’m wasting my time and money taking this class,” or “I’m going to be an engineer; who cares about biology” could be reduced or perhaps even eliminated. Equally important, instructors may lessen their frustrations in dealing with students who readily display their disdain for attending certain classes. By creating win-win situations, students will feel they are gaining valuable skills and teaching becomes a pleasure instead of a chore. (D’Aloisio, 2007, p.228)

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