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Understanding Your Own Motivation

In this chapter, we're going to explore some of the factors that impact our students' motivation. But before we do that, let's first take a look at some of the factors that influence our own motivation. When you think about your own motivation—that is, motivation toward your job, toward academic pursuits, toward leisure activities, and so forth—what causes you to be motivated (i.e., what determines your motivation)? Is your motivation primarily determined by internal factors such as your personality, your abilities, your priorities, your likes, and dislikes, or is your motivation determined by external factors like family concerns, societal norms, your supervisor's expectations, and so forth? Or is your motivation perhaps determined by both internal and external factors?

YOUR PERSONALITY AND YOUR MOTIVATION

Let's start our examination of influences on your motivation by discussing the concept of **personality**. Have you ever thought about how you would describe your personality? Do you think that aspects of your personality affect your motivation? Let's explore this in the following activity.

- First, think about your personality. If you had to list five of your personality traits, what would they be? (Think very broadly about personality traits; we're not looking for scientific precision in your responses). Some of these traits might be: *shy, outgoing, dependent, confident, anxious, helpful, hard-working, pessimistic, responsible, creative*, and so forth. Write these five traits down in the Activity 2.1 chart.
- Next, think about some *activity or task that you are motivated to do regularly* (e.g., something that you have to do repeatedly at your job; taking care of your children; paying bills; etc.); don't worry about the type of motivation that you have for the activity right now (e.g., intrinsic, extrinsic, etc.); just think about the activity itself. Write down a very brief description of this activity in the top row of the Activity 2.1 chart.
- Write down what time it is right now: _____
- Now, next to each of the five personality traits that you listed, write a sentence or two describing how each of these aspects of your personality impacts your motivation to do the activity that you just identified.
Don't proceed to the next step until you finish this part!

- Write down what time it is right now (immediately after writing your descriptive sentences): _____
- Finally, select which of the following statements best describes how you felt while you were doing this activity:
 - (a) It was very easy.
 - (b) It was a bit harder than I thought it might be; although a few of my personality traits were easy to connect to the activity, I had to think a bit about some of the others.
 - (c) It was much harder than I thought it might be; the connections between most of the personality traits and the activity weren't as obvious as I initially thought that they would be.
 - (d) It was very difficult, and I gave up.

Activity 2.1 Personality and Motivation

What is a task or activity that you are motivated to do regularly?

Personality Trait	Relationship of Personality Trait to the Task That You Do Regularly
Activity:	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Now, let's examine your responses. First, think about your response to the final question (about how you felt during the activity). If I were going to bet, I would bet that you probably selected "b" or "c" as your response. For most of us, this is not an overwhelmingly difficult activity, but it isn't simple either. The connections between aspects of our personalities and our motivation are not always obvious; moreover, sometimes, there simply is no obvious connection between our personality traits and our own motivation.

Next, look at the two times that you wrote down, and calculate how many minutes it took you to come up with the five connections between your personality traits and the task. Did this take longer than you expected? For many of us, it takes more time than we realized to complete an activity of this nature; this is because *personality variables are in fact only one of many different kinds of variables that are responsible for our motivation.* It often is difficult for us to identify specific connections between our personality traits and our motivated behaviors, because our personality is just one of the many variables that influence our motivation. Moreover, some of our personality traits are unrelated to some of our motivated behaviors. *(As a personal example, one aspect of my job as a college professor is teaching, which I do regularly and I enjoy. Nevertheless, I have always considered myself to be an introvert; when I think about teaching, there is no obvious connection between my self-perception as an introvert and my positive motivation toward teaching [and I actually tend to be quite outgoing when I'm teaching – no signs of introversion!] Although introversion is part of my personality, other variables in my life seem to take precedence in my motivation to teach; my tendency toward introversion is real, but it has no obvious effect on my teaching).*