# MOTIVATION TECHNIQUES FOR EFFECTIVE ADULT LEARNING

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*Abstract:Adulthood is usually perceived as a period of maximum work capacity and adaptation seeking. The full intellectual and physical maturity, as well as many other biological factors contribute to the development of the human being. Biological and physical factors that have to be very seriously taken into consideration are family and profession, the two essential development dimensions of adulthood. On one hand, family concerns the biological and affective levels of human development and, on the other hand, profession concerns the individual and social levels. This paper aims to present some of the most useful techniques to boost motivation for an effective learning and provide some insights upon how these techniques can help throughout life-long learning process.*

*Keywords: motivation, adult learning, adulthood, life-long learning, effective learning*

Nowadays strong expansion of science and technology among all areas of activity and practice domains leads to a continuous acceleration of individual's life's rhythm. These characteristics of contemporaneity have direct consequences on the education and preparation of the young generation, who has to adapt and cope with both the current society demands and the subsequent social development. The rapid propagation and growth of information in all fields, the accelerated knowledge use, which is constantly outdated for the time being, all these aspects require continuous adaptation of life-long learning objectives, contents, forms and methods, in order to be able to overtake the informational dynamics. This new and accelerated life rhythm strains one, demanding new abilities such as readjustment and continuous adaption in social, cultural and professional areas. Due to this new way of living, both adults and children have to be educated to survive, surpass and adapt to all the new and various life-style tendencies.

Motivation is a key factor psychological researches state, which would be directly responsible for one's behavior and acting. Nowadays psychological experiments provide seriously insights upon the causes which stand behind one's behavior. Researchers found out that such causes might be any kind of determination, incitement, a goal, a purpose, or any kind of directed energy support. Motivation is the one which directs the energy to support behaviors and acting. All being said about motivation, we propose a closer look to the learning motivation, one of the fundamental purposes of education systems. The learning motivation development throughout educational cycles has always been a major concern among educational researchers due to its fundamental role for the life-long education. By educating children from the very first ages to cultivate a motivational perspective upon learning, researches demonstrated that they develop the perfect mindset for a life-long learning perspective. By understanding the primary



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purposes of education, individuals build a strong motivational learning mindset, which will be responsible for an effective way of learning, a strong capacity of knowledge use and a sense of a powerful meanings of developing oneself through education. Motivation, as the Dictionary of Psychology states, is "the set of dynamic factors that determine the behavior of an individual" (Sillamy 202) having an important role in learning, because it is the factor that determines the body to act and pursue certain goals. It often happens that we are not aware of why we are doing a certain action, even so, there is no act of unmotivated conduct, no behavior occurs or manifests itself, without some incitement, direction, and energy support.

The long-term development of learning motivation has its strong placed basis in the early ages of childhood education. The foundation should then be completed in adolescence when teenagers should understand and develop a motivational attitude for the subsequent pursuit of a profession. During this learning cycle there are some intellectual and physical transformations, adolescence representing the age at which the horizons that education will have to be explored are revealed, the motivational register being more and more wide, signaling a high coefficient of receptivity and sensitivity towards interpersonal relations and social values, self-analysis and self-determination and also a stage of preparation for the subsequent pursuit of a professional activity, this period being favorable to the development of motivation for long-term learning.

There is a close relationship between motivation and learning. Motivation is considered as a fundamental condition of learning, as large amounts of money can be invested in upgrading schools, for the professional development of teachers, all of which are futile if students do not want to learn. Motivation is one of the reasons why the learner learns or does not learn, but it can also be the effect of learning activity, because learning outcomes support the student's later efforts. If initially his effort is successful, in one form or another, the student will develop his / her motivation to learn more. Motivation is important not only because it generates and stimulates learning, but also because it influences learning outcomes and performance, because when motivation is low, learning performance is also low.

Professionals in the field agree unanimously that there is not one type of motivation for learning, and that learning is usually done under the influence of complex sets of purposes that cause, support, intensify or interrupt learning. By the place motivation occupies in the structure of the learning activity, we may distinguish between **intrinsic** and **extrinsic** motivation. Intrinsic motivation is triggered in the student's internal structure, supports learning from within, stemming from the actual content of learning and does not appear as a means of gaining benefits. **Intrinsic motivation** is the ideal support for learning, associated with the active participation of students in the learning process, with positive attitudes towards learning, being resilient in time, having a strong force in maintaining appetite for learning. **Extrinsic motivation** has its sources outside the subject and activity as such, and its own elements are related to the external effects or factors that dynamize the learning activity. The subjective feelings of this motivation may be positive (satisfaction reactions) or negative (fear reactions). Thus, two types of extrinsic motives can be distinguished: positive - which are aimed at gaining the benefits of learning (grades, scores, prizes, prestige, material benefits, etc.); they do not make learning more attractive, as it aims towards the final material achievements of learning and not towards the whole process of learning; and may be negative which are manifested by reactions of rejection to unpleasant



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consequences: criticism, punishment, fear of failure, etc. Educational approaches should be centered upon the transition from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation, since intrinsic motivation is optimal, includes interest, exaltation and trust, resulting in increased performance, creativity and self-esteem.

Adulthood is usually perceived as a period of maximum work capacity and adaptation seeking. The full intellectual and physical maturity, as well as many other biological factors contribute to the development of the human being. Biological and physical factors that have to be very seriously taken into consideration are family and profession, the two essential development dimensions of adulthood. On one hand, family concerns the biological and affective levels of human development and, on the other hand, profession concerns the individual and social levels. Among the reasons why people follow school or any kind of education, is social success. We can say that we go to school or we attend training courses to promote in society, to have a higher social status, to succeed in life. The fundamental elements of learning motivation are represented by the value coordinates of the social success dominant model.

The andragogic model for adult learning, built by M. Knowles (1984), displays a different perspective upon pedagogical and andragogical models of teaching. While the pedagogical model has the professor placed in the center of the activity, the andragogical one has the educable, the trainable, the learner placed in the center of the educative process and purpose. The experience of learning is crucial in adult education, the educational activities have to be centered on developing the skills needed for adults. The theoretical concepts have to be 10-15% of the total training time, followed by practical exercises and applications that will contribute to the development of the practical skills of new knowledge and will encourage the necessary changes in adults' future performance. Adult motivational sources include the following categories:

- Social relationships: adults attend instructive / educational activities to socialize, to make new friends or to be with their friends, colleagues, relatives;
- Social expectations: adults engage in instructive / educational activities to meet some social requirements, or at the insistence of an authority;
- Social well-being: to develop their readiness to serve the community, to be useful to society, usually referring to the activities that are not tangential to the basic profession;
- Professional advancement / achievement: adults engage in instructive / educational activities to obtain material benefits, professional advancement, social prestige, in order to compete;
- Retreat or stimulation: to get rid of boredom, to avoid home or work routine, adults find their salvation in learning;
- Cognitive interest: most adults learn for the sake of learning, seek new information to satisfy their own curiosity and desire to acquire knowledge.

Adult learning is defined by several features which have to be taken into consideration while dealing with learning motivation: usually the learning has to be centered around the problem, the situation, the need of learning; another aspect is that the learning has to be correlated with adult’s experience, which has to be relevant for the subject learned; learning objectives have to be clear stated and addressed; adults have to always receive feedback during



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their learning process in order to fully understand their progress towards the followed purpose. These being summarized and stated, we propose the following techniques for boosting motivation among adult learning in order to obtain an effective learning process and in order to stimulate the mental processes:

1. Stimulating cognitive interests, epistemic curiosity, capturing attention;
2. Linking learning content between past knowledge, present and future learning needs;
3. Communicating clear expectations, learning objectives and purposes;
4. Involving adults in various activities;
5. Provide insights and customized feedback for individual learning achievements.

Strategies to develop the learning motivation of adults vary according to the nature of the educational activities and objectives, their social and affective needs. The methods and techniques used will seek to tailor factors that influence adult performance and "ensure clarity, stability and cohesion of the structures horizontally and vertically, own both the didactic logic and the logic of science" (Neacșu 55). As a result, teaching and learning will be achieved by activating and using the most appropriate methods and teaching techniques that stimulate the adult's thinking and experiences, but especially the learning motivation.

David Ausubel argues that trainers could do more to capture the interest of adults even when the cognitive impulse is minimal. He proposes the creation of cognitive conflicts in this regard, stating that "many educational objects contain paradoxes or opposing views of scholars, or visible contradictions to common sense, and if they are pointed out to the uninterested student in the beginning, a powerful motivational effect, propelling the learning process until other relevant impulses become operational". (Ausbel 449) Thus, a few techniques that the trainer could use are: creating opportunities for sensory experiences (adults come directly in contact with things), starting teaching through an anecdote, a history related to the theory to be taught, a problem to be solved, questions that involve paradoxes, contradictions, the use of concrete examples relevant to adults' lives, debates, problem-solving (providing intrinsic motivational support, determining active participation and intense interactivity), discovery learning, etc. A didactic activity which aims to develop learning motivation must actively involve adults and capture their interest. We could use also, Ausubel states, the selfaffirmation impulse of the student, showing that learning a subject opens professional perspectives in several prestigious areas. Finally, we need to know the areas of interest of the adult and, in the teaching activity, to choose examples and establish links with these areas of interest.

Adults need to be aware from the very beginning the expectations they have to meet during the learning process, the learning objectives, the feedback and the evaluation systems. All these requirements will be clearly stated, while the trainer needs to pay equal attention to all students, no matter their capabilities and individual features. All these suggestions show, once again, that adult motivation issues are extremely diverse, and the trainer's intervention cannot be based on prescriptions, but on tailored learning for each individual situation. Presenting the learning purposes, objectives and importance of tasks can be motivating. Adults can be supported to be able to perceive the learning needs. They can also be chestnut on their previous knowledge



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of the subject to be presented. The learning plan can be presented as questions (this way of presenting the subject obliges the students to focus their attention on the important issues and to seek answers to the questions asked). The trainer can use examples related to the adults' interests or analogies (thus, students are determined to establish links between a field that they know well and a new one).

The facilitator has to vary the methods and materials (images, movies, objects) used and involve adults in various activities that raise the interest and attention for the activity. The modern didactic strategies that determine the active and participative character of adults in the learning act ensure the linking of the theory of practice and the accessibility of knowledge. The use of active methods makes learning to turn from a routine, boring activity into an interesting, attractive, creative, qualitatively different activity both in structure and methods, and through learning outcomes. Some suggestions for methods that involve adults in learning and also in developing their motivation for learning are the cooperative learning, the role play, the anticipation guide, the demonstration, the case study, etc.

The assessment method can also have important effects on adult motivation. Without a continuous feedback provided during the whole learning process, motivation of adults can be seriously damaged. For many assessors, evaluation implies only the grading process, the result of a passed / not passed assessment. This method may have negative effects on adult motivation. If we want the assessment to be a really motivating factor, to boost their willingness, involvement and learning perseverance, it is necessary for the assessment process to focus more on the progress, on recognizing the effort, on performance improvement and not just to establish the level of knowledge. In adult learning and the most recommended assessment method is the auto evaluation, in which the adult proposes a personal perspective upon his own learning progress, managing to build a critical thinking and provide objective insights.

In this respect, the project or the portfolio are alternative assessment methods which can be used in the evaluation, based on a long-term theoretical research, and the portfolio that combines the theoretical and practical performances and competencies that determine the adult's learning progress. The two alternative assessment methods aim to develop various skills and a greater involvement towards the accomplishment of an outcome. The adults' evolution must be assessed in positive terms (praise, encouragement, emphasis), because disapproval is less effective in stimulating learning motivation. We also need to emphasize that all the methods shall be used with discernment, especially when seeking to increase motivation for learning. Much more effective for enhancing the student's motivation are personal observations and feedback comments especially in difficult moments. It is also important to encourage adults to do self-assessment. This is not just about proposing a grading system for themselves, but rather getting used to assessing the effectiveness of the strategies they use. Improving the adult's opinion about his / her own competence is obtained when he / she repeatedly succeeds in an activity he / she does not consider himself capable of doing. An unexpected success gives a student self-confidence and thus increases his motivation to engage in an activity and to persevere in order to increase his / her performance. For this, the trainer has to design learning activities that are not too easy (because they no longer pose a challenge for students), but they are not too difficult (because the students are quickly discouraged and abandoning) and throughout the activity, the



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teacher will provide the student with a permanent feedback on both his / her effort, his / her skills and abilities.

The development of the learning motivation is a major goal of the worldwide educational system, therefore the present study investigated adults' motivation in relation to the learning process, the social and affective needs, by identifying the adult's learning needs as they manifest themselves in their environment, what are the values they recognize, what motivates them to learn, which, in their opinion, would be the effective ways to improve the educational process, as well as the determination of the ways of organizing the teaching activities that act directly on the motivation of learning.

As it emerges from the above mentioned concepts and theories, the internal motivational factors are represented by the personal needs or aspirations that "push" the adult to adopt a certain behavior (curiosity, the need for knowledge, the need for self-development, the pleasure to work something, etc.), while external factors arise when the adult is forced to do something or is stimulated to act in a predetermined direction (for symbolic or material recognition or reward, etc.). Also, the importance of the trainer's actions in didactic activity has been identified, which will try to stimulate the active participation of students in assimilation of knowledge and skills training, by stimulating their curiosity and their desire for knowledge, transforming the learning process into an attractive and efficient activity.

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