

TWO TYPES OF MOTIVATORS

Which of the following pairs represent two basic classes of motivators?

- A. Money and torture
- B. Quantitative and qualitative
- C. Proactive and reactive
- D. Intrinsic and extrinsic

The two general kinds of motivation are known as extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivators are those that are described as being internal to the person. But what does that mean? Intrinsic motivation is stimulated by the nature of a learning activity or by the process of learning itself, with no external rewards or stimulation. Students are intrinsically motivated when they like their tasks, the way they are learning, and the course content. Here are a few examples.

Students experience intrinsic motivation when they are studying a subject they enjoy or appreciate. A student working on a puzzle or problem is motivated to complete it as she sees more and more parts falling into place. A student who has nearly completed a task is motivated because he is close to achieving the goal.

Intrinsic motivation results when a student feels secure in the learning environment, likes the instructor's teaching methods, likes the content or structure of a lesson, successfully completes a task, has some control over the learning process, and feels good about achieving goals.

Now let's consider extrinsic motivation, which is external to the person-but what does that mean?

Extrinsic motivation is stimulated not by the content or process of learning but by receiving a reward, recognition, or some similar gain. Rewards or other extrinsic incentives can be used to encourage people to do things they would not otherwise do. Examples in the everyday world include supermarkets that use loyalty cards, airlines that give sky miles, and companies that offer bonuses and commissions. In the classroom, instructors might give certificates of achievement, prizes, or simply a pat on the back. Even grades are extrinsic motivators.

Some extrinsic motivators can have negative connotations such as when an instructor warns a student that he is close to failing the course.

Rewards are easy to provide and although they are often effective, the results are usually short-lived. The problem is that rewards often cause students to focus on the prize instead of the task or accomplishment. Many studies have indicated that if you stop providing rewards, students will probably stop the behavior. The overuse of rewards may, in fact, reduce a student's intrinsic interest in what is being learned.

In addition, these superficial forms of extrinsic motivation can, in a sense, be controlling. That is, students sometimes feel that they are being manipulated since they may want the reward but they may not want to engage in a certain behavior or task. Adult students, in particular, may experience this emotion. So, should you avoid offering rewards? No. Rewards are useful because they can often encourage students to persevere until they become intrinsically motivated. Feel free to use them but be aware of what can happen if you overuse them.

There are forms of extrinsic motivation other than rewards that are both effective, long-lasting, and highly desirable parts of an instructor's management strategy. For example, extrinsic motivation results when students enjoy extra-curricular activities, receive helpful feedback and support from instructors, are told about new career opportunities that are available to them, and are told why a given lesson is relevant to their career goals.

Some motivators are both intrinsic and extrinsic. For example, being on the honor roll is an intrinsic motivator because it represents achievement of a personal goal. It motivates a student from within. It's also an extrinsic motivator because it is a status symbol that commands the respect of others. That is, it provides external rewards. If you can't decide whether a particular motivator is intrinsic or extrinsic, maybe it's both.

Of the two types, intrinsic motivators are the most effective and enduring. Lessons that are well-structured, feature variety, provide choices, are rich in relevant content, and offer an optimal challenge will motivate students most effectively. These are all teaching strategies associated with intrinsic motivation, and they inspire students to recommend a course, a program, or even a school to others.

So, what are the implications of the two types of motivation for instructors?

Intrinsic motivators are more lasting and more effective than extrinsic ones. Some extrinsic motivators such as rewards can be useful while helping students to become intrinsically motivated.