Motivation in Adult Education: From Engagement to Performance

Prof. Philippe Carre
Université Paris X Nanterre, France

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Abstract: *This paper will focus on recent developments on the theme of adult motivation for education and training. It is based on the results of a large empirical research project conducted in France between 1997-99*

Introduction

The rationale for research into adult motivation for education and training in France rests firstly on the phenomenon of ever-growing demand for competence development (both for the workforce and the unemployed), faced with stagnating, sometimes dwindling public and private funding of training. Caught in this double bind, trainers, HRD specialists, managers and workers themselves have to find new ways of developing corporate knowledge and skills without necessarily banking on formal, subsidized training programs. Hence the success of such concepts as informal learning, learning organizations, self-directed learning, work-based learning, etc. Hence also the increase in pressure on people's involvement in work performance and, consequently, in to the self-management of their qualifications. Social and economic pressure on organizations thus "naturally" bring about questions of individual motivation to work and to learn in a more acute manner.

Secondly, over the last 25 years, most of the new practical developments in adult education have taken for granted the fact that adults are necessarily "volunteers for learning".. What might have been obvious in a different social and historical context appears today as somewhat less sure, to say the least. Moreover, as new approaches to learning develop, more and more commitment is expected from learners themselves if any result is to be hoped for. Thus, adults are more and more "mobilized" to engage in training, but not necessarily "motivated" to learn.

A "new educational deal" is this taking shape right before our eyes, which engages both researchers, experts and practitioners to have a second look at the field of motivation and action within the realm of adult education and learning.

The present research was designed to face these issues in a theoretical and empirical mode. This paper will focus on two main aspects of the research: presentation of the theoretical model of motivation in adult education and summary of the main results of the survey.

Presentation of the Theoretical Model

Research Paradigms and Adult Motivation to Learn
On the theoretical side, this research project was grounded in an interactive view of human motivation, considered as a "hypothetical construct used to describe external and internal forces that explain the start, strength, direction and persistence of action" (Vallerand & Thill, 1993). According to this view, human motivation assessment must be regarded as a "snapshot" of the relations that establish themselves, in a given context, at a given time, between a person and her/his environment, or a part thereof. This concept of motivation drives us away from other theories that stress, in human action, the role of unique processes, whether they be an located within the individual or within her/his environment. For instance, conventional behavioral and sociological theories on the one hand, psychoanalytic and strictly cognitive theories on the other, draw a firm line between the effects of external or internal processes, to the point of understating the other side of the equation.

The first phase of the research led us to examine research production around the themes of adult motivation to learn, participation in adult education, and adult learning. This led us to discard the long-standing paradigms of human motivation and action mentioned above, and to concentrate on sociocognitive psychology as the one research paradigm in tune with our interactive view of the problem.

Educational psychology has taught us for long that motivation is an indispensable ingredient of learning. But motivation theories, until fairly recently, were of little help to understand and facilitate adult learning especially in French research (Carré, 1997), with few, albeit noticeable exceptions (Nuttin, 1987). Today, with the development

of socio-cognitive theories of learning and motivation, mostly in Anglo-American-oriented literature (Bandura, 1997, Deci 1995, Weiner 1992, Vallerand et Thill, 1993), adult educators may draw upon a large, consistent, theoretically sound body of research. A new vision of adult motivation for education and its impact on learning is thus slowly emerging.

In this research, with the theoretical backing mentioned above, a model of adult motivation to engage in training was developed around two main components: a renewed pattern of motives, and a threefold vision of motivational processes.

The Pattern of Motives

As regards motives, a combination of literature review and empirical observation led us to the following construct:. Adults motives for participating in adult education seem to follow four major orientations, derived from Houle's (1961) initial vision and organized on two axes.

- Along a first axis, motives are orientated towards intrinsic versus extrinsic orientations (Deci, 1985)
- On a second axis, motives are orientated towards learning versus participating (in the first case, a motive is geared towards the acquisition of knowledge or skill; in the second case, a motive is geared towards other objectives, such as having a good time, making money, or escaping some boring activity …)

The combination of these orientations and axes, combined with empirical analysis of adult motives to engage in training, produces 10 specific motives which were labeled as follows. One is both intrinsic and learning-oriented ("epistemic"); two are both intrinsic and participation-oriented ("social-affective" and "hedonic"). Three are extrinsic and participation-oriented ("economic", "derivative," "prescribed"); two are extrinsic and learning-oriented ("personal-operational", "professional-operational"). Two are extrinsic and either participation – or learning-oriented ("vocational", "identity-based").

It is worth underlining the fact that, within this framework, motives form temporary patterns of motivation that cannot be assimilated to either permanent dimensions of the self, or to lasting indexes of an individual's "rapport" to training, or even to a

stable characteristic of the person's motivation for a given learning content. Motives have three major characteristics here : they are plural, changeable and contingent upon the individual's life context.

Motivational Processes

The second aspect of the theoretical model was directly drawn from our analysis of educational psychology productions and their applicability to both our field and paradigm of research. Three concepts have thus been identified to complete our model. Our theoretical construct of adult motivation to engage in training was established upon the combination of motives and the three following intertwined processes :

- Perceived competence (or self-efficacy), based on Bandura's sociocognitive view of human action (1997)
- Self-determination, based on Deci's (1995) conceptualization of motivation
- Project-formulation, as formalized in Nuttin's (1987) theory of human motivation, including perceived instrumentality of action.

In order to put this model to the test, to produce comparative results among a variety of adults about to engage in training, and to analyze the relations between motivation and performance in adult training, an empirical research was carried out in three phases:

- Qualitative survey: 61 adults who were about to start a training program were interviewed about the nature of their engagement in the project. After a pre-test series of interviews, a panel was built, drawing on 7 different training situations. Content analysis was carried out using a "double-blind" approach. The initial model was slightly modified and validated.
- Instrument design: a 143-item, Lickert-type instrument was designed, field tested and completed by 400 adults in two different training contexts, leading to a significantly reduced second version (69 items) with satisfactory internal validity (Carré et al., 2000).
- Quantitative survey: the second version of the instrument was then proposed to 2,500 adults in 9 different contexts (completed in 99). Statistical analyses were carried out and results were

obtained in the following areas :
– Descriptive data: variations of various aspects of motivation according to socio-demographic variables (age, gender, SPC, activity status, etc.)
– Correlational analyses among different motivational variables (motives, perception of competence, self-determination, project formation)
– Relation of initial motivation and final performance in training.

Summary of the Main Results:
Quantitative Survey

We shall briefly summarize the results of the research under 5 headings: population profile, motive analyses, motivation processes, performance, conclusions and implications for pedagogical practice and adult education research.

Population Profile

The final version of the instrument was sent to 2500 adults who had just enrolled (and not yet began) training programs of various lengths, on different topics, in various settings (public, semi-public, private), organizations (companies and training centers). 1548 questionnaires were returned, out of which 1139 were fully completed and used for the more refined statistical analyses.

The research population (n = 1548) was either fully employed or unemployed, in one of the six following organizations : 2 large industrial companies (car-making and electrical production), a large public transport authority, the largest training center in France, a university permanent education department, and a voluntary organization. The respondents were mostly male (62,7%), globally younger than the French workforce as a whole (64,6% were 40 or under), lived in various family conditions, with or without children, and had a slightly lower level of education than the reference group in France. Professional status was distributed as follows : 21,7% were manual workers, 28,5% white collar employees, 35,6% technicians / engineers, 11,4% executives. Two thirds of this research population were working at the time (35,1% were unemployed). The courses the respondents were about to take varied in length from three to more than 100 days, and were dedicated to one of the following 7 areas : vocational orientation, using computers, secretarial work, personal development,

technical training, cultural issues, management and HRD.

All in all, this panel of respondents presents a marked closeness to the adult education population as a whole, representing a reasonable (albeit not strictly speaking representative) sample.

Motive Analyses

Comparative analyses (ranks 1 and 2) led to the following conclusions: Declared motives were stronger for women than men almost everywhere, especially in companies. Age had little effect on motives, when organization was held constant. Family status played a discrete, but interesting part in motive declaration, with respondents living alone, without and even with children, declaring significantly higher motives than people living in a couple.

Activity status (working / unemployed), level of qualification, professional status, type of training, course duration and organization had noticeable and combined effects on motives, resulting in a rather clear cut distinction between two groups, as revealed by factor analysis.

A first cluster grouped together older, mostly working, more highly qualified respondents located in companies, with higher professional statuses. The most prevailing motive for this first category was operational-professional, with all of the other motives ranking significantly lower. In strong contrast, the second cluster grouped together a younger, less well qualified, mostly unemployed category of people enjoying lower professional status. This second group showed markedly superior motives for engaging training in all areas expect "operational professional".

Motivational Processes

Available data at this time seem to point towards the following conclusions: [i]

Perceived competence regarding training appears to be slightly superior in females than males, (and largely so when in interaction with the organization) and to decrease gradually with age, with a slight recovery after age 50. Perceived competence increases steadily with educational level and professional status, but only in interaction with the organization. Neither family status nor activity status (working/unemployed) reveal any significant correlation with perceived competence.

Self-determination varies significantly according to organization, gender (with women slightly more self-determined in all organizations but one). Neither age, family situation or educational level have any effect on self-determination, whereas it varies with activity status and professional status but only when in interaction with the organization. Last, but not least, self-determination grows with course duration, as a simple or combined effect with the organization.

The importance and instrumentality of training within the framework of a personal project appear linked with several variables: the organization (with companies ranking lower than training centers), gender (with women more project-oriented than men in 5 out of the 6 settings), age (although statistically significant, the effect of age on project formation seems discrete and irregular), activity status and family status, and course duration (very significantly so, as one could have guessed). Analyses for educational level, professional status and course duration do not show marked simple effects on project formation.

Motivation and Performance
Very few significant results have been found regarding the link between adult motivation to engage in training and final course results. 345 persons who had filled in the motivation questionnaire were evaluated at the end of the training and their results correlated with initial motivation measurements. Apart from one significant correlation between project formation and results in one organization, the very few links established were mostly … negative, as if the more motivated one was at the onset of training, the worse training results tended to be! On top of these rather disappointing results, and even more surprisingly so, precious little significant influence of any of the socio-demographic variables was found on training results. Consequently, the research team re-analyzed the conditions, criteria and marking systems that were used in the evaluation procedures of the field survey and concluded that beyond the classical vagueness of French evaluation procedures in most adult education situations, three more sources of bias had to be taken into account. First, the evaluation criteria and marking procedures were considered generally invalid; second, in one of the organizations, the most successful learners left in the middle of the course to start a new job and were left out of the measure-

ments; third, in one of the organizations, the span of the marks was so reduced that no significant difference could be established between the trainees in terms of performance.

All in all, further research into the link between engagement motivation and learning outcomes is clearly needed, the present research having failed to demonstrate either the presence or the absence of such a link.

Conclusion and Implications
Apart from the disappointing lack of results concerning the supposed link between initial motivation and final performance, which clearly calls for further research using standardized evaluation conditions and instruments, this research has supplemented our knowledge of motivational phenomena in adults who engage in training on several grounds.

- A complete, validated list of motives, organized according to two double orientations, has clarified our vision of the reasons adults have for enrolling into adult education courses ;
- A theoretical model of adult motivation for education has been constructed on the basis of a renewed, sociocognitive vision, and validated through a series of 61 interviews ;
- The model has been operationalized and a valid, internally consistent instrument of motivational assessment was produced ;
- The instrument was used in a large scale survey of 1548 adults who were about to start a training course, which allowed a series of analyses to be carried out ;
- As a result of those, numerous differences have been established between groups of adults as to the dynamics of engagement into training. Apart from the effect of such sociodemographic variables as gender, age, professional status, etc., a striking difference was shown between two categories of adults in terms of their specific motivational set-ups.

Results obtained in the present research as to differences in motive combination and motivational processes between adults who engage in training courses could be duplicated and extended in different settings, using the present methodology and instrument with three possible different goals:

- Research: adult educational theory could benefit from wider analyses of the reasons why adults go into training. Comparison of results obtained with similar procedures in a variety of settings could enlarge our vision of adult motivation to learn and develop.
- Pedagogical practice: with the help of a simple key, trainers could offer the instrument at the onset of new training programs and thus get a more precise, more conceptually sound vision of their groups, than with conventional needs analysis approaches. Course preparation time, trainer anxiety and new materials development needs are likely to be reduced with such an approach.
- Lastly, this instrument and its interpretation key could be used in self-diagnosis procedures to help adults decide on which training courses to join and to reflect on their dispositions to learn or … not to learn!

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[i] Complementary analyses were being carried out at the time this document was being written. Definitive results on this section will be available by the time of the AERC Conference.

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