



Examining Student Academic Motivation Using Carl Stone's Work Attitude Survey

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In 1982, Carl Stone set out to explore worker attitudes in Jamaica. Using a ten question survey, he discovered several critical findings about what motivates workers. The survey and his subsequent book serves as a key study for understanding employee motivation, especially in the field of public administration. While teaching Introduction of Public Administration, this same survey was employed, with some minor tweaking, to get students in the class to consider what motivates them as Lander University students. The findings are an interesting look inside the motivations of our students and may be helpful for faculty to consider and understand while working with them.

What Motivates Students?

Within the field of psychology, research has been conducted to find out about student academic motivation. Perhaps the best explanation of academic motivation that can be used to examine the results of the Work Attitude Survey was done by Vallerand and Bissonnette (1992). They identified three types of academic motivations for students: Internal Motivation, External Motivation, and Amotivated. Within Internal and External Motivation types they also identified three subfields of motivation. Internal Motivation is characterized by a student acting voluntarily with no expectation of external reward and include the following:

- *To Know* internal motivation is indicative of students gaining satisfaction from learning;
- *Toward Accomplishment* means students gain motivation from achieving something; and
- *To Experience Stimulation* indicates students are motivated by mental or physical sensory stimulation.

External Motivation occurs when students are motivated by a reward beyond the act itself and include the following subtypes:

- *Identified* is an external motivation indicative of student being motivated due to future benefit from an action;
- *Introjected* is external motivation where students internalize emotions such as pride or guilt for accomplishing or not accomplishing work or goals; and
- *External Motivation* is indicative of student motivation due to an outside person or persons granting or withholding an activity as an incentive.

Amotivated students are those that are not motivated by any internal or external motivations and have no measurable drive or purpose.

Carl Stone's Work Attitude Survey

While teaching POLS 317: Introduction to Public Administration, we examined employee motivation, including various theories of motivation and the findings of Carl Stone's work. To examine the ideas of motivation further, the class completed a slightly changed survey that Carl Stone used to examine workers in Jamaica to examine their own motivations as college students (see below). The findings led to an interesting class discussion that helped the students better understand themselves, theories of employee motivation, and how such theories are practically applied. The answers also provide an insight into what motivates Lander students, especially when coupled with Vallerand and Bissonnette's ideas of student motivation.

The questionnaire was handed out to thirty-one students enrolled in the class. The class was composed of almost exclusively upper level students – juniors and seniors. Nearly sixty percent of the students were Sociology majors (especially those with a criminal justice emphasis), another thirty percent of the class were political science majors (especially those with a public administration emphasis) and the final ten percent were education majors. The questionnaire used in the class, with Carl Stone's actual wording in parentheses, was changed to reflect the intended audience (students) as opposed to employees. Student answers are listed below the question with highest number of responses listed first.

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MOTIVATION

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The array of answers to each question show a great range of motivations for students. Although the questions are different and, in many cases the answers vary greatly, there are some common themes. Many Lander students are motivated by external motivations, especially by such things as achieving good grades, graduating, and obtaining some future benefit like a degree, a job, or the ability to attend graduate school. Although slightly less prevalent, internal motivation is still a driving force for our students. Many students are motivated by self-improvement, learning, and gaining skill and knowledge. There were relatively few answers that could be characterized as amotivated. Although we have all

encountered many of these students, given that most of the students in this class were upper level, amotivated students were likely filtered by attrition.

Although the class is not representative of the whole university, there are still some helpful findings to consider when thinking about what motivates our students. Many do enjoy our classes and are motivated to learn. However, most are thinking in terms of external rewards and threats to motivate them in class. This may also be the source of tension or frustration for us as faculty at a liberal arts school because it is likely that many of us were and are motivated by intrinsic motivations. Ultimately, this survey

does show that our upper level students are motivated and do react, although somewhat differently than we might expect, to motivations that we have in our classes.

References:

Stone, C. 1982. *Work Attitude Survey: A Report to the Jamaican Government*. St. Anne, Jamaica: Earle Publishers Ltd.

Stone, C. 1983. *Finding of the Stone Survey*. Kingston, Jamaica: JIS Press.

Vallerand, R.J., Bissonnette, R. 1992. Intrinsic, Extrinsic, and Amotivational Styles as Predictors of Behavior: A Prospective Study. *Journal of Personality*, 60, 599-620.

What Motivates You?

Complete the following sentences with first word or phrase that come to mind:

1. I go to class (work) because _____

Have to/ Want a degree/ Want to learn and/or Get good grades/ Want to better their life/ Do not want to fail

2. College (Work) to me means _____

A better life/ Education/ Self-improvement/A game

3. The best part about college (work) is _____

Friends/ the Structure/ Expansion of knowledge and skills

4. The worst part about college (work) is _____

Difficulty of class and stress/ Costs/ Unnecessary work/ Peers/ Food

5. My job (is) as student is _____

Work hard and get good grades/ Get a degree/ Learn

6. Motivation to do class work (work) comes from _____

Want to learn and graduate/ Grades/ Family/ Accomplish future goals/ Recognition

7. If I made one change to make my class work (work) more interesting, I would _____

More hands on and more discussion/ More organized/ Smaller classes

8. My motivation at college (work) would improve if _____

More time/ More financial support/ Better professors/ Less distractions/ A guaranteed job/ Less stressful

9. My motivation at college (work) would decline if _____

Costs increase/ Had bad professors/ Had to take unwanted classes/ Received a job offer/ Had no goals/ Had too much work

10. My ambition is to _____

Graduate/ Be successful/ Be knowledgeable/ Help others/ Go to graduate school/ Impress/ Get a job/ Find purpose