

# Rolland Viau's Theory of Motivation

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Inspired by the sociocognitive approaches to learning, Rolland Viau (buy his books from Amazon) proposes an innovative motivation model in the context of acquiring information and completing goals.

Although the model has been initially designed for the learning student, its structures can be just as easily and successfully applied to any situation where an individual is faced with a challenge and a need to be completing a goal.

|| Never think that you already know all. However highly you are appraised, always have the courage to say to yourself - I am ignorant. Ivan P. Pavlov

## What is Motivation?

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**Motivation** is the reason for people's actions, willingness and goals. Motivation is derived from the word *motive* which is defined as a need that requires satisfaction.

These needs could be wants or desires that are acquired through influence of culture, society, lifestyle, etc. or generally innate.

**Motivation** is one's direction to behaviour, or what causes a person to want to repeat a behaviour, a set of force that acts behind the motives. An individual's motivation may be inspired by others, events or external rewards – extrinsic motivation – or it may come from within the individual – intrinsic motivation.

|| Motivation is a dynamic state that has its origin the student's perceptions of himself and of his environment, which incites him on choosing an activity, to engage in the pursuit of finishing a goal. Rolland Viau

The definition given by Viau highlights three aspects of motivation:

- motivation is a dynamic phenomenon, which is constantly changing
- motivation implies the interactions between the student's perceptions, his behaviours, and the environment
- motivation requires a goal to be achieved.

## A Sociocognitive Model

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According to Viau's model, motivation has its roots in the relationship between the persons perceptions and his forming context. The perceptions specific to the context, which are the most important sources of motivation, are as follows:

- the person's perception of the activity's value.
- the person's perception of his own competence in completing the activity.
- the person's perception of the control on the activity.

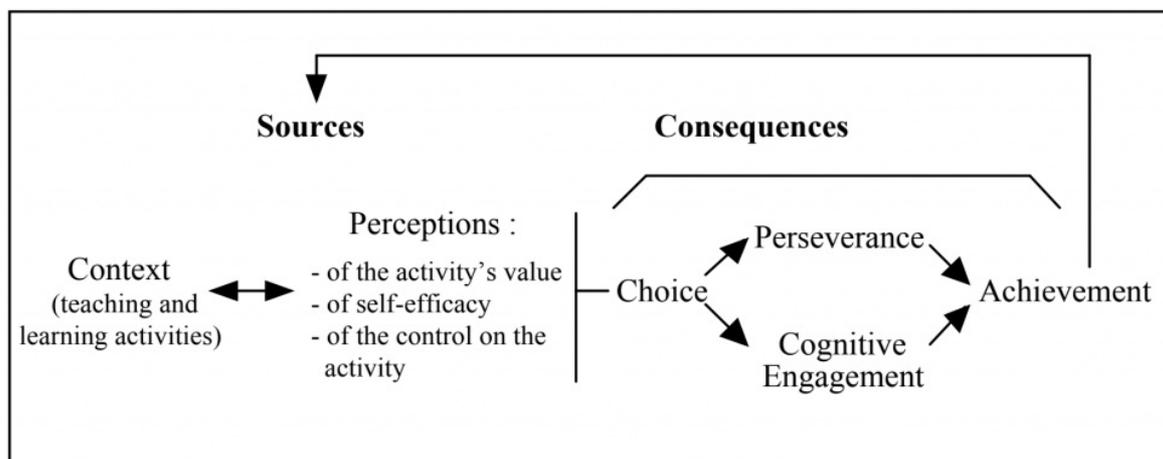


Figure 1 : Motivational Dynamic (Viau, 1994)

Illustration of the Sociocognitive Model of Motivation developed by Rolland Viau

The person's perception of an activity's value is the judgement one makes regarding the importance and interest an activity has for the goals he is already pursuing.

Some people are interested in acquiring knowledge and abilities – which correspond to the concept of intrinsic motivation, while others are attracted to an activity because it can bring them external rewards, such as prizes, commends and money – which would correspond to extrinsic motivation. Viau believes the distinction between the two categories is difficult to pinpoint, so the focus must be kept on the future perspectives one has.

These perspectives directly influence the cognitive engagement in a certain activity. Those who have long-term goals are more capable of perceiving an activity's value even though it may not bring them immediate gratification. On the contrary, those with a limited perspective, reduced clarity and less structured goals don't have a point of reference for correctly judging the value of an activity, especially if it does not bring them immediate rewards. Metacognition also plays an important part in perceiving one's own mental capabilities and styles of thinking.

|| The objectives transform a random walk into a chase. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

## Competence and Self-Efficacy

The perception an individual has on his own competence in completing an activity is closely related to the concept of self-efficacy developed by psychologist Albert Bandura.

**Self-efficacy** is an individual's belief in their innate ability to achieve goals. Albert Bandura ([buy his books from Amazon](#)) defines it as a personal judgment of "how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations". Expectations of self-efficacy determine whether an individual will be able to exhibit coping behaviour and how long effort will be sustained in the face of obstacles. Individuals who have high self-efficacy will exert sufficient effort that, if well executed, leads to successful outcomes, whereas those with low self-efficacy are likely to cease effort early and fail.

|| I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail. Abraham Maslow

The stronger the self-efficacy or mastery expectations, the more active the efforts. However, those with low self-efficacy sometimes experience incentive to learn more about an unfamiliar subject, where someone with a high self-efficacy may not prepare as well for a task. A negative effect of low self-efficacy is that it can lead to a state of learned helplessness.

Learned helplessness was studied by Martin Seligman in an experiment in which shocks were applied to animals. Through the experiment, Seligman ([buy his books from Amazon](#)) discovered that the animals placed in a cage where they could escape shocks by moving to a different part of the cage did not attempt to move because they had formerly been placed in a cage in which escape from the shocks was not possible. Low self-efficacy can lead to this state in which it is believed that no amount of effort will make a difference in the success of the task at hand.

**Self-efficacy** has several effects on thought patterns and responses:

- Low self-efficacy can lead people to believe tasks to be harder than they actually are. This often results in poor task planning, as well as increased stress.
- People become erratic and unpredictable when engaging in a task in which they have low self-efficacy.
- People with high self-efficacy tend to take a wider view of a task in order to determine the best plan.
- Obstacles often stimulate people with high self-efficacy to greater efforts, where someone with low self-efficacy will tend toward discouragement and giving up.
- A person with high self-efficacy will attribute failure to external factors, where a person with low self-efficacy will blame low ability. For example, someone with high self-efficacy in regards to mathematics may attribute a poor test grade to a harder-than-usual test, illness, lack of effort, or insufficient preparation. A person with a low self-efficacy will attribute the result to poor mathematical ability.

Returning to our motivation model, Viau determines some additional specifications of this type of perception on one's own competence of successfully finishing a task:

Self Evaluation

At the origin of the perception one has on his own abilities to finish a task is a process of self evaluation. This process only occurs when the individual is confronted with an activity that has a high rate of uncertainty regarding its success. A person does not need to evaluate its competences when it comes to routine activities which are completed with ease.

#### Level of expectancy of the outcome

The perception of one's own competence must not be confused with the level of expectancy one has of the outcome. This means that a person can consider herself capable of succeeding in an activity, but because of various reasons, does not expect a favorable outcome.

#### General perception of competence

The perception of competence in completing a certain goal must not be confused with the general perception a person has of his own competence. The first one is linked with a certain task or activity, whereas the second one is measured taking into account different aspects of the individual's personality.

## Control and Attribution

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The perception of control the individual believes he or she possesses over the development and consequences of an activity is, also, a source of motivation. If a person thinks the strategies he can use in solving a problem are enough to bring about a satisfactory outcome, he will feel capable of controlling the development of the activity. Conversely, the person who believes the steps which he is about to use in completing a task are not enough to help him succeed has a low perception of control.

The factors which influence this type of perception are: the perception of one's own competence and the causal attributions which the person is making – attribution is the process by which individuals explain the causes of behavior and events.

## Conclusion

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Every one of these perceptions must be positive in order for the person to make the choice of committing to achieve the goal. If a single one of them is negative, the most likely outcome is that the individual doesn't engage in pursuing the activity.

After the choice is made, both cognitive engagement and perseverance are required for obtaining achievement. Styles of approach can differ from one person to another, but a balance is indeed needed for the task to be successfully completed.

Rolland Viau's model can be used in a large set of situations and can bring priceless insight on the motives and mechanisms that affect and determine an individual's motivation to succeed.