Content Unit 3:

Strengthening Learning Motivation

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1 LEARNING WITH ENTHUSIASM

Learning with enthusiasm is an incredible journey filled with moments of inspiration and growth. While reflecting on our previous learning experiences, some of us can maybe remember moments when a learning experience was not as enjoyable as we expected. However, these moments should not overshadow the positive aspects that learning with enthusiasm brings.

Today, we can often choose what and from whom we want to learn, and in what way these subjects are taught. Nevertheless, no course is tailored to our personal needs all the time. There are still challenges regarding learning: Many of us have a job and have children, which can make it difficult to find enough time to study. Moreover, as adults, we face even more distractions and temptations. All this can make it difficult for us to complete courses that we have started.

That's why this learning unit is about **how we can make learning easier to keep on with enthusiasm.**

1.1 How to motivate yourself to learn

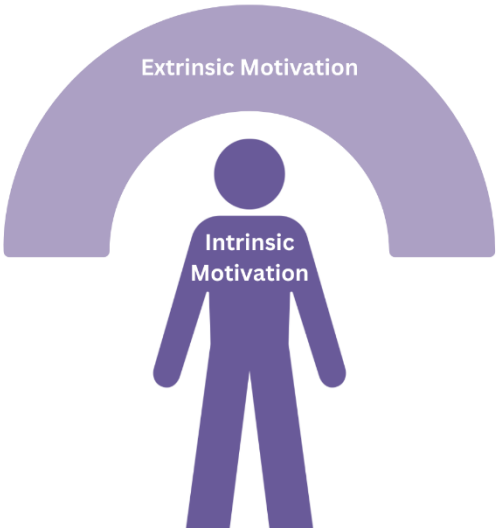
Motivation is one of the **most important success factors for learning**.

Example

Think of a topic that particularly interests you, e.g. your favorite hobby, a computer game or a sport. You probably know an incredible amount about this topic without ever having sat down to "learn" for it. Due to your personal interest, your motivation to learn a lot about it is high, and you do not have to make a special effort.

Sometimes, in our lives we also have to learn things we are not so interested in. Then we have difficulty in finding enough motivation to learn. After all, motivation is not that easy to "conjure up" – or is it? Let's take a closer look at that!

How can we become motivated for something? There are two different types of motivation: "**intrinsic" and "extrinsic“ motivation**.



Intrinsic motivation is the "motivation **from within**". You are motivated to do something, simply out of interest or because you enjoy it – the topic itself is the reason why you deal with

it. Example: You play football because you enjoy it. You learn English because you love the language.

Practical relevance

John is doing an education to become a health and fitness trainer because it has always been his biggest dream to practice this profession and to support other people.

Extrinsic motivation, in contrast, is the "**motivation from outside**". You do something because it gives you an advantage. Example: You get paid for an exhausting job. You go to the gym because you want to lose weight. You learn English because you have to pass an exam.

The easiest way to learn something is when we are intrinsically motivated – because we are interested in the topic and we want to know a lot about it. For example, Juan takes a course on further developing his digital competences because he wants to be better prepared for his customer service job. However, both forms of motivation work – extrinsic motivation can also be very effective (e.g. "I really want to pass this exam!").

If it is difficult for you to motivate yourself, it helps to think of:

For example, think of the good feeling after finishing the exam. Or imagine what you can use your knowledge for once you have learned something.

It is important to **set yourself a goal**. So, at the beginning of a course, think about why you are attending and write the reasons down. Your goal should **SMART**. Have you ever heard of this term? It means that your goals should be:

S specific	What you want to achieve should be described precisely and it should be easily understandable.
M measurable	Criteria have to be defined that must be met in order to achieve the goal. These must be measurable (e.g. positive completion of the exam; being able to type one full page of text within 5 minutes by implementing the 5 finger typing,...).
A achievable	Set goals in a way that they are ambitious but still realistically achievable.
R relevant	The learning objective must also be important and motivating for yourself.
T terminated	Find particular dates or times by which the goal should be achieved.

Practical relevance

An example for a SMART goal related blended learning could be:
"Until the online lesson in two weeks, Juan has learned chapters 1 and 2 (which is 15 pages) of the script about data privacy he received from his teacher Julia."

- **Specific:** The goal is to be able to remember the content of these two chapters in two weeks.
- **Measurable:** He can track his progress by counting the pages he already learned.
- **Achievable:** As he doesn't have many additional appointments, it is doable to learn these 15 pages in two weeks.
- **Relevant:** As he is very interested in how to protect his personal data, the learning content is important for himself.
- **Terminated:** He has two weeks to accomplish this goal.

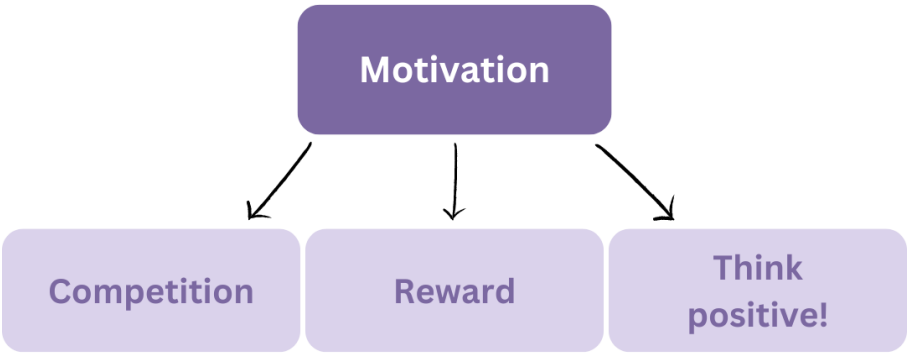
Tips for (even) more motivation

One thing you should keep in your mind is: **Start Small!** It is easier to take smaller steps. Many people fail because they start with goals that are too big. Since they can't keep up with them, they lose motivation.

Example

For example, if your goal is going for a 5K run every day, maybe start with 2K and twice per week. Once you've made that a habit, you can always "up" your game and, bit by bit, move towards 5K per run and more runs per week.

If your motivation is particularly low, you can try **to trick your brain.** Human brains work quite similarly. With the following tricks, you can press the "motivation button":



- **Competition:** Turn learning into a championship – play either against others or simply against yourself. Set yourself "challenges". We all have the motivation to be particularly good at challenges. Competitions increase our motivation and thus also our performance. We can use this to our advantage.

  Example

  "I bet I'll manage to finalise my research task on the internet until 7 pm!"
  "Who will be able to learn 20 vocabularies by tomorrow?".

- **Reward:** The thought of passing an exam is not enough motivation for you to learn? Then reward yourself! This is possible with smaller or bigger incentives. Even if you need a bit of self-control, if you know what you're working for, you'll have a lot more energy right away.

Example

"After an hour of studying, I eat a chocolate bar."
"When I've finished this chapter, I'll have a movie night with my friend!"

You can also try to find an ally. For example, a friend or family member can be your ally. They can remind you of your goal and motivate you to pursue it.

- **Think positive!** It sounds easier than it is done, but: Avoid negative thoughts. If you start with the attitude "I don't want to do that!", then your motivation will certainly decrease. Therefore: Always think positively. Tell yourself: "Today I will learn something – I can do that!" Always keep your goal in mind and think of the good feeling after learning something new.

Reflection

You have heard a lot about self-motivation. Now it's your turn: Think about how you can motivate yourself. Consider the following questions:

- Why are you taking this course? What are your goals?
- Why are you interested in this course? How can you personally benefit from it?
- What is your reward for completing the course? Or what is the sanction if you don't manage it?

Write down your thoughts. Then you can always have a look at them again when you need motivation.

1.2 How to keep on learning

We are all different in the way we are able to learn best. But one thing that is the same for all of us is that achieving our goals is strongly influenced by our habits. Therefore, it is helpful if we **develop habits that are beneficial to us and that fit our personal needs and learning goals.**

These recommendations will help you to integrate learning into your everyday life:

- **Learn regularly (e.g. every week at the same time and place)**
- **Tick off tasks that are completed**
- **Learn with the methods you prefer (e.g. reading, listening, practicing)**
- **Adjust your learning schedule in case of unforeseen delays so that you can still reach your goals**
- **Reward yourself when you have completed a task**

Practical relevance

Reino has started an online course on "Managing stressful times". He plans to complete the entire course within 3 weeks. As he can concentrate best in the morning, he develops the routine to get up half an hour earlier for learning before he leaves for work. He reads through the learning content while drinking coffee.

Reino downloads the lectures for the respective modules as audio files to his smartphone and then listens to them when sitting in the car. Thus, the previously read information can be repeated.

After completing each module, he rewards himself. He has written a list with a lot of rewards from which he can choose spontaneously, e.g. watching a movie, eating his favourite food or going swimming. In this way, he makes good progress with learning.

We all have our personal "comfort zone". We are in our comfort zone when everything around us is familiar to us. In our comfort zone, we don't have to face challenges that might frighten us. However, we cannot develop further within this zone either. Therefore**, it is important that we all try to leave our comfort zone to acquire new skills and develop our personality.**

Especially when people made us aware of our mistakes and failures again and again in the past, it is not that easy to step out of our comfort zone. But we need the courage to do so in order to acquire **new skills** and to **become more self-confident**.

The following recommendations will help you to step out of your comfort zone:

Start with small steps

Explore topics you are interested in on the internet or talk about them with people who are already working on them. Try a new learning method (e.g. e-learning).

Get a positive feeling about the course you attend

Imagine that you have already completed the course positively. What picture do you have in your mind? How will it feel?

Ask yourself why it is worth it to attend a course

What is it the worth for you personally? What is the worth in relation to your work? For whom do you want to be a role model?

Find a person that supports you

Who can help you step out of your comfort zone? This can be another participant of the course with whom you regularly discuss the learning progress. Even a good friend or family member can support you to keep learning.
Often, an external person is best suited for this: Thus, think if you would like to be supported by a coach to get slowly out of your comfort zone.

Set goals you can implement

How much time can you spend on a course? Is it realistic for to complete a course by a certain date? Can you choose a course that puts little to no time pressure on you?

Be grateful to yourself

Reward yourself for going out of your comfort zone. These rewards can be little things, e.g. eat your favourite ice cream, sit in the sun for half an hour or decorate your workplace.

Be gracious to yourself if something doesn't work as planned

Very often it was not your sole fault if a plan could not be realised. Ask yourself what factors you can actually influence in the future so that you have enough time and energy to study.

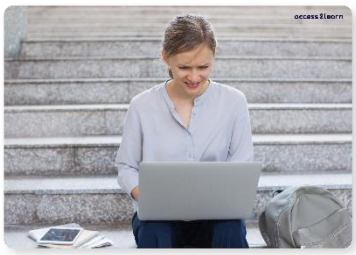
Practical relevance

Tynne likes to travel to Italy during her holidays. She likes the lifestyle there, which also includes the wonderful sound of the Italian language. Her colleague has been attending an online Italian language course for two semesters and tells her that it was easy to learn the language online. For Tynne, it is difficult to follow online lessons. But she imagines how it would feel like to order her favourite dish "Spaghetti ai Frutti di Mare" in Italian during her next holiday and how much better it would taste then. She also thinks of how impressed her boyfriend will be when she can already communicate in Italian. She knows that she will be very proud of herself. In addition, she might be able to use the Italian language in her future job. All this motivates her to sign up for an online language course for beginners.

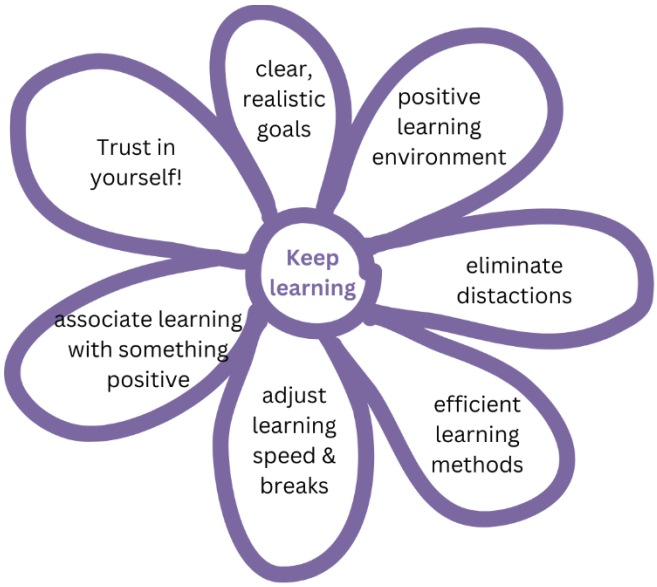
Tynne has now reserved time every Tuesday from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. to participate in video conferencing classes. In addition to these video conferences, she has scheduled an hour of study time every Saturday morning. At the end of each semester, she can take an online test and an oral exam via video conference with the teacher. Then she receives a certificate of successful participation in the language course.

Every Thursday, Tynne also wants to reward herself: She makes sure that she leaves her workplace punctually to do something she loves to do. For example, she takes time for reading a nice book, or she takes a long walk in nature.

Sometimes, we perceive a kind of **inner resistance** that prevents us from doing what we actually planned to do. **If we force ourselves to continue working according to plan, we are unproductive.** Activities then take much longer than usual and/or the quality of the work done is not very good. But **if we postpone learning, there is the risk of not being able to motivate ourselves later.**



The "**keep learning flower"** helps you to avoid inner resistance, unproductive learning and procrastination and instead motivates you to learn and grow:



- **Check whether you have set your goals clearly and realistically:**
  Do you want to achieve your learning goal at all? Are you interested in the content? Do you have the feeling that it will be worthwhile when you have achieved your learning goal? Do you give yourself enough time to reach the goal?

- **Create an environment you like to learn in:**
  Where can you learn well? How can you organise your place of learning? Does music help you to concentrate better? During learning, you can surround yourself with lots of light and liveliness (e.g. plants, pets, garden).

- **Avoid distractions:**
  Our desire to do several things at the same time distracts us from our work and causes us to do nothing at all. Observe yourself when you get distracted from working! How can you reduce the reasons for that? You should also mute the devices you don't need, e.g. your smartphone, so that you are not disturbed during learning!

- **Find out which learning methods suit you best:**
  Is it easier for you to write essential information down in your own words, or is it enough to read through the documents and highlight the most important things? Does it help you to listen to presentations during a lecture? Or maybe you prefer learning during a practical workshop? Try to choose courses with methods you prefer.

- **Avoid being overwhelmed:**
  Create a step-by-step plan for learning: When do you work on what tasks? When is the best time to focus on studying – is it in the morning, evening or at weekends? Have you planned enough breaks in which you do something good for yourself? An average person can concentrate for about 20 to 40 minutes and then needs a break of 5 to 15 minutes. The fewer breaks we take, the more likely we are to get distracted!

  Example

  One possibility to plan learning breaks is the Pomodoro Technique. To find out how this technique works, go to Content Unit 4 “Time Management”, subchapter 1.1 “Plan your learning process”.

- **Associate learning with something positive:**
  What activity will you reward yourself with after or during your learning? Would you, for example, like to drink a cup of tea or listen to pleasant music? If you like nature, you could listen to the learning content in the form of an audio file during a walk. Or after working through the next section, you could have a coffee with a colleague you like.

- **Trust in yourself:**
  Do you sometimes have negative thoughts about yourself and your abilities? Then say "Stop!" internally. Which of your personal qualities have you already proven in other situations (e.g. curiosity, perseverance, patience) with which you can now support yourself to keep learning?

Practical relevance

Juan, who works in the customer service and sales department, was asked to take an e-learning course on "Social Media Marketing". He is happy about this because he would like to contribute to an increase in the number of clients. At the beginning, he is also a bit sceptical whether he is the right person for it because it has often been difficult for him to keep learning. Nevertheless, he remembers that he persevered in vocational school and learned to be patient with herself. Therefore, he is confident that he will also successfully complete this course.

Juan boss wants him to regularly sit in the office and learn for the course. But the office is small and has no window. That's why he arranges two days of working from home. He goes home a bit earlier and learns from home. This is perfect for him because he prefers learning in the afternoon. He enjoys his desk at home near to the window, surrounded by beautiful plants. Juan likes to organise his study time on his own and does not want to be disturbed by anyone. However, he recognises that sometimes, he takes his phone and looks through Instagram again and again. Thus, he makes an agreement with himself to not look at the phone until he has completed the current section, and then to take a longer break.

Juan notes that writing down the information that is useful for his workplace supports him in learning. He has already learned a lot and implements many tips practically in the company. That's what he enjoys the most.

When it comes to blended learning, there are often also **online lessons**, which might be **difficult to follow**. When sitting at home and the teacher or colleagues are talking to us only via our computer/device, we might get easily distracted and lose concentration. Here, you can find some tips on how to stay focused in online classes:

- Find a place for these sessions where nobody can distract you. Put away your phone and lock different pages on the internet to avoid distractions of your computer.
- Sort your desk to feel comfortable.
- Take notes during the sessions. This helps, on the one hand, to stay concentrated and to learn the content easier, on the other hand.
- Participate actively in online lessons (by asking questions or using the chat).
- Your eyes need regular breaks – look away from your screen sometimes.
- You can conduct different loosening-up exercises during the lessons.
- Ensure lighting conditions that don't tire you out.
- Focus on the essential and avoid absorbing too many impressions. Also avoid multitasking.
- Stop watching your camera picture on the screen. Concentrate on the speaker instead.
- Be honest. When a lesson becomes too exhausting, let your teacher know that you need a break.

Reflection

For this exercise, you have to leave your personal comfort zone and write down your answers to the following questions:

1. If I could choose any topic for a course, what would it be?
2. What would I gain from it?
3. How could my life change if I learned that?
4. How much time could I spend on studying each week?
5. Really?
6. Whom could I tell about my course and my goals and who could be my ally?
7. How would I feel on completing the course?
8. With which little things can I reward myself every week for completing my tasks?

Reflection

Try to remember a learning experience in the past where it was very difficult for you to stay motivated, so that you didn't want to learn anymore for some time.

Take a look at the "keep learning flower":

- Which petals did not receive enough attention from you at that time?
- What would you do differently with your current knowledge of learning motivation?

1.3 Summary

To achieve success in learning, it is important to be able to motivate yourself to learn. There are two possibilities: the development of **intrinsic motivation**, e.g. because you are particularly interested in a certain topic, or the setting of **external incentives**, such as rewarding yourself for success.

In general, your own motivation can be strengthened by both types, but learning is easier for you if you are really interested in the learning content.

Set **goals** and **think carefully about why you are actually learning the content and what the advantages are for you.** This will make you aware of the benefits of staying motivated while learning.

If it is difficult for you to find motivation to learn, you can also try to **trick your brain**, e.g. by coming up with rewards or competing with others. However, the most important thing is to have a **positive attitude** towards learning and also towards the subject.

Our habits strongly influence whether we achieve our goals. Therefore, it is helpful if we **develop those beneficial habits that fit our personal needs and learning goals.**

We can only develop our personality and abilities if we are brave enough **to leave our comfort zone for a goal**.

We are best motivated to learn when we observe our learning behaviour and take responsibility for **adapting the conditions around us to our needs.** The "keep learning flower" helps us with this.

Staying concentrated during an online class is particularly difficult. Different aspects should be considered to make concentration during these classes easier.

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