

Issue:

IVC's students have differing cultural backgrounds. Do people from different cultures use the same strategies to attain their goals?

Rule:

Recent research shows that students from the United States and students from the People's Republic of China use different strategies for goal attainment (Georgianna, in press). The American group perceived their success to be determined by ability and intelligence, while the Chinese group perceived their success to be determined by persistence, knowledge, and effort. The American students could not specify how they would reach their educational goal but often expressed concerns that a lack of resources (e.g., money or time) would impede their goal striving. In contrast, the Chinese students specified repetition as one means to reach their goals.

Other research by Mueller and Dweck (1998) indicates that emphasizing ability and intelligence as reasons for successful performance induces helplessness, whereas emphasizing efforts as reason for successful performance is beneficial for self-efficacy beliefs, perseverance during setbacks, and task completion.

Finishing college was seen as leading to a rewarding career and high income in the American sample but not in the Chinese sample. Financial success was the core outcome of the American students' goal realization. The Chinese sample did not anticipate financial success and only saw lack of financial means as an obstacle to goal realization. Another study by Kasser and Ryan (1993) showed that persons who strove for self-acceptance and cared for their communities reported greater self-actualization, vitality, productivity, had less difficulties to adjust themselves to their circumstances, were less control oriented, and reported lower levels of anxiety and depression than people who highly valued financial success.

Application:

Instructors should be aware of the cultural differences between students to improve classroom performance. Such performance may be improved by encouraging observation and analysis of successful performances and providing feedback centered on learning, not performance. Or, instead of setting the class goal "To receive a C or higher" (i.e., focus on the person and his/her performance), telling students at the beginning of a class that "You can receive a good grade by reviewing the course material (the more often you review it before a test, the better will be your grade). Taking this course will increase your understanding of the course's subject, your critical thinking abilities, and will equip you for the higher classes". This will increase students' persistence in mastering more difficult tasks or future setbacks. Consequently, students can exchange a negative self-evaluation about their intelligence and abilities (e.g., "I will never be able to comprehend this issue" accompanied by fear of failure and discouragement) with a positive one (e.g., "If I put in a little effort into this class and repeat reviewing the study material, I can be successful in this and the next class"). This will give them a means to achieve their goals, strengthen their expectations of success, and enhance their performance.

Conclusion:

To summarize, people from different cultures use different strategies to attain their goals.