# Attribution Theory

### **ATTRIBUTION THEORY**

Disclosure: ChatGPT was used in the creation of this resource.

### Key Words:

* Attribution theory: a psychological framework that explains how individuals interpret and explain the causes of events or behaviors.
* Dispositional Attribution (internal): Giving the cause of behavior to an internal characteristic of an individual rather than to outside forces.
* Situational Attribution (external): Giving the cause of behavior to a situation or event outside an individual’s control.

### **What is the Attribution Theory?**

Attribution theory is a psychological framework that explains how individuals interpret and explain the causes of events or behaviors (their own and others). The theory focuses on the cognitive processes people use to understand and make sense of the world around them. Example to think about: Is that person upset at me because they had a long day or did, I do something to make them upset?

Fritz Heider was an Austrian-American that was fascinated by the psychologies of attribution. Heider had the thought that everyone was a psychologist trying to make sense of the social world. This kind of thinking led him to put two ideas out in the world, dispositional and situational attributions.

### **What is the difference of dispositional and situational?**

            Dispositional Attribution has to do with giving the cause of behavior to an internal characteristic of an individual rather than to outside forces. For example, when a student accomplishes a difficult piano practice, they give themselves credit for their skills and effort. This is an internal accomplishment that the student gives credit to themselves for.

            Situational Attribution has to do with giving the cause of a behavior to a situation or event outside an individual’s control. For example, when a student completes a piano performance, they may give credit to the teacher for teaching them the material. They are giving an external situation credit for the success of completing the performance.

### **Does the attribution theory affect the classroom?**

Attribution theory is essential to the classroom because it helps teachers build an understanding of why the student acts the way they do *(1)*. For instance, a student can be disrupting the classroom by speaking out of turn constantly. The teacher can assess the problem by determining if the student has a dispositional issue, the student thinks they won’t be called on if they raise their hand, so they speak out of turn, that is causing the disruption or if there is a situational issue, the student keeps being overlooked by the teacher, that is causing the student to talk out of turn. According to Paul Main *(2)*, a researcher and professional in metacognition, he encourages teachers to help students recognize what attributes to their success and failures, so teachers can determine an understanding of where the students are at in their learning.

*1.* Gaier, S. E. (2015). Understanding Why Students Do What They Do: Using Attribution Theory to Help Students Succeed Academically. *Research and Teaching in Developmental Education*, *31*(2), 6–19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45373106>

*2.* <https://www.structural-learning.com/post/attribution-theory>

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/attribution-theory.html>

Read this online at <https://books.byui.edu/the_science_of_learning/attribution_theory>