

# Attribution Theory: Why We Blame Success and Failure

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Attribution theory focuses on how people attribute the cause of an event and how those beliefs interact with internal perception of themselves. Attribution Theory defines three major elements of cause: Locus, Stability, and Control ability.

**1. Locus** - determining the location of the cause--internal (dispositional) or external (situational) to the person • Influential to feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy • If success or failure is attributed to internal factors, success will lead to pride and increased self-efficacy, whereas failure will diminish self-esteem and negatively affect self-efficacy

**2. Stability** - whether the cause is static or dynamic over time • Closely related to expectations and goals in the future • If students attribute their failure to stable factors such as the difficulty of the subject, they will expect to fail in that subject in the future

**3. Controllability** - whether the person is actively in control of the cause • Related to emotions such as anger, pity, gratitude, or shame • Conflict can arise if we feel we have not done our best; guilt • If we attribute our own abilities to success we will increase self-efficacy • Failing at a task we cannot control can lead to shame or anger.