

SELF-DETERMINATION IN
DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS

By

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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ABSTRACT

Individuals with Developmental Disabilities (DD) have been largely marginalized in our society; this appears most evident from the dearth of research available on service provision that promote their development. In the current research Self-Determination theory (SDT) is used as a theoretical framework for investigating how perceptions held by Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) on autonomy-support in their workplace and their own motivation influences their felt sense of autonomy and competency. Based on data analyses from self-report questionnaires, a direct relationship was found between the reported DSPs' sense of autonomy and competency. The perceived autonomy-support in the workplace had an impactful effect on said positive relationship. While mediation was not seen to be significant, the combination of intrinsic motivation and autonomy explained up to half of the variability with competency, and, therefore, can be used as a fairly accurate predictor of competency. This current research provides an SDT perspective on service provision offered by DSPs by featuring the essentiality of satiating DSPs' basic psychological needs, and promotion of motivation as well as autonomy-supportive practices in these work environments. Consideration of SDT and its tenets should be integrated as theoretical buttresses organizing managerial practices and training offered to DSPs. Proliferative use of SDT in the DD field will not only assist agencies in satisfying mandated service provision regulations, but also enhance the quality of life for Individuals with DD.

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PREVIEW

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The debacle of the Willowbrook Developmental Center and its ultimate shuttering in 1984 marked a significant shift in New York State's policy for the care of Individuals with Developmental Disabilities (DD; Castellani, 1996). As a result, the process of deinstitutionalization has had an indelible impact on policy and practice of residential services for Individuals with DD. In the U. S., the enforcement of this policy has been the catalyst for marked census reduction in large state-operated institutions (from 154,638 people in 1977 to 52,488 in 1998) (Prouty & Lakin, 1999). Part of the process of deinstitutionalization is the rejection of segregation of people with disabilities from society at large (Bradley, Ashbaugh, & Baney, 1994). Although this collective mindset supports the inclusion and the advancement of Individuals with disabilities; the closing of institutions does not ensure the obsolescence of institutional practices (Felce, 1996). Still at many rehabilitative settings, services are delivered with an institutional mindset which are void of person-centered provisions tailored to Individuals' needs and desires; and where blanket policies and procedures exist.

In an effort to address this obsolete approach, new regulations continue to be promulgated which address and, ultimately, propel the proverbial pendulum toward genuine person-centeredness. Despite this collective awareness held by stakeholders in the DD field, however, a dearth in research exists in the field of DD as compared to other neurodevelopmental disorders (Salvador-Carulla & Saxena, 2009). This lack of available research has a secondary effect on the development and furtherance of health policies concerned with this population. Over a decade ago Yan and Munir (2004) raised awareness of the existence of problematic parity issues in research of children and Individuals with DD. More recently, there has been a

neurodiversity movement which assumes a political approach to autism spectrum disorders, to become more person-centered and foster fuller exchanges amongst advocates and medical and mental health professionals (Cascio, 2012) devoid of an institutionalized approach to care. Concern for continuous quality improvement held by Individuals receiving services, their friends and family members, as well as the viability of the DSP profession are duly noted by this researcher. Hagger and Chatzisaranti (2007) promote the use of SDT in the instances of when full participation is essential. It is intended that the theoretical application of Self-Determination concepts will, ultimately, enhance the quality of life of Individuals with DD, and propel the advancement of DSPs as workers supporting Individuals with DD. This current study is meant to demonstrate the potential of applying abstract theory to illuminate concrete policy, procedures, and satisfy regulatory expectations. Through the review of literature, in the verbiage of the survey questions, and in the results of this study's data analyses, a clarified view of self-determinative practices can be achieved. Steps taken are detailed in the following passage.

Research Plan

The purpose of my study endeavors to bridge the identified gap in literature regarding the knowledge about how staff members who work with Individuals with DD in certified residential settings perceive their own level of self-determination and measure perceptions of their workplace. Assessments were given to staff members who provide direct care to these Individuals in an effort to analyze their internal motivation as well. While the sample represents employees who can help to improve understanding about how service provision can be organized and enhanced to help Individuals with DD improve their control and level of self-determination over their lives; the current proposed study seeks to examine the applicability of SDT tenets in the vocation of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). This study follows moderation and

mediation models as the statistical frameworks for data analyses; which entail step by step analyses in establishing each respective said statistical model (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Judd & Kenny, 1981; James & Brett, 1984).

An overarching implication resultant of this study would be to discover how self-determination can measure and organize this advanced stage of deinstitutionalization. Another one of this study's outcome would be to provide an important step in promoting and designing person-centered service programs with an end of goal of increased authentic community integration and, ultimately, enhanced quality of life.

The study is based on staff member's completion of self-report scales; one assessment of which evaluates whether or not providing an environment where the person has more control and can experience more autonomy will propel enhancement of self-competency, thus solidifying a more self-determined way vocational experience. The second research questions appraises the impact of intrinsic motivation on sense of autonomy and competency. An arm of the body of literature of Self-Determination theory is comprised of distinct conceptualizations (i.e. human needs, quality of motivation, and type of perceived environment) which are addressed in the foregoing study.

Purpose and Rationale

A robust field exists that aims to improve the lives of people who receive services from the Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD). Multisystem community presence is an integral part of the promotion of integration of messaging received from the microsystems and macrosystems regarding exosystem (Jenkins, 2007; Bronfenbrenner, 1994), and can be applied to the influences the process of deinstitutionalization. This pendulum continues to move away from institutional living and towards greater community presence. This

momentum is being enforced in residential agencies through the installation of regulations to which residential agencies must adhere for their continued existence. Given the foregoing, there is still a rift in the current literature about the impact of how these many recent changes in legislation mandating a ‘least restrictive’ environment and person - centeredness (i.e. Olmstead Act, and Person - Centered Planning regulations, etc.) (Mount, 1992; Person-Centered Planning, 2015; 2015a; & Person - Centered Planning Addendum, 2015; Olmstead v. L.C., 1999) ("the Olmstead decision") is impactful in the way in which services are organized and delivered. More importantly, it appears that there is a dearth of knowledge about service recipients’ perceptions of their enhanced self-validation of own behaviors; and alternatively, how these staff members (called Direct Service Professionals - DSPS) perceive their level of competency, autonomy, and relatedness. Yet another example of dearth in literature is the way in which DSPs perceive their work environment. In addition, there appears an incomplete understanding about how service provision can be organized and enhanced to help Individuals with DD improve their control and level of self-determination over their lives despite public law promulgating that treatment for an Individuals with DD be designed to “to maximize [...] potential of the person and should be provided in the setting that is least restrictive of the person's personal liberty” (Developmental Disabilities Act, 1984, pg. 2669).

Few comprehensive studies exist on the process by which unique and individualized plans are formulated to promote community integration using a self-determinative approach; this is the very impetus for this current study. We are in the midst of constant influx of change in the way in which services are delivered in the DD field. Success is influenced by both environmental and intrapersonal factors. Self- Determination Theory offers parsimonious conceptualizations for both levels and, can be seen as a conduit promoting a said paradigm shift in the provision of care

in the DD field. Kuhn (1962) posits that the adaptation of theory is propelled by intellectual grappling of scenarios and potentials as opposed to the interjection of route facts.

Literature Review

Overview of Self-Determination Theory

Key researchers that ascribe to Self-Determination Theory (SDT) accept it as a sound empirical theory (Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1973) since the beginning of the 1970s. SDT is considered a macro-theory of human motivation that encompasses several mini-theories (Deci, & Ryan, 2008a; Lam et al., 2015; Moller, Ryan, & Deci, 2006). Carver & Scheier (2012) describe SDT as a meta-theory that interweaves complex functions of motivation. Specifically, they are (a) Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) which is concerned with intrinsic motivation; (b) Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) which addresses the topic of extrinsic motivation along a continuum of internalization; (c) Causality Orientations Theory (COT) proposes autonomy orientation, control orientation, Impersonal/amotivated orientations; (d) Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) which equates psychological well-being to the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs; (e) Goal Contents Theory (GCT) which delineates extrinsic goals and intrinsic goals that are proposed to lead to lower and higher levels of well-being, respectively; and, lastly, (f) Relationships Motivation Theory (RMT) which describes relationships being essential for adjustment & well-being (“Self-Determination Theory Overview,” 2015, para. 6-11).

This study’s theoretical stance rests on the SD meta-theory which has applications that span a wide range of life areas (Deci, & Ryan, 2008b); specifically, of the following sub-theories: Organismic Integration Theory (OIT), Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT), and Causality Orientations Theory (COT). SDT uses multiple perspectives for purposes of

understanding the goals and motives in human motivation (Rogers, Morris, & Moore, 2008). In other words, people vary in their level of motivation as well as quality of that motivation (Chemolli & Gagné, 2014). SDT is a comprehensive theory that takes into consideration the interrelatedness of motivation as conceptualized on a continuum, and the environment that impacts the quality of motivation (Wehmeyer, 2007). Cobb, Lehmann, Newman-Gonchar, and Morgan (2009) conducted a narrative metasynthesis and concluded that there is sufficient evidence to support the effectiveness of self-determination. Guided by the tenets in the SDT paradigm, the sample to be sought out represents employees who have the 'hands-on' experience and knowledge that is essential to the amelioration of service provision in DD field. In an effort to realize real-life scenarios that follow the spirit of said regulations and promote their development, the current focus of this study serves as contribution in the succession for continual improvement in the DD field. The current workforce is surveyed on elements of SDT in an effort to demonstrate that SDT is an applicable theoretical model to be used for improving service provision in this specific field.

People often understand motivation as something that they either have or do not have. To become self-determined is seen as a dichotomy; which may forestall its pursuit (Smith, Agosta, & Fortune, 2007). In addition to this conceptualization Deci and Ryan expound beyond a simple dichotomy of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Vallerand, 2000). SDT proposes quality as opposed to quantity (degree to which one has) motivation as a main tenet in this theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008a). Self-determination theory is based on the assertion that individuals naturally follow self-determined goals to approximate toward fulfillment of their basic psychological needs. Once these are attained a person can freely resolve conflicts and problems, engage

socially, and master tasks. The fulfillment, or approximations of fulfillments of needs are absolute essentials for health and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

Motivation is defined as the process by which activities towards goal completion is revitalized, guided, and maintained (Schunk, Pintrich & Meece, 2008). In a recent study two hypotheses were posited. The first prediction was that the perceived level of students' autonomy support taken at the beginning of a semester would forecast an effect on students' sense of autonomy after one month of classes. The second projection was that the level of autonomy after one month elapsed will affect participants' reported vitality at the end of the semester three months later. The results yielded strong positive associations between both the autonomy support and actual autonomy felt by students. The prediction of the relationship between students' sense of autonomy and their subsequent sense of vitality was also observed (Núñez, Fernández, León, & Grijalvo, 2015). The correlation between intrinsic motivation and enhanced sense of vitality has been supported by other research also (Kasser & Ryan, 1995; 1996; Williams, Cox, Hedberg, & Deci, 2000; Grouzet, et al., 2005). A sense of vitality is essential to productive work and retained employability (Van Scheppingen, 2015; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1990). SDT tenets could be used to increase sustainability; lengthening DSPs' tenure and inform the way in which managerial practices and training area realized in day-to-day operations.

Basic Psychological Needs Theory

Relatedness

Substantial empirical evidence buttresses the theoretical stance that there are three collective and universal human needs (Deci & Ryan, 2012) that exist cross-culturally (Deci & Ryan, 1985a; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan and Deci (2000) propose in the metatheory of SDT that there are universal psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness that are

examined as part of this research study. These three needs are innately present within all human beings (Lopes & Chambel, 2014) regardless of developmental period (Price & Patton, 2003). Specifically, relatedness appertains to a sense of trust, affiliation, and belongingness with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary, 2001). While the elements of autonomy and competence come to the forefront, the quality of relatedness is foundational in the making of self-determined behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Vallerand, 1997).

LaGuardia and Patrick (2008) further elaborate on the utility of relationships in motivation and give it a two-fold purpose in its inclusion in motivation. The primary focus on relationships is how they can facilitate meeting basic psychological needs. Relationships can foster or stymie these needs' fulfillment. Correspondingly, a second concentration assesses how motivational orientations toward relationships and/or the interactions within them can be preserved or reconstructed by way of the interactions experienced within these relationships. Good and Tom (1985) propose that there must be involvement to enhance engagements and dissuade disaffection. An intervention study that was done on 80 elementary and middle school students whose class attendance was poor found those who had closer and higher quality relationships showed fuller participation in the way of class attendance (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004).

Guay, Vallerand and Blanchard (2000) also extended their work on relatedness and proffered that its importance is domain specific. For instance, the atmosphere of a classroom is quite different than that of a workplace because the former is much more individualistic compared to the typical socially demanding setting of the workplace (Richer, Blanchard & Vallerand, 2002). However, Baard, Deci and Ryan (2004) presented research based on employee

satisfaction including all three needs at the workplace and suggested that the fulfillment of these needs forecasts job performance and overall well-being at work.

Another example of research in the workplace, Hackman and Oldham (1974, 1976) propounded that elements like opportunities to demonstrate one's varied skills and receipt of verbally positive feedback foster vocational settings conducive to increased self-determination. When giving feedback it is important to have an awareness of the possibility of projecting undesired traits about oneself onto others (Newman, Duff, & Baumeister, 1997). To the extent that individuals are able to genuinely reflect about themselves and endorse their own personal characteristics and behaviors, they may show more openness and less defensiveness (Hodgins & Knee, 2002). A heightened sense of openness and flexibility in relationships are translated into greater overall sense of autonomy (LaGuardia & Patrick, 2008). Moreover, relationships have been recognized as one of the social sources of wellbeing in research literature (Argyle, 2001; Duck, 1998). Autonomy, another psychology need, is in part a relationship with oneself.

Autonomy

DeCharms (1968) equates the conceptualization of autonomy with the idea of self-rule. Autonomy is also associated with the desire to be one's own governor of actions and decisions. A further description of an autonomous person is a person who is a self-catalyst and fully affirms actions and behavior taken congruent to self (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim & Kaplan, 2003). DeCharms (1968 as cited in Chirkov, Ryan, Kim & Kaplan, 2003, p. 98) went on to offer a discriminate conceptualization in that "the opposite of autonomy is not dependence but rather heteronomy, in which one's actions are experienced as controlled by forces that are phenomenally alien to the self or that compel one to behave in specific ways regardless of one's values or interests." In fact the presence of alignment of values between staff and organization was explored in a study done

in Australian residential facilities was explored; this alignment was present in those residences that were considered to have higher earmark of quality as measured by quality of life outcomes for Individuals with DD in 5 small group homes (Bigby, Knox, Beadle-Brown, Clement, Mansell, 2012). Baumann & Scheffer (2010) found that when specific interest is pursued with increased intrinsic motivation, the person is likely to achieve full immersion and engagement in the activity of interest. OPWDD states that the jobs of DSPs require “technical and values-based skills” that have far reaching effects for Individuals with whom they work. These skills are related to the Core Competencies (“*Core Competencies*,” 2017).

Ryan and Lynch (1989) hold a similar line of thinking on autonomy and also distinguishing it from independence. The inverse of dependence is not autonomy but rather independence. This formulation of meaning follows the SDT theoretical model that autonomy is unrelated to independence (Ryan, 1993). Kuvaas (2009) extended this meaning and used the term ‘task interdependence’ in a study conducted with public sector employees in Norway. This term is defined as the reciprocity in relationships amongst co-workers involved in completing job tasks at work. Kuvaas’ (2009) findings suggest employment conditions conducive to autonomy, competence, and task interdependence involving relationships amongst co-workers appear to optimize the chances of attaining greater internal motivation. This relationship implies that an autonomy supportive environment would moderate the relationship between level of autonomy felt at the workplace and the level of work competency; which is posited in hypothesis one. Pfeffer and Veiga (1999) propose that work investment, endurance, and performance are enhanced when work engagement and commitment are derived from a perception of greater internal locus of control and level of personal contribution in their work. DeCharms (1968) emphasizes experiencing oneself as the locus of causality for one’s own behaviors and regulator

of one's actions (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, Soenens, & Lens, 2010; Van Yperen, Rietzschel, & De Jonge, et al., 2014). This line of thinking is predicated on the reciprocity amongst increased work performance, competence, and bestowal of increased responsibility.

One last example of the nuanced conceptualization of autonomy is dependency on a provider. Memmi (1984) illustrates reliance on the support of a person with resources or one who has the resources to fulfill another's psychological needs does not imply being controlled by that provider; given that the individual has a sense of autonomy. Moreover, a supporter can facilitate a sense of autonomic feeling while providing the care and assistance for the dependent (Bretherton, & Waters, 1985; Bretherton, 1987). Autonomy is based in this study to have a direct relationship with competency.

Competency

Competence conveys one's experience of feeling capable to achieve a desired outcome (Williams et al., 2011). White (1959; 1960) defines competence as self-appraisal of having efficacy in interacting with one's environment and within relationships. This sense of competence may be related to outcome expectations (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2006). Schunk and Usher (2012) further expand that outcome expectations are inherently motivating. Good and Tom (1985) apply SDT to specific teacher behaviors in the classroom. For example, when teachers give unsolicited help, children may make a self-attribution based on that interaction and interpret the offer for assistance as an inference about their competency to complete a task. Graham and Barker (1990) also researched classroom interaction between students and teachers and highlighted the role of personal cognitions and self-beliefs during the learning process. Their research underscores the view that learners are active and constructive participants when learning

and growing. Learning happens in the work environment constantly. For this reason, the competent worker needs to have a sense of motivation, especially when work entails the installation of motivation for another individual.

Organismic Integration Theory (OIT): A sub-theory of Self-Determination

One of the mini theories that concentrates on the effect of contextual ramifications on intrinsic motivation is called the Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) (Weibell, 2011).

Vansteenkiste and Ryan (2013, p. 264) define organismic “as being associated with the Latin verb *organizare*, which means ‘to arrange in a coherent form.’” Johnson (2012, p. 1172) applies a similar conceptualization made by Schmalhausen (1946); he extrapolated that individuals are “observable wholes that are continually undergoing internal developmental processes whose regulation can respond flexibly to environmental circumstances.” Schmalhausen (as cited in Johnson, 2012, p. 1172) thought of individuals and growth potential as analogous to “learning sponges, constantly consciously and unconsciously orienting toward and absorbing information from the environment.” This is a particularly applicable point in the work with vulnerable Individuals, where these Individuals may be seen as highly permeable to external influence. The need for the organism to fulfill basic needs drives the organism’s behavior and serves as a guiding force in the environment (Little, Synder & Weymeyer, 2006). OIT proposes that impetuses that lie in the environment are not causes of behavior; rather these occurrences of stimuli are opportunities to satisfy basic psychological needs (Davis, Bagozzi & Warshaw (1992). The origin of intrinsic motivation is inherently sheer innateness.

Motivation Orientation

Intrinsic Motivation

SDT also postulates that an intrinsic human tendency exists to integrate our experiences which furthers coherent growth of our inner structure called the self. At the root of this propensity for development is the process of internalizing the regulation of behaviors from the environment that was external initially, but has imbued the self to become intrinsically valued (Ryan, 1995). Deci and Ryan (2000) coin the term ‘internalization’ as the process of permeation from an initial external source. This undertaking of stimulus absorption from the environment can penetrate to a deeply absorbed sense of self-command and innateness. Grusec and Goodnow (1994) assert when there is a power differential in a relationship, the use of explanation as opposed to the wielding of power will affect the quality of internalization. Weinstein, Deci and Ryan (2011) depict a person with higher autonomy is a person with greater consolidation of past negative experiences, and, therefore, holds higher potential for movement toward intrinsic motivation on the continuum of the Organismic Integration. The concept of the honing in on the type of motivation fueling competency is one of the tenets of this current study. SDT literature qualifies distinct types of motivation and has gradations between intrinsic and external sourced motivation.

Introjected Motivation

Malhotra, Galletta and Kirsch (2008) relay the focal point of Deci and Ryan’s OIT to be the way in which perceptions about one’s autonomy meld intentions and behaviors. An endogenous origin of motivation propels a sense of self-determination and secures a sense of trust in the external environment, thereby increasing one’s self efficacy; which Bandura (1997) defines as a person’s belief in their capacity to successfully complete a task. It also delineates

unique differences among individuals' intentions and behaviors. In other words, there is a type of regulation process where an initial externally motivated activity transects itself across the continuum of internal motivation. In order to alleviate pressures to satisfy the aforementioned psychological needs, this activity becomes introjected, and potentiates further integration by the organism or self towards higher intrinsic absorption. The control of behavior is corralled from within the self as potential consequences are applied to self if and/or when an externally motivated goal is not met. Individuals' functioning within this level of motivation are typically seeking endorsement from others (Koestner & Losier, 2002). Approximations toward intrinsic motivation hold the following descriptions.

Identified and Integrated Motivation

Attainments of identified and integrated motivation levels are approximations towards fuller innateness; however, they may be experienced as controlling because meeting these approximations successfully involves a sense of self-worth (Kernis & Paradise, 2002). In a study done with pregnant women in varying stages of pregnancy, women who held a quality of identified regulation exercised more and cited fewer barriers (Gaston, Wilson, Mack, Elliot, & Prapavessis, 2013). Self-regulation yielding more of an intrinsic quality was seen to herald greater psychological well-being, with academic performance excluded from analysis in a study done in academic settings. Conversely, identified regulation related to academic performance. As students' identified academic regulation increased, the greater the dependency of psychological well-being had on level of performance. (Burton, Lydon, D'Alessandro, & Koestner, 2006). The closer to integration, the higher the self-worth, but a setback towards integration may have a negative impact on the sense of self-worth. These types of goals align themselves with a person's value and goals and are more fluently subsumed into one's identity (Marcia, 1980). This idea of