Reviewer's report

Title: Fostering Autonomous Motivation: Implications of Self-Determination Theory for Teachers and Leaders in Academic Medicine

Version: 1 Date: 5 June 2013

Reviewer: Olle Ten Cate

Reviewer's report:

Review of Lyness et al Fostering Autonomous Motivation .. etc.

This manuscript covers an important topic, that has only recently caught attention in the medical education literature. Motivation is a significant driver for action, both of students and faculty. Self-determination theory is one of the major motivation theories.

This paper attempts to explain SDT and to provide examples of how SDT insights can inform the practice of teaching and faculty work in and academic health center.

The authors are from the institution where SDT was originated and where founders (Deci and Ryan) are both still active researchers. This should put this paper in a special position.

Despite its importance, I have a few hesitations with this publication.

GENERAL REMARKS

1. I find the description of both the theory and the examples rather superficial and somewhat interpreted. Granted, the authors admit this, but to reduce the theory to only the three psychological needs, despite their importance, does not sufficiently do justice to the theory.

2. The authors claim this to be the first paper to explicitly consider its implications for leaders in academic health centers. With a little homework the authors would have noticed a important 1999 paper in Academic Medicine by Williams, Saizow and Ryan, and more recently by Kusurkar and colleagues:


Kusurkar, Rashmi A, Croiset, G., Mann, K. V, Custers, E., & Ten Cate, O. (2012). Have Motivation Theories Guided the Development and Reform of Medical


None of these were cited, while most of what the manuscript deals with was covered in these papers, all targeted at the medical education community (including its leaders), and including a Guide of the Association for Medical Education in Europe. Williams, who is both highly knowledgeable about SFD and faculty at the authors’ academic health center could have been consulted.

In a revised manuscript, the authors should build on the existing literature and attempt to bring it a step further. I consider this a major compulsory revision.

3. I found the switch between recommendation for faculty and for students somewhat confusing and would recommend the authors to separate them in a whole section on students and one on faculty.

4. I would suggest to engage Deci and Ryan or experts from their group to discuss each of the recommendations made and whether there are indication that these really support autonomous motivation.

DETAILED REMARKS

Page 6. I believe the most important humanist theoretician who wrote about relatedness was Maslow (who called this Belonging, which essentially is the same)

Page 7. The authors talk about a ‘continuum of autonomy’. I don’t think Deci and Ryan would call it this way. In fact it is a continuum of extrinsic motivation, which would require a bit more of a description of the theory, which I would recommend

Page 8 and further. Many of the examples and guidelines are not deeply founded, or refer to literature. While some suggestion are probably useful for teachers and management; some seems less an illustration of autonomy-supportive measures. Page 9 “providing means necessary to meet the proposed challenge” – I would recommend the authors to discuss with the theoreticians whether this will really foster a feeling of competence and stimulate intrinsic motivation instead of controlled motivation (as that is what the three needs are supposed to do). I believe some recommendations it might lead to better acceptance of necessary measure, but this my not necessarily translate to increased intrinsic motivation (or autonomous motivation). Page 11 for example suggests that acknowledging feelings leads to feelings of relatedness. The relatedness concept refers to a group, not an individual. In medical education,
the most significant groupings in this respect are the student peer group and the community of practice (i.e., the medical community). Being taken seriously and rewarded by significant groups leads to a feeling of belonging (relatedness) and may be expected to foster intrinsic motivation. Also, I would recommend to discuss the cases with SDT experts.

Page 14. I wondered about the heading “SUMMARY”. There is an abstract, so no need for a summary, but the text is not really a summary, but adds new thoughts

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests: I declare that I have no competing interests