Applying Self-Determination Theory to Workforce Development

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

A broad meta-theory with two main postulates (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2002):

I. All individuals have three basic psychological needs:
   - **Competence** - need feel “effective in one’s ongoing interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one’s capacities” (Ryan & Deci, 2002, p. 7)
   - **Relatedness** - need to feel a sense of belonging and connection with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2002)
   - **Autonomy** - need to feel they have control and are the origins of their own behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2002; Weiss & Amorose, in press)

II. There is an ongoing interactive relationship between individuals and their environment
   - Individuals will experience optimal growth, functioning, and development to the extent that the environment supports and satisfies the three basic needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2002)

SDT in the Literature

Application across disciplines:
   - SDT serves as the theoretical framework for a broad range of studies across a variety of disciplines, including education, parenting, organizational management, and sport and recreation.
   - Satisfaction of the three psychological needs mediates the relationship between contextual/environmental factors (parenting styles, coaching behaviors, management practices, etc.) and individuals’ well-being and motivation (Amorose, Cooper, & Anderson-Butcher, 2009; Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007; Deci et al., 2001; Reeve, 2002)

Limited study in relation to workforce development (Example: Social Work):
   - Many studies incorporate only one or two of the needs (Boyas & Wind, 2010; Himle & Jayaratne, 1991; Kim & Stoner, 2008).
   - None of these studies explicitly indicate SDT as the theoretical framework
   - Many other variables often are included in the research model that have little theoretical basis
   - Many studies only focus on how some of these needs relate to negative psychological well-being indicators, such as feelings of burnout, turnover intention, and job stress

Gaps in the research:
   - Little systematic research on how satisfaction of the three needs relates to both positive (intention to remain in the job, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, etc.) and negative (burnout, stress, etc.) workforce indicators
   - Few studies have explored the contextual factors that either facilitate or inhibit need satisfaction in this population.
Potential Next Steps:

Research studies examining SDT and workforce development, particularly in relation to the ESMH workforce, may point to pre-service training and workforce development needs.

Developing questions/areas of interest:
- Examining workers’ satisfaction of the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy in relation to workers’ well-being on the job:
  - Job satisfaction
  - Organizational commitment
  - Burnout
- Attention to the potentially mediating role of need satisfaction between organizational and leadership variables and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and burnout
- SDT and pre-service field practicum settings – Does autonomy-support provided by the field supervisor relate to need satisfaction and intention to explore job opportunities in that field?