Interrogating the motivation mechanisms and claims of asset-based community development with Self-Determination Theory

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Introduction

In asset-based community development (ABCD), community members are the principal actors in the development process. They decide, plan and act to progress their own development goals, using their existing individual and collective strengths and capacities ('assets') ranging from material (e.g. land, finance) to less tangible assets (e.g. skills, institutions). Academic literature claims the focus on existing assets, in addition to locally identified priorities, motivates community-led change (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003, 2005; Willetts, Asker, Carrard, & Winterford, 2014).

Although motivation outcomes are central to ABCD, there is an absence of theory or rigor in ABCD literature as to how motivation is defined or conceived. The limited ABCD literature neglects or over simplifies motivation, reducing motivation to a binary concept. People are considered to be motivated—energized and proactive; or not motivated, unwilling or unable to take part in community development interventions (Foot & Hopkins, 2010; Willetts et al., 2014). This binary conceptualization of motivation fails to capture the range of motivation experiences of ABCD program participants, and the implications of different motivations for program outcomes.

We propose ABCD can benefit by drawing from Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to assess ABCD's motivation mechanisms and claims. Developed in psychology, SDT is an empirical theory of motivation which has been tested in various contexts for over 30 years. SDT is concerned with autonomous motivation. That is, volitional behavior perceived as originating from inside, and characterized by an absence of feelings of pressure or control. SDT has defined a taxonomy of motivations of different quality, their role in human development, and how social environments may support or undermine high-quality autonomous motives.

This paper examines the relevance of SDT to ABCD and proposes how the theory may be integrated into ABCD. We discuss how SDT can strengthen the theoretical foundations of ABCD in two ways. First, SDT can provide a means to understand the motivational mechanisms in ABCD

processes. Second, SDT can be used to evaluate the motivational claims of ABCD, and specifically interrogate the motivation quality resulting from ABCD programs. We argue these two elements can strengthen the theoretical basis, practice, and evaluation of ABCD-based programs.

Methods to examine the relevance of SDT to ABCD

Before proposing opportunities for integration of SDT into ABCD, we compared the different theoretical roots and approaches to knowledge. Informed by literature on paradigm mapping (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011), we reviewed SDT academic, and ABCD academic and gray literature to compare the theoretical elements, such as research paradigms and values associated with ABCD and SDT. We also compared attributes unique to ABCD and SDT, for example, concepts of autonomy and internally-driven change. A summary of the full comparison is included in the supplementary material to this paper and key aspects of the comparison are discussed later in this paper. The second part of the method was the use of SDT to analyze the motivational mechanisms in ABCD tools to determine how ABCD tools support autonomous motivations. Finally, we reviewed several SDT quantitative measures to determine their relevance in evaluating the motivational claims of ABCD based programs.

To illustrate the ABCD process and SDT motivation constructs, this paper draws on examples from a development program implemented by an Australian and Malawian non-government organization (NGO). The program was implemented in rural Malawi from 2012 to 2017 using an ABCD process. The program targeted improvement of water, sanitation and hygiene, and food security in over 150 villages. The success of the ABCD approach saw both the Malawian and Australian NGOs adopt ABCD as their development philosophy. The program is the subject of doctoral study by the lead author, focused on water supply and the motivations of volunteer water committee members. This paper does not interrogate the merits of the Malawi program. Instead, it uses the program as a grounded example of ABCD tools and motivation experiences of research participants including the water committee members and village leaders.

The next section of this paper provides additional background of ABCD and SDT, including core concepts, principles and paradigms. This is followed by the theoretical comparison of ABCD and SDT, and opportunities to integrate SDT into ABCD.

ABCD: Principles, applications and contentions

ABCD is based in a social constructionist world view, where reality is assumed to be socially constructed, and language creates meaning to that reality (Elliott, 1999; cited by Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). The emphasis on assets and a community-led approach is contrasted to needs-based approaches to development. Need-based approaches are the dominant paradigm in development, these approaches are deficiency orientated and define communities in terms of their problems. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993, p. 2) defined this paradigm as creating "images of needy and problematic and deficient neighborhoods, populated by needy and problematic and deficient people". The ABCD literature argues such approaches have longer-term negative consequences. These consequences of needs-based approaches include impinging on the participants' motivations and capacity for innovation, a reduced sense of local power and agency, and an over reliance on outside actors and welfare to solve problems (Ireland & McKinnon, 2013; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003, 2005; Cahill, 2010; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

From a constructionist perspective, transformation requires a different language to replace this reality of deficits with one of capacity and potential. Consequently, ABCD principles seek to shift focus to a 'glass half-full' attitude. ABCD approaches do this through processes which rather than focusing on deficits, identify stories of community-led change and community assets (Mathie, Cameron, & Gibson, 2017). Consistent with ABCD literature, we use the term 'assets' to encompass diverse types of assets such as individual skills and personal qualities, associations, natural resources, physical assets, economic assets and cultural and spiritual values. Mathie et al. (2017, p. 56) describes this change of orientation from needs to assets as a process of transformation, where an "internalized sense of powerlessness is challenged, as people reframe themselves as subjects capable of acting".

The ABCD process also reframes the role of development practitioners and participants in development projects. Participants rather than practitioners define development priorities in ABCD-driven development programs, meaning practitioners must relinquish control of development outcomes. The practitioners' role and their relationship to participants becomes facilitative rather than directive–a departure from top-down projects (O'Leary, Burkett, & Braithwaite, 2011).

Various versions of ABCD principles can be found throughout gray and academic literature (Foot & Hopkins, 2010; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Mathie & Cunningham, 2005; Nel, 2018). Here, we summarize the principles into the following four elements:

(1) Place-based: a community is the unit of focus and the source of assets and networks.

(2) Asset-based: ABCD process starts with what exists in a community—the strengths and capacities of people. This focus is more likely to inspire change than focusing on needs and deficits.

(3) Association-based: informal and formal associations of people in the community bring leadership and drive the vision and action of ABCD based initiatives.

(4) Internal focus to development: community-driven rather than externally-driven development allows people to work on issues and projects they care about.

We return to these principles later in this paper when comparing SDT and ABCD.

Before introducing SDT in more detail, we note three areas of contention concerning ABCD. First, some authors argue that ABCD takes an overly optimistic view of communities. A 'community' in ABCD literature is usually defined by geography although it can include a group of people who share a common interest and circumstance (Garven, McLean, & Pattoni, 2016). In ABCD, social capital within communities is considered as a force of good; however, issues of power and oppression within communities are often ignored (Gray, 2011). The general term 'community' used in ABCD gray and academic literature, and in this paper, disguises the diversity of groups, relationships, agendas and power within communities. Such diversity within communities has implications for equity. For example, traditional power holders within a

community may direct a development process to the exclusion of minority groups. ABCD approaches are criticized for leaving such structural power and privilege unchallenged. These criticisms apply to power within communities and to power held in external structures which perpetuate institutionalized discrimination (Friedli, 2013; Gray, 2011; MacLeod & Emejulu, 2014).

Instead of directly challenging power imbalances, ABCD approaches tend to assume power can be addressed through inclusion. A facilitated ABCD processes seeks to elicit participation from those often excluded from community decision-making (Peters & Eliasov, 2014). In addition, some authors and practitioners see the ABCD processes as indirectly confronting structural power inequalities. Collective action and empowerment are viewed as a potential means of building solidarity and giving a political voice to those marginalized because of their gender, class, age or ethnicity (O'Leary et al., 2011). It remains that tackling structural power inequalities is outside the primary focus of ABCD. Power often remains uncontested within communities, and instead ABCD seeks to 'raise the floor', rather than 'lower the ceiling'.

A second criticism of ABCD is that its focus on self-help and reduced reliance on external support is complicit with neoliberal agendas. Gray (2011) and Macleod and Emejulu (2014) argued that ABCD privatizes public issues such as poverty and inequality through promoting entrepreneurship and innovation. Hence, discourses on community empowerment, including approaches like ABCD, justify the rollback of state responsibilities regarding social welfare (MacLeod & Emejulu, 2014). However, we view such critiques as simplistic, and reflect the abuse of ABCD approaches, rather than failings inherent to the approach itself. In this line, Burkett (2011, p. 574) argues ABCD is not a product of neoliberalism, but instead held "radical possibilities" for creating social change and responding to neoliberal agendas.

Finally, as noted earlier, many of the claims regarding change outcomes resulting from ABCD approaches lack critical reflection, a limitation which extends to both motivational mechanism and motivational claims of ABCD interventions. Academic literature has argued the ABCD process is motivating compared to needs-based approaches, with motivation attributed to

two aspects of ABCD. First, the focus on assets, rather than deficits, is purported to affirm capacity

and therefore support motivations (Mathie et al., 2017; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). ABCD

practice guidelines note that "when communities recognize their assets and opportunities, they are

more likely to be motivated to take initiative" (Peters & Eliasov, 2014, p. 34)**.** Second, in the ABCD

process people identify and work on issues important to them, in contrast to top-down identified

goals which risk being imposed and irrelevant. The focus on relevant and community identified

priorities is also considered motivating. As noted in the introduction, these motivation claims are

often oversimplified, assumed, and remain unqualified in ABCD literature. In the following section

we introduce SDT, discuss the concept of basic psychological needs, and outline the motivation

types as defined in the SDT continuum.

An introduction to SDT

SDT is a meta theory of motivation which originated in psychology and has developed over 30

years to become one of the most accepted theories of motivation. Applications of SDT include

motivations in the contexts of education, healthcare, relationships, organizations, goals, health and

well-being, and pro-environmental behavior. SDT proposes a continuum of motivation types. These

types are differentiated by their means of regulation, namely if the 'why' for behavior is

experienced as originating from the self (internal) or an external source (Ryan & Connell, 1989).

Hence, '*autonomy*' is fundamental to SDT and is defined as a feeling of being the origin of one's

behavior, as opposed to feelings of being controlled or pressured (Ng et al., 2012). More

autonomous forms of motivation are considered more internalized, and associated with experiences

of wellness, performance and persistence of motivation (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999; Yu,

Levesque-Bristol, & Maeda, 2018).

The concept of peoples' basic psychological needs (BPNs) are central to understanding how

motivations are supported. SDT maintains that autonomous motivations are contingent on the

degree to which an environment (e.g. workplace, school, or health care intervention) help or hinder

the satisfaction of BPNs. The SDT literature proposes three universal BPNs, which are applicable

across cultures (Yu et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2015; Chirkov, Ryan, & Sheldon, 2011), and can be observed and quantified. These are *autonomy* (as defined above), *competence* (the ability to express one's capacities and effect change) and *relatedness* (a feeling of being cared for, and a sense of trust towards others) (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Ryan and Deci (2000) describe BPNs as analogous to water, light and soil for plants. They are necessary psychological nutriments for human flourishing. Multiple empirical studies have found that satisfaction of BPNs has contributed to autonomous, hence high quality forms of motivation and well-being outcomes (Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017; Ng et al., 2012; Ryan, Patrick, Deci, & Williams, 2008; Gagné & Deci, 2005). Conversely, the frustration of BPNs can produce low-quality motivation and ill-being.

Importantly, motivations are not fixed. People can exhibit multiple forms of motivation for a behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Motivation quality can shift with time and in response to a person's experience of their social environment. Hence, interventions and interactions can be designed to support autonomous motivations through environments which satisfy an individual's BPNs. In the following section, we outline the various motivation types and their qualities as identified by SDT and summarized in the SDT motivation continuum shown in Figure 1 below. We draw from examples from the Malawi program to illustrate each type.

Motivation types

Intrinsic motivation is considered the most autonomous and hence the optimal motivation in SDT. Empirical research has associated intrinsic motivation with well-being, performance outcomes and persistence of behavior (Deci et al., 1999; Yu et al., 2018). In typical experiences of intrinsic motivation, behaviors are inherently satisfying, fun or interesting. Thus, an intrinsically motivated activity is performed for its own sake. For example, a water committee member in Malawi noted "I enjoy working in the committee as I learn a lot about water". In intrinsic motivation, the perceived cause of behavior is highly autonomous and thus internal. The activity has interest or enjoyment for the individual, their capacities are being used, and the behavior itself is the reward (Ryan & Deci, 2002; Sheldon, Osin, Gordeeva, Suchkov, & Sychev, 2017). As seen in Figure 1, intrinsic

motivation is a type of autonomous motivation. Autonomous motivations include behaviors or activities that are self-endorsed, aligned with personal values or hold inherent interest.

In *extrinsic motivation*, the 'why' of behavior is separate to the behavior itself and the behavior is not necessarily considered fun or interesting as with intrinsic motivation. Figure 1 shows the four categories of extrinsic motivation. From most to least autonomous, these are integration, identification, introjection and external motivation. *Integrated motivation*, although extrinsic, is perceived as originating from the sense of self and is highly autonomous. In this experience, the individual has endorsed the behavior, integrated the behavior with their values and goals and the behavior forms part of a sense of self-identity (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ryan et al., 2008). For example, a volunteer community mobiliser in Malawi said, "I am part and parcel of this community, because I live here, and I love it…. [so] I serve the same community... it is [my] personal choice to serve the community". Like intrinsic motivation, integration is associated with persistence of people's behavior, as the behavior (including associated uninteresting tasks) is part of their identity.

Identified motivation refers to behavior which is valued, accepted and personally important (Gagné & Deci, 2005). For example, when describing their motives to volunteer in a water committee, a member in Malawi said, "people know that water is life. If the borehole stops functioning [users] have to access water from the old water source. So I want to repair and maintain it the same day". Although less internalized than both intrinsic motivation and integrated motivation, identified motivation is still considered autonomous, and hence it is associated with persistence, positive performance and well-being outcomes.

Introjected and *external motivations* are controlled forms of motivation where behavior is motivated by a sense of external pressure from self and others (e.g. "I have to…." or "I should…"). In introjection, motives are regulated by internal pressure. Typical examples include behaviors controlled by shame or pride (Deci et al., 2017). Perls (1973, cited in Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 236) described it as "swallowing regulations whole without digesting them". For example, a volunteer in

Malawi described their motives to take part in a water committee as, "I am hardworking… and

committed to my work, so I do not want to disappoint the people". Although the motivational drive

for the behavior is inside the person, it is only partially internalized; hence, the motives are still

controlled (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Introjected behavior is unlikely to be associated with longer-term

adherence of behavior and is experienced as moderately pressuring as a sense of volition for the

behavior is reduced or not present.

External motivation is when behavior is motivated by the desire for an external reward or to

avoid punishment. This includes compliance with societal or workplace pressures to please or avoid

upsetting others. For example, a Chief in Malawi described his motivation to take part in

development projects as, "since it has […] been donated as a community development project, I

accept it. And people do participate in those projects, although not happily... because it is a

development that they have just received". When important others (development agencies in this

example) use their authority to offer rewards or punishments, they may foster external motivation.

Such approaches can stimulate motivation though the motivation is often of poor quality. The

motivation experience is associated with feelings of pressure and is unlikely to be sustained once

the external reward or punishment is removed.

Amotivation is the final motivation type, it is experienced when a behavior is not valued, or

there is a perceived absence of competence associated with the behavior. In the former case, the

individual no longer cares for or understands the reasons for the behavior. For example, a water

committee member commented, "it happens that others [NGOs] just impose the project, as a result,

I hardly feel ownership. For instance, if [the water point] has broken-down, I [do] not care to

maintain it". With competence-driven amotivation, there is a belief the individual cannot effect

change, or they see the behavior as irrelevant to the change (Ryan, Lynch, Vansteenkiste, & Deci,

2011). In Malawi, this was often associated with perceived low resources. For example, "on our

own we cannot manage [major borehole repairs] because it's extremely expensive… we depend on

the well-wishers to help… we have not done anything to solve this problem". In both types of

amotivation, there are experiences of ill-being and a lack of intention to act. People are passive

actors, or do not act at all (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2002).

In summary, if practitioners are interested in an individual's effectiveness, perseverance and

well-being, an understanding of both autonomous and controlled motivation are critical. As

described earlier, BPN satisfaction supports autonomous motivations, and is associated with greater

persistence, performance and well-being (Chirkov & Ryan, 2001; Ng et al., 2012; Ryan & Deci,

2000, p. 200).

Theoretical comparison of ABCD and SDT—philosophies and approaches to knowledge

In the following section, we compare theoretical attributes of ABCD and SDT and assess areas of

alignment and divergence. This comparison informs the opportunities for the integration of SDT

into ABCD discussed later in this article.

Different and potentially conflictual research paradigms

Change processes in ABCD are considered complex, unpredictable, context dependent, and difficult

to measure (Mathie & Peters, 2014). As ABCD has philosophical roots in the social constructionist

paradigm, most research has used qualitative or interpretative methods where the participants' voice

and experience have primacy (Jackson et al., 2003; Mathie & Peters, 2014). Quantitative methods

are occasionally used in ABCD literature, often in response to donor demands to capture changes in

assets (e.g. income, networks and changes in physical infrastructure) and well-being (Hills, Carroll,

& Desjardins, 2010; Mathie & Peters, 2014). However, when quantitative methods are used, they

are context dependent, making it difficult to compare or generalize findings across studies. Hence,

the evidence base of ABCD is fragmented, with some claiming ABCD academic literature is yet to

capture change processes in a meaningful and consistent manner (Friedli, 2013; Gray, 2011).

By contrast, the large scale and relatively homogenous methods popularized in SDT

research mean the evidence base is consistent and extensive. With roots in psychology, most

literature and associated claims of SDT are based on statistical positivism (Chirkov & Anderson,

2018). SDT concepts such as motivation types and BPN satisfaction, are typically measured with

tested and validated questionnaires with pre-determined answers (Centre for Self-Determination

Theory, CSDT, 2020). The questionnaires are used to support generalized statistical correlations

associated with the quantitative tradition (Chirkov & Anderson, 2018) and provide a codified means

to define, test and measure SDT constructs and causality in SDT.

However, SDTs basis in positivism and almost exclusive use of closed questionnaires has

led to criticisms. These include the removal of people's voice and individual experiences when

dealing with constructs such as a sense of autonomy, relatedness and competence (Chirkov &

Anderson, 2018; Wisniewski et al., 2018). The absence of participant voice is more pronounced in

contexts such as Malawi where the power distance between practitioner and participant are likely to

be high. In addition, the aggregation of data in quantitative methods means findings are artificially

abstracted from the messiness of people's social contexts, and hence SDT's claims are at risk of

being over simplified (Chirkov & Anderson, 2018). Such criticisms highlight potential conflict

between positivist roots and claims of SDT as a person-centered theory as individual experiences

are all but removed in most research approaches. For social constructionists this could be a cause

for concern. Incompatibility between qualitative and quantitative approaches is not unique to

ABCD and SDT. It has been the subject of an ongoing debate in research philosophy, with some

considering the theoretical paradigms behind each approach as "so different that any reconciliation

between them would destroy the philosophical foundations of each" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.

268).

We take a pluralistic position and propose that SDT's positivist quantitative methods can

add valuable insights to ABCD approaches. Such insights are outlined later in this article.

Pluralistic research approaches consider the use of both quantitative *and* qualitative (e.g. mixed

methods) as a valid way of knowing, and a means to bridge the apparent philosophical divide

(Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).The conflicting paradigms of SDT and ABCD remain a point of

debate and resistance for scholars and practitioners, when considering the integration of the approaches.

ABCD analyzes collective experiences, SDT aggregates individual experiences

ABCD approaches focus on the mobilization of groups of people defined by geography and interest ('communities'), with social change driven by consensus and co-operation on shared goals (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). As a community is the unit of focus, experiences of motivation and well-being are often generalized across groups in the ABCD literature. In addition, motivation is usually assessed by proxy rather than directly in ABCD, through behavior such as group initiative and collective action to progress tangible outcomes. For example, in Malawi, motivation was evident in group co-ordination and construction of communal water supplies. As a result, in ABCD the quality of motivation is not considered nor are individual experiences of motivation.

In contrast, SDT starts with a focus on individual human experiences. Motivation types are and BPN satisfaction are usually determined through validated quantitative questionnaires. Individual motivation experiences and BPN satisfaction are aggregated to draw generalized conclusions across a population. Hence, SDT has methods and resolution which focus at the individual and group scales, while ABCD focuses primarily on the group scale. We do not consider the different resolutions of the two concepts as a barrier to integrating SDT into ABCD per se. However, the use of SDT would require a re-orientation of ABCD methods to focus on individual experiences in addition to collective experiences of motivation.

ABCD and SDT are critical of hegemony

Both ABCD and SDT are critical of oppressive forces. As discussed earlier, the ABCD literature contests development norms which position professionals as experts in control of development programs, and participants as less powerful subjects (Cahill, 2010). Kretzmann and McKnight (1993, p. 4) argued many development experts have prioritized a needs-based "deficiency orientation" towards communities, and ignore their existing knowledge and capacities. Some argue

the effects of this are harmful, propagating a sense of helplessness and reliance on outside experts to

solve local problems (Mathie & Cunningham, 2005). Therefore, external experts and power holders

in development programs are often viewed critically and cautiously in ABCD approaches.

Although ABCD literature has acknowledged communities and their culture have their own

stratification of power and oppression; judgement is reserved. Instead, ABCD's endogenous focus

views local knowledge, community assets and relationships as forces for positive change (Cahill,

2010). Mathie and Cunningham (2003, p. 483) highlighted this tension when they noted ABCD

does not "directly confront the issue of unequal power within communities and its attendant

oppressions; instead, [it] tend[s] to appeal to the higher motive of using power to act in the shared

interests of the common good, and to uncover the strengths of those who might otherwise be less

valued". Hence, culture within communities including culture which maintains negative power

relations, is not directly challenged in ABCD

SDT is critical of hegemony in cultures and these criticisms extend to a variety of cultural

contexts (e.g. workplace and ethnic cultures) which some SDT scholars critique "directly and

unabashedly" (Ryan & Niemiec, 2009, p. 269). Empirical SDT research has found controlling

environments can be harmful for both well-being and performance. For example, research in the

education context, Deci et al. (1982) found teachers pressured by accountability measures talked

more and criticized students more, than teachers who were not pressured. The teachers' controlling

approaches meant students were less satisfied with their learning experience and had reduced

performance. Such findings are consistent with similar empirical SDT studies across different

contexts. Controlled environments are correlated with reduced well-being and poor quality

motivation; as a result they are viewed as oppressive.

ABCD and SDT value outcomes of autonomy, human potential and growth

ABCD and SDT are both concerned with autonomously driven change. For ABCD, this includes a

focus on social change directed from within a community and change driven using community

assets. According to ABCD literature, every community has capacities and relationships which can

be used to build community assets and improve well-being (Ireland & McKinnon, 2013; O'Leary et al., 2011). ABCD scholars have argued the focus on community-led change, rather than external agency driven change, results in more relevant programs while reducing reliance on uncertain outside resources (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Such endogenous approaches to development are considered to be more sustainable, Kretzmann and McKnight (1993, p. 5) argue this as "communities are never built from the top-down, or from the outside in".

Tangible and intangible outcomes of ABCD programs are interdependent. Both types of outcomes are seen to support human development. The gray and academic literature credits ABCD programs with intangible well-being benefits such as hope and self-esteem (Peters, Gonsamo, & Molla, 2011; Willetts et al., 2014). These benefits are seen to have inherent value, while also considered as important psychosocial drivers of tangible change. Tangible outcomes of ABCD programs are context dependent. Tangible outcomes commonly include the building of social capital, improvements in local economies and empowerment, improved health, and access to services. Ultimately, the co-dependent intangible and tangible outcomes support community health and human well-being.

Similarly, SDT supports human flourishing and considers the propensity for growth in people to be a universal human trait. Through satisfaction of BPNs, people move towards well-being and performance outcomes. Hence, both ABCD and SDT see people having an inherent capacity for growth and flourishing. They also both claim to promote improvements in well-being and performance by reducing external controls and supporting change from within.

The process of ownership in ABCD is congruent with internalization in SDT

Ownership is a goal of most participatory development practices, including ABCD. Ownership in the development context refers to community participants' sense of psychological commitment, care, responsibility and, occasionally control over development programs (Jones & Kardan, 2013). A participant in Malawi described their experience of ownership as, "if [the water pump] breaks down that will be the end of the road. If [the pump] remains available, it is possible to be self-

reliant... it is our responsibility to care for it, because we own it". ABCD aims to design for

ownership by starting with community priorities. Peters (2013) contrasted the ABCD approach with

top-down development programs where participants are treated as beneficiaries or passive

recipients of service providers. Ownership in asset-based approaches is a process. New initiatives

are owned when they are integrated with participants' sense of self people's investment in the

initiative and its relevance to their life or community goals.

Internalization in SDT holds similarities with ownership in ABCD. When a behavior is

internalized the actor perceives themselves as the origin of the behavior (Ryan & Connell, 1989). In

ABCD, the process of ownership in development projects is often evidenced by active community

engagement in said projects. However, ABCD literature and guidance lacks nuance in defining the

process, quality and quantity of ownership (or internalization) which happens through this process.

By contrast, SDT's continuum model (refer to Figure 1) provides a useful means to understand the

internalization process. Motives are not static and can change with time. For example, motives can

become internalized over time and move from more controlled to more autonomous forms, or from

left to right on the continuum. Equally, motives can become more controlled with time. Stone and

colleagues (2009) illustrated how motives change in relation to workplace rules. They described

staff with introjected motivations in an organizational context as only having "partially digested

external workplace rules… [and not] accepted as their own" (Stone et al., 2009, p. 6). By contrast,

in integrated regulation rules or norms are endorsed and integrated into a sense-of self (refer to

Figure 1 for introjection and integration's place in the continuum). According to SDT research, this

process of internalization is supported by environments which satisfy the autonomy, competence

and relatedness of participants.

The practitioner supports autonomy in ABCD and SDT

The ABCD practitioner acts as a facilitator rather than director of the development process, with

participants considered experts of their social and geographical contexts (Willetts et al., 2014). To

enable participants to recognize their expertise and capacity, ABCD facilitators are guided to step-

back and let communities step forward to lead change processes (Mathie & Cunningham, 2005; Peters & Eliasov, 2014). This approach can be contrary to conventional relationships between development practitioner and participant, as highlighted by a chief in Malawi, "[NGOs] just come to implement what they have planned or come and tell us what to do. Honestly, we have never sat down to discuss the priorities, or they have never come to consult us". Hence, the facilitator's manner, their relationship with participants, and the tools they use, seek to support the sense of autonomy experienced by participants. In doing so, ABCD has aimed to move decision-making from outside experts to the participant.

Similarly the SDT practitioner (the power holder in the dynamic, e.g. boss, parent, coach etc.) is guided to support the autonomy of 'clients' and reduce the controls placed upon them (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Compared to ABCD, the expertise of the SDT practitioner is still prominent in their relationship with participants. However, expertise is delivered in a non-controlling and autonomy-supportive manner. The practitioner's method differs based on the application of SDT. Their practice may include: providing informational rather than directive guidance; emphasizing the interesting or challenging aspects of tasks and acknowledging tedious aspects; avoiding contingent rewards and surveillance; acknowledging participants' perspectives; providing relevant information in a non-controlling way; offering choice (not control); and encouraging self-initiation rather than pressuring participant to behave in specified ways (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Stone et al., 2009).

In sum, the areas of theoretical alignment of SDT and ABCD discussed in this section are not exhaustive and require further critique. In particular, we expect the different research paradigms will provide a source of debate and challenge to integrating SDT into ABCD. However, on balance we view many of the principles of ABCD and SDT as complementary. The nuance in motivation constructs that the SDT literature provides offers a means to integrate SDT into ABCD tools and programs. We discuss this in the following sections.

Using SDT to analyze the motivational mechanisms of ABCD tools

As noted earlier, the gray and academic literature argues that ABCD approaches support

motivations by focusing on issues people care about. However, the motivation mechanisms in

ABCD processes are only superficially understood. This section analyzes ABCD using an SDT

lens, to determine how ABCD processes and principles support BPNs of participants as antecedents

of participants' more autonomous motivations. We focus the analysis on four significant tools

which are commonly applied in ABCD approaches and which reflect the ABCD principles

described earlier in this paper. We present the tools in the stages in which they are typically

delivered.

1. *Appreciative interviews and plenary with community participants.*

The appreciative interview stage in ABCD includes a reflection on the participants' past successes,

which have been completed independently of external (i.e. NGO or government) assistance. For

example, a farmer in Malawi described his move from selling charcoal to vegetable farming, which

was more profitable and less laborious. The appreciative interviews are completed in a plenary

format and trigger a sense of possibility that participants can enact change without external support.

This stage also identifies transferable success factors which lead to change (Cooperrider &

Srivastava, 1987). For example, it may identify the resources or networks the vegetable farmer drew

on. An ABCD facilitator in Malawi described this as "the multiplier effect of [ABCD]. Because if

one farmer succeeds... the other farmer is motivated to say, 'if this one can do it, I can do it as well'.

They will not be saying '[the NGO] has done it to this person'".

From an SDT perspective, the outcomes highlighted in the quote above are congruent with

fostering a sense of competence as a precursor to autonomy. Competence in SDT reflects a feeling

of efficacy where capacities are engaged in efforts to achieve mastery (Ng et al., 2012; Ryan &

Deci, 2017). As a BPN, competence satisfaction is considered an important driver of autonomous,

higher quality motivation. In the example above the farmer's success highlighted the capacities

(competence) and choices (autonomy) available for other farmers in similar contexts, rather than

having to seek assistance from external sources which is likely more difficult and may compromise

motivations.

2. *A positive vision for the future*

Following the appreciative interviews, participants' dream or forecast their ideal community. Participants' determine an agreed vision through a facilitated process of debate and consensus. In the Malawi program, visions took the form of physical maps which included, for example, images of stronger relationships between people, new economic opportunities to support food security, a new water supply, or a new school. In this stage the facilitator responds to these priorities and determines what was outside the NGO's expertise or resources to support. ABCD literature has contrasted this bottom-up approach with externally-led programs with pre-set agendas which may be irrelevant to participants. An ABCD facilitator in Malawi described the role of visions regarding goals of improved water supply as, "it is their motivation of the need to have clean water that pushes them to achieve the clean water… it comes [from] within… not somebody coming and pushing to have clean water".

The visioning stage is consistent with concepts of autonomy support in SDT. Autonomy support in SDT is characterized by the provision of choice, acknowledgement of the participants' perspective, and the absence of controlling pressure (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Stone et al., 2009). In this stage ABCD participants can define development activities and outcomes which they value, as opposed to projects being directed by external agencies. Directives from external agencies may hinder both a sense of autonomy and trust (i.e. relatedness) with respect to the community-agency relationship. Malawi participants criticized such approaches as "imposed". By contrast, the ABCD visioning aims to facilitate a community-led decision-making process in a non-controlling manner. According to SDT such environments are more conducive to autonomous motivations.

3. *Asset mapping*

Following visioning, the assets of the community are named and categorized. These categories can vary between projects and facilitators. Those used in Malawi were typical of other ABCD programs and included associations, individual skills, institutions, and natural resources. This stage identifies

assets within the community which can be used to progress the community vision and related goals.

As per the appreciative interview stage, the focus on assets also aims to facilitate participants' sense

of efficacy (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, p. 352).

Analyzing this stage with SDT, it is likely the autonomy and competence of participants are

supported through three mechanisms. First, the emphasis on capacities (assets), second how these

assets may be used to progress priorities, and third by limiting the focus on needs and problems

hence minimizing competence frustration. These mechanisms are likely to support the motivations

of participants to act on their vision by supporting their confidence and ability. As noted by an

ABCD facilitator, "in the end, you find that there are few things which the community does not

have. There are more things which the community can do on their own".

4. *Planning and action.*

Peters and Eliasov (2014) describe the planning and action stage as the what, why, who, how, where

and when of action in ABCD driven programs. This stage identifies and schedules tasks needed to

progress the vision using the relevant assets that have been identified in the previous stage.

Importantly, this stage starts with 'quick wins' before addressing more ambitious goals as part of

action plans. Quick wins are tangible, community-led actions, completed with no external help in a

short time frame (Willetts et al., 2014; Mathie & Peters, 2014). Through initial successes, the

approach aims to establish the community's confidence, capacity to work together; and build

participant trust in practitioners and the ABCD process (Willetts et al., 2014).

From an SDT perspective, this phase reinforces a sense of competence through early and

tangible change, and fosters participants' confidence and trust (i.e. relatedness) with the ABCD

process and partners. In addition, activities associated with ABCD are typically pro-social in nature

and designed to benefit participants and others in the community. SDT research has shown

autonomously-driven pro-social behavior is conducive to supporting the autonomy, competence and

relatedness of those helping (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). Hence, this action phase in ABCD likely

further supports BPN satisfaction and reinforces the autonomous motives of participants.

Beyond quick wins in ABCD, participants progress to more ambitious goals which may reveal gaps in expertise or resources. This may present challenges to participants' sense of competence. Consequently, the planning and action stage also identifies how to address competence gaps by linking participants' assets or, where necessary, the use of external support. This support might include relevant training, or material support. For example, in Malawi funding of water borehole installations was beyond the financial capacity of the community actors and required NGO and government support.

The ABCD facilitator role in this planning and action process is congruent with autonomy and competence-supportive practice in SDT. In SDT, the practitioner role includes clarifying the expectations of participant behavior and the outcomes and alignment of participants' behavior strategies with their skill levels. In addition, SDT practitioners support participants when competence or control barriers emerge, through feedback and skills support or training (Ryan et al., 2011). The SDT literature argues such support mechanisms should be delivered in an autonomy-supportive manner so as not to undermine internalized motives. This has clear parallels with the ABCD planning and action process, where participants identify their priority projects and apply their assets to progress plans. The facilitator supports participants to overcome competence barriers through targeted support when required. In the following section we transition from identifying the motivational mechanisms in ABCD processes, to the use of SDT in evaluating ABCD programs.

Using SDT to evaluate the motivational claims of ABCD

As noted earlier, the gray and academic literature argues that ABCD approaches are motivating. However, these claims lack nuance. Motivation outcomes are usually described in binary terms and focus on quantity (motivated or amotivated) rather than the quality of motivation. The previous section used SDT to analyze how ABCD processes and principles can support motivations based on SDT. The following section outlines three opportunities to apply SDT tools and concepts to evaluate the motivational claims and outcomes of ABCD driven programs.

Evaluating ABCD programs for BPN support

There is an opportunity to integrate SDT concepts of autonomy, relatedness and competence (i.e. BPNs) into the ABCD lexicon. For example, the ABCD principles described earlier in this paper (asset-based, association-based, and internal focus to development), align with the concepts of competence, relatedness and autonomy in SDT. Through a BPN lens, ABCD and top-down development approaches can be evaluated according to the degree they are BPN-supportive or thwarting. As noted earlier, participants' sense of BPN satisfaction has implications for their well-being and performance (i.e. motivation quality). Hence, an evaluation focus on BPNs and associated measurement methods provides an empirical basis to test the merits and effectiveness of ABCD approaches compared to top-down approaches to development.

SDT has several validated quantitative tools relevant to such applications. Possible examples include the Health Climate or Work Climate Questionnaires (CSDT, 2020), which are used to evaluate the degree to which the environment provided by work or health care environment is autonomy supportive. For example, the Health Climate Questionnaire asks if patients felt their health care practitioner provided choices and options for treatment, if patients felt listened to, and if practitioners empathized with the patient's circumstances. In addition, the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSFS) (CSDT, 2020) could be used to assess the degree to which autonomy, relatedness and competence needs were satisfied or thwarted in ABCD-driven development programs. The BPNSFS scores the satisfaction of each BPN. For example, questions such as "I feel a sense of choice and freedom in the things I undertake" and "most of the things I do I feel like I have to [do]" quantify both autonomy satisfaction and thwarting. Both questionnaires would require only minor changes to be adapted to the development program 'climate' or context.

In addition, qualitative measures could be used in combination with quantitative questionnaires to identify participants' experiences of BPN satisfaction. Such pluralistic approaches address challenges associated with SDT's largely positivist approach, where individual voice and

experience is absent in aggregated data. Lines of enquiry might include: how was autonomy

expressed and experienced by participants in a particular project? What aspects of the ABCD

process were experienced as more or less autonomy-supportive? How did autonomy change with

time? How did experiences of autonomy support differ between agencies and their approaches?

Such examples, along with quantitative measures, can assess individual experiences of volition

(autonomy), efficacy and mastery (competence) and connected and trusting relationships

(relatedness) in response to development interventions.

Determining the quality of participants' motivations in ABCD programs

As described previously, ABCD literature often conceptualizes participants' motives as either

amotivated or motivated, with the latter evidenced by action or mobilization. These measures

disguise a range of motivation experiences and qualities which reflect in participants' well-being

and their persistence. Participants in the Malawi program highlighted this nuance in motivation

quality, often describing multiple and conflicting motives of varying quality. For example, in the

case of water supply and management, a participant experienced controlled motives of wanting to

avoid the shame of failure, in parallel to being driven by altruistic motives, namely care for other

community members. These two motives are likely to result in different qualities of motivation. In

another example, a community leader described the impact of NGO payments to community

members to complete projects. Payment drove short-term behavior, but the leader noted these

projects were unlikely to be sustained once the payment stopped. These poor quality motives were

contrasted to projects which were valued and had continued. Such complex motivation experiences

are not captured in existing ABCD literature.

Validated SDT measurement tools have been tested to evaluate such variable motivation

experiences. The Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ) (Sheldon et al., 2017; CSDT, 2020) can be

used to determine motivation typologies before or in response to ABCD-based interventions. The

SRQ determines the significance of various motivation types for participants, for example, the

significance of shame compared to altruistic motives. The SRQ can also be used to determine if

people are more broadly driven by autonomous or controlled motives. In this way, participants'

motivation types could be evaluated prior to and in response to ABCD interventions, to determine if

and how program approaches have influenced motivations.

The SDT continuum can model internalization in ABCD-based interventions

The SDT continuum can track the internalization of behaviors resulting from the planning and

action stage of ABCD. Development projects emerging from the planning stage will inevitably

require new behaviors. For example, in the Malawi program new water supplies required the

formation of water committees to collect water tariffs, conduct maintenance tasks, and enforce

hygiene and rules at the water point. Internalization of such behavior is contingent on the degree to

which participants experience the project and their role in the project as autonomy-supportive or

controlling. The SDT continuum provides a framework to determine if such new behaviors have

been internalized or not, and how internalization may change with time. Continuing with the water

supply example, committee members may initially collect water fees because that is what they are

expected to do. With autonomy-supportive practices, members can be supported to internalize and

value the importance of practice in sustaining the water point. Hence, the SDT continuum can track

motivation types in ABCD programs with time, and support ABCD practitioners to adjust their

approach to foster internalization.

The opportunities we have presented for integrating SDT into ABCD to analyze the

motivational mechanisms and evaluate the motivational claims of ABCD are not exhaustive.

However, they provide means to strengthen the theoretical base, practice and evaluation of ABCD

interventions. Integration will also generate debate, as the differences between the paradigms of

ABCD and SDT present practical and philosophical challenges. SDT's quantitative measures do not

exclude the qualitative methods typically used by ABCD researchers and practitioners. Indeed, we

view a pluralistic approach, which applies questionnaires and SDT concepts in addition to

qualitative approaches, as appropriate to provide a more nuanced understanding of motivational

claims. For example, SDT questionnaires can determine if, and to what degree, a relationship with

an NGO was experienced as controlling. While qualitative data (e.g. interviews) can identify and explore specific aspects of why and how the participant-NGO relationship was experienced as controlling.

Although SDT argues that concepts such as autonomy, relatedness and competence are universal, we recognize the importance of adapting any SDT tools to the context in which they are used. Adaptation is particularly important for ABCD-based programs which prioritize local knowledge systems and programs are often implemented in marginalized contexts. In the space available, it is not possible to give a detailed account of specific adaptations. However, local definitions and expressions of SDT concepts (using local language) such as autonomy, competence and relatedness are one such example (e.g. Roche, Haar, & Brougham, 2018).

Conclusion

ABCD is an approach where community development participants drive the development agenda and process. ABCD proponents claim the approach is inherently motivating. However motivations in ABCD are often neglected or over-simplified, and there is limited understanding or critical analysis of the motivational mechanisms and motivational claims of ABCD. By contrast, SDT is an incrementally developed theory that has been tested in experimental settings and interventions. SDT has identified distinct motivation types of varying quality. More autonomous forms of motivation are associated with persistence, performance and well-being, while the opposite is true for more controlled motivations.

The different epistemological foundations of SDT and ABCD outlined in this article present practical and philosophical challenges to integration. ABCD's social constructionist approach values participant voice and participatory methods. These approaches are largely absent in SDT research. SDT's positivist roots and research methodologies means a near exclusive use of questionnaires and statistical analysis to make large-scale generalizations. An added challenge is the

limited number of examples of SDT's application in 'development' and low-income contexts

common to ABCD approaches.

Despite these challenges, we argued that ABCD's bottom-up principles and practices are, on

balance, congruent with SDT principles. At a foundational level, we identified the alignment of

SDT's conceptualizations of autonomy with ABCD's standpoint of community-driven change.

From this foundation other areas of alignment emerge including critiques of hegemony and

controlling approaches, and support for practitioner approaches which foster the autonomy and

competence of participants. The alignment between the two concepts provides an opportunity for

the integration of SDT theory into ABCD.

Integration has implications for improving ABCD practice through a nuanced and critical

understanding of motivation mechanisms in ABCD tools and practitioner approaches. In addition,

SDT concepts and tools offer means to evaluate the motivational impacts of ABCD interventions.

Specifically, three opportunities for the evaluation of ABCD approaches to development were

outlined. First, SDT can evaluate the degree to which ABCD processes support the autonomy and

competence of participants. Second, SDT can evaluate the nature of a participants' motivations in

response to ABCD processes. Third, SDT can track changes in the internalization of new behaviors

with time. These opportunities for the integration of SDT and ABCD can strengthen the theoretical

foundations of ABCD and improve the practice and evaluation of ABCD interventions. Further

research is needed to test the application of SDT tools to ABCD programs. In addition, the

relevance of SDT constructs and questionnaires in low-income contexts, where literacy levels may

be low and practitioner-participant power distances are high, requires further study.

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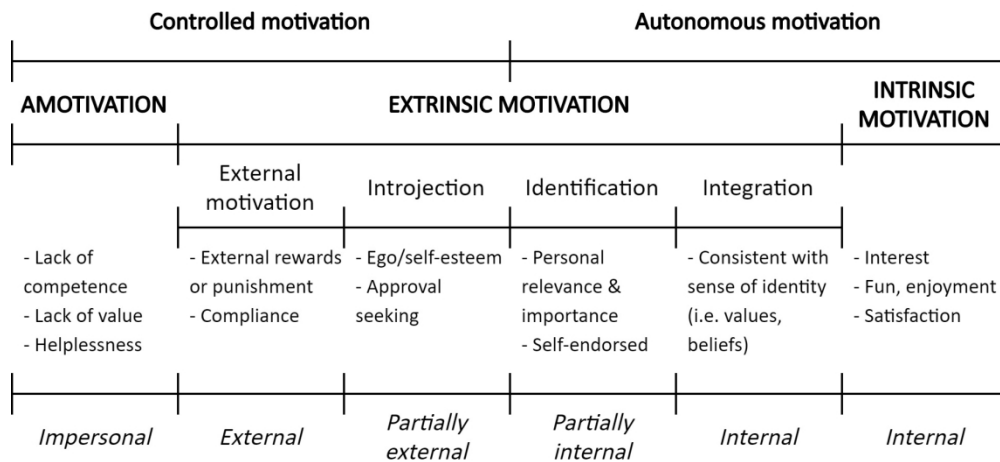51
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Figure 1. SDT motivation continuum (Adapted from Ryan & Deci, 2000 with permission).

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