

“STICKING THE BOOT IN” – THE ROLE OF GOAL SETTING IN MOTIVATIONAL INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES

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Abstract

Goals play an essential role in the purposeful behaviour of job seekers, but to date scholars have not been able to communicate this knowledge to the practitioners of motivational intervention programmes. This article will present a conceptual framework for thinking about the motivational construct with respect to long-term unemployment. Another purpose is to integrate classic ideas on needs, values and goals, thus enriching the study and practice of motivational interventions. Finally, the author’s aim is to present a theory of how motivational intervention programmes can increase motivation through providing participants with the opportunity to set specific, well-defined, short-term and effective goals.

INTRODUCTION

Most job seeking is motivated behaviour. An unemployed person in receipt of the Unemployment Benefit must actively seek employment, and thus must have a degree of motivation to progress towards that end. Motivation as a construct has been the focus of much research over the years (Deci and Ryan 1985, Festinger 1954, Locke 1968, 1991, Maslow 1970, McClelland 1965, Ryan and Deci 2000), and more recently worker motivation has been discussed (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman 1959, Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn 1994, Vroom 1984, Vroom & Deci 1992). What is missing in the literature is a motivational construct for the long-term unemployed.

Motivational intervention programmes in New Zealand were developed by the Ministry of Social Development² in response to the fact that the motivation of long-term unemployed people to look for work decreases as the term of unemployment increases, as does their level of self-esteem and self-confidence (Swindells 1988, Winefield 1995). The programmes were also a recognition of the need to rebuild the skills, morale and motivation of the long-term unemployed (Regier et al. 1984).

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- 2 Strictly speaking, the programmes were developed by the Ministry of Social Development’s predecessor organisations, the New Zealand Employment Service and Work and Income New Zealand

Despite the relevance and prevalence of motivation and goal-setting activities during motivational intervention programmes, there is little scholarly research about the significance of goal setting to programme outcomes. Practitioners of motivational intervention deliver courses that include goal setting as a course component, and the limited research supports goal setting as an effective tool on outdoor adventure-based courses (Crane et al. 1997). Motivational intervention programmes have also been found to have some success in motivating their participants (Johri et al. 2004, O'Brien 1988, Swindells 1988). However, there is still a knowledge gap between the practice and theory of motivation with respect to the long-term unemployed.

Longer-term employment outcomes for this group show that at two years post-course there is a small negative impact (0.99) when compared to non-participants of motivational intervention programmes on their employment status (Johri et al. 2004). When we think of the outcomes of motivational intervention programmes it is natural to think of employment or full-time study. While the current evidence in New Zealand indicates that motivational intervention training does not improve participants' employment prospects (Johri et al. 2004), I would broaden this view of outcomes to encompass increased social, family and community health. We know that the effects of long-term unemployment lead not only to a decrease in motivation and self-esteem, but also to a breakdown in that person's relationship with his or her family and community. These social disconnections also lead to problems in the community, such as an increase in crime, dependency, and a lowering of the individual's overall social and physical health.

I begin with a discussion of motivational intervention programmes in New Zealand to provide a context for the theory, then take look at the research on motivation theory to provide a framework for thinking about current knowledge and what areas are in need of further research. Next, I examine motivation in relation to the long-term unemployed person and the importance of needs, values and goals with relevance to job searching. An analysis of the current underlying philosophy for motivational interventions is then presented, followed by an analysis of the way in which effective goal setting is instrumental in goal attainment. Although the theories presented here have been acknowledged by prior research, the contributions have been fragmented. This paper brings together this research and integrates new ideas on goal setting from both practice and theory, in order to present a cohesive framework for the provision of effective goal setting during motivational intervention programmes. Finally, I close with suggested future research agendas.

MOTIVATIONAL INTERVENTION

The Ministry of Social Development contracts various providers throughout New Zealand to deliver motivational intervention programmes, with the aim of increasing “the confidence of and skills of job seekers so as to improve their chances of finding work. Such programmes are not expected to achieve high employment outcomes” (Anderson 1998). Many providers of motivational intervention are outdoor adventure-based, and draw on the knowledge that these courses improve participants’ self-concept, self-efficacy, motivation and team work through wilderness-based activities (Ewert 1989, Hattie et al. 1997, Martin 1998, Mitchell and Mitchell 1989, Neill 1999).

The original provider of motivational intervention training is Limited Services Volunteers (LSV), which began operations in 1993 and is run by the New Zealand Defence Force. In 1997 alternative providers were contracted by the Ministry, including Outward Bound, to deliver residential motivational training (Swindells 1988). Currently LSV and Outward Bound are the only two providers that are funded by the Ministry on a national contract, thus enabling them to recruit clients nationally. They are also the two largest providers of motivational intervention, with other providers operating at a regional level.

The intervention environment for the long-term unemployed (more than 26 weeks) is changing, with providers experiencing more challenging behaviours from their clients as well as a lowering of the average age of clients. While we are experiencing low levels of unemployment currently, the long-term unemployed represent over one-third of the unemployed and are living in an environment of ever-increasing social problems. Thus those who are selected to attend motivational intervention programmes are in need of quality interventions that enable them to break out of the cycle of long-term unemployment.

Currently, providers expose their participants to a new positive environment in which they are given opportunities to succeed. This in turn has the effect of increasing participants’ self-confidence and self-esteem (Ewert 1989, Hattie et al. 1997). While post-course motivation is said to be increased (Johri et al. 2004, O’Brien 1988, Swindells 1988), there is still little long-term effect on their employment status (Johri et al. 2004). One of the key assumptions of motivational intervention is that a short, sharp shock is an effective tool for stimulating motivation. The participant is then able to transfer or “hold onto” this new-found motivation back in their home environment, and thus have more success in securing employment.

This increased motivation post-course, while being a valued outcome, is not always enough to have a lasting effect on a participant's employment status. In many cases the missing ingredient is a set direction after course completion to channel and focus this new-found motivation into concrete valued outcomes.

I now take a closer look at the research on motivation in order to highlight the significance of motivation theory for practitioners of motivational intervention.

MOTIVATION THEORY

Many of the ideas about motivation are concerned with getting existing job holders to stay committed to an organisation, while others relate to lifetime orientations or personality differences. When looking at the motivational aspects of the long-term unemployed, we are looking at a relatively short period of that person's life, which is complicated by the multiple challenges and negative effects of being unemployed. I now take a look at the work done on motivation to lay the groundwork for motivation with respect to the long-term unemployed.

An early understanding of motivation theory was based on the construct of punishment and reward. It was inferred that people are inclined toward actions and behaviours that offer reward, and avoid actions and behaviours that have negative consequences. In the early 1900s, Taylor (1911) included in his scientific management theory the idea that good workers should be rewarded and unsatisfactory workers punished. The notion that a happy worker is a good worker (Perrow 1972) was also put forward to explain worker motivation.

These early simplistic views of motivation were found to be wanting by later empirical studies, which revealed that there were more than monetary incentives that could have an effect on motivation (Herzberg et al. 1959). Vroom (1984, 1992) expressed motivation in terms of choice, in that people have preferences among the possible outcomes from choosing to perform a particular act. "For any pair of outcomes x and y , a person prefers x to y , prefers y to x , or is indifferent to whether he receives x or y " (Vroom 1984).

Maier (1961) proposed that motivated behaviour is variable, constructive and goal directed, and that frustrated behaviour is rigid, stereotyped, compulsive and not goal directed. Goal-directed behaviour towards positively valued outcomes and the avoidance of negatively valued outcomes has also been emphasised by Tolman (1949).

The major theoretical positions can be divided into content and process theories (Schermerhorn et al. 1994). Content theories focus on what initiates behaviour in the individual or the environment. Included in this realm is Maslow's (1970) hierarchy

of needs, McClelland’s (1965) need for achievement and Herzberg’s (1959) two factor theory. Process theories focus on how behaviour is targeted and sustained. Included under process theories are Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theory, Adam’s (1963) equity theory and Vroom’s (1984) expectancy theory.

Intrinsically motivated behaviour refers to doing an activity for the sake of doing it, in contrast to extrinsically motivated behaviour where an activity is undertaken to gain a separable outcome (Ryan & Deci 2000). In reality there is usually a combination of both extrinsic and intrinsic factors that determine an individual’s level of motivation (Day 1976, Kanfer and Ackerman 1989).

External reward can undermine intrinsic motivation through the perception of loss of control (Ryan and Deci 2000). Factors such as deadlines, threats, imposed goals and external pressure can also have the affect of reducing intrinsic motivation due to the perception of the external locus of causality (Vallerand and Bissonnette 1992). Factors that increase intrinsic motivation – such as choice, acknowledgement of feelings, and opportunities to set own goals – enhance intrinsic motivation due to the greater feeling of autonomy (Deci and Ryan 1985).

“Extrinsic motivation can vary greatly in its relative autonomy” (Ryan and Deci 2000). For example, unemployed people actively seeking employment who are doing so because they personally value the end result of employment are extrinsically motivated, as well as those who are actively seeking employment due to pressure from their case manager to find work. While the same activity occurs in the above example, and is directed towards the same outcome, the former has a greater feeling of control and autonomy to the individual. It is this greater feeling of autonomy that is sought after when trying to increase an individual’s level of extrinsic motivation. (Ryan and Deci 2000).

Although some unemployed people may benefit from having a greater level of extrinsic motivation, these same people may also have a greater ability to secure employment through their own resources. On the other hand, those who are long-term unemployed may benefit from an external agent motivating them towards employment.

Different types of extrinsic motivation have been put forward by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000), which can be ordered along a self-determination continuum: from lower levels of self-determination occurring when behaviour is externally regulated, to higher levels of self-determination where behaviour is initiated within the person. The self-determination scale is (a) external, (b) introjected, (c) identified, (d) integrated regulation.

A third construct of motivation is amotivation, where an individual perceives a lack of contingency between performing an action or behaviour and the expected outcomes (Vallerand and Bissonnette 1992). A person is said to be non-motivated when there is no perception of rewards of an intrinsic or extrinsic nature, and no possibility of changing the outcome. Amotivated people either do not act, or perform an activity without intent. This results from the person either not valuing the activity, or the expectation that the action will not produce the desired outcome (Ryan and Deci 2000), or not feeling that they are competent to perform the task (Bandura 1986).

One would not expect many amotivated individuals to be participating in motivational intervention programmes. Due to the courses being voluntary, participants must have some level of motivation to attend, whether externally regulated, integrated regulation or intrinsically regulated. At some level participants will have an expectation that by completing such courses there will be some positive outcome, thus providing extrinsic motivation to participate.

Teachers who are supportive of students increasing their individual autonomy (rather than being controlling) foster a greater level of intrinsic motivation, as well as increasing their desire for challenge. This also applies to autonomy-supportive parents and mentors, who stimulate higher levels of intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci 2000). This shows that motivational intervention programmes can foster a higher level of intrinsic motivation by being supportive of the autonomy of participants.

Social environments can also have an intervening effect on individuals' levels of intrinsic motivation by supporting as opposed to thwarting their psychological needs (Ryan and Deci 2000). The need for social integration is also a factor in intrinsic motivation; for example, completing an activity because it is interesting can be further enhanced when completing the same activity with other people who are supportive, and foster a sense of belonging (Tinto 1993).

Facilitating the integration of extrinsic motivation can be achieved through prompting or modelling by people who have a significant influence on participants. This highlights the importance that providers of motivational intervention have in developing secure connections to participants in order for them to internalise a higher level of extrinsic motivation. This is due to the fact that many extrinsically motivated behaviours are not interesting in themselves, and therefore require external prompting (Ryan and Deci 2000).

The level of perceived competence is also a moderating factor in the level of internalisation of extrinsically motivated activities. The greater the level of competence an individual feels in performing the desired activity within the relevant social group,

the more likely it is that they will undertake such activity. An example is an unemployed person who is encouraged to apply for a position they do not feel competent in performing: the outcome would likely not be a positive experience for them. Therefore, when facilitating the internalisation of extrinsically motivated behaviours, support for competence should be provided (Vallerand and Bissonnette 1992).

MOTIVATION AND EMPLOYMENT

To simplify and give a clear illustration of the construct of motivation with respect to employment and motivational intervention courses for the long-term unemployed, it can be divided into three distinct areas: needs, values and goals.

Needs

Maslow’s theory of a hierarchy of needs is probably the most used and the most well-known needs theory. Based on a foundation of physical needs, then building to the more abstract and highly individual self-actualisation needs, each need in turn is a prerequisite to the next and is required before the subsequent need can be satisfied (Maslow 1970).

The basic needs are the same for everyone, in that we all have the need for food, warmth and shelter; these are referred to as the “physiological needs”. The next level is defined as the safety needs of law, order and the authority of society, enabling one to feel safe and protected. Next in the hierarchy is the belongingness and love needs that secure the individual to a group or family. Esteem needs are next, and when satisfied lead to feelings of self-confidence, worth, capability and adequacy, and of feeling useful and necessary in society. Lastly in the hierarchy is the need for self-actualisation, in which people strive to do what they are individually fitted for (Maslow 1970).

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is a useful start to explain the needs part of the motivation equation because it is a simple model. However, it has the limitation that needs are linear in nature and that the lower-order needs have to be satisfied before any higher-order needs can be achieved. Others have noted that there is not necessarily an order to an individual’s needs, and that so-called higher-order needs can be satisfied without lower-order needs being fulfilled (Schermerhorn et al. 1994).

A more economical model is the existence, relatedness and growth theory (Alderfer 1969). This model argues that needs can be fulfilled concurrently and lower-order needs can arise again on the failure of higher-order needs. The three categories of needs in Alderfer’s model are similar to Maslow’s physiological, belongingness and self-actualisation needs. Alderfer defines existence needs, which relate to physiological and

material satisfaction, relatedness needs, which represent the desire for quality social interaction, and growth needs, which are desires for continued personal growth and development (1969).

Employment is capable of fulfilling both Maslow's and Alderfer's needs. By providing an income, employment meets the provision of the physiological needs. A person's workplace can also provide a sense of belongingness, relatedness and safety through stable employment, as well as gaining self-respect and -esteem through proving to be a capable worker. When a person's potential is matched to their employment it is possible for them to attain self-actualisation (Maslow 1999), or in Alderfer's model, to satisfy the need for growth.

Although employment is capable of satisfying one's needs, it is not imperative in order to provide the basic needs of survival. New Zealand is close to the OECD average unemployment benefit rate (OECD 2006), which enables satisfaction of the basic needs for food, warmth and shelter. Sense of belonging needs can also be attained without the necessity of employment. For example, in areas of high unemployment, the availability of social interaction through contact with other unemployed people satisfies Alderfer's relatedness needs and Maslow's belongingness needs.

This is a simplistic view of needs, and is not to say that while on the unemployment benefit people do not have needs or wants that are not attainable with their immediate resources. Instead, it is suggested that after longer durations of unemployment some people adapt to the situation (for example, shop for low-price alternatives) and lower their expectations of what they really need in order to be satisfied.

Values

"Values may be conceived as general beliefs held by individuals about desirable or undesirable goals or ways of behaving" (Feather 1992). These values are individual, intrinsic and developed over life (Locke 1991). They are also thought to remain stable over the course of one's life (Costa and McCrae 1987). When relating values to an unemployed person, even if that person values employment, repeated unsuccessful job applications and increased duration of unemployment cause a reduction in the expectation of a future successful job search (Feather 1992).

Value theory holds that a person's actions are related to the expected outcomes the individual believes will follow such actions, and that the outcomes of performing the task, or performing some alternative action, are subject to the values the individual holds (Feather 1992). Expectations and subjective values combine to determine whether a person will act in a particular way. For example, a person may view a particular job

as attractive but may have low expectancy of becoming the successful candidate at the end of the employment selection process, and therefore not engage in the selection process (Feather 1992). This low level of expectancy can be further reduced with the increased duration of unemployment as well as reductions in self-efficacy (Swinburne 1981, Warr and Jackson 1985).

For an unemployed person to engage in a motivational intervention programme, they must first value the desired outcome of work, given that attendance on such programmes is voluntary. If we use Ryan and Deci's (2000) theory that intrinsically motivated participants are more likely to succeed than externally motivated participants, then participants who are forced by an external agent (for example, their parent, WINZ case managers or the justice system) to attend would be less likely to succeed than someone entering the course under their own volition.

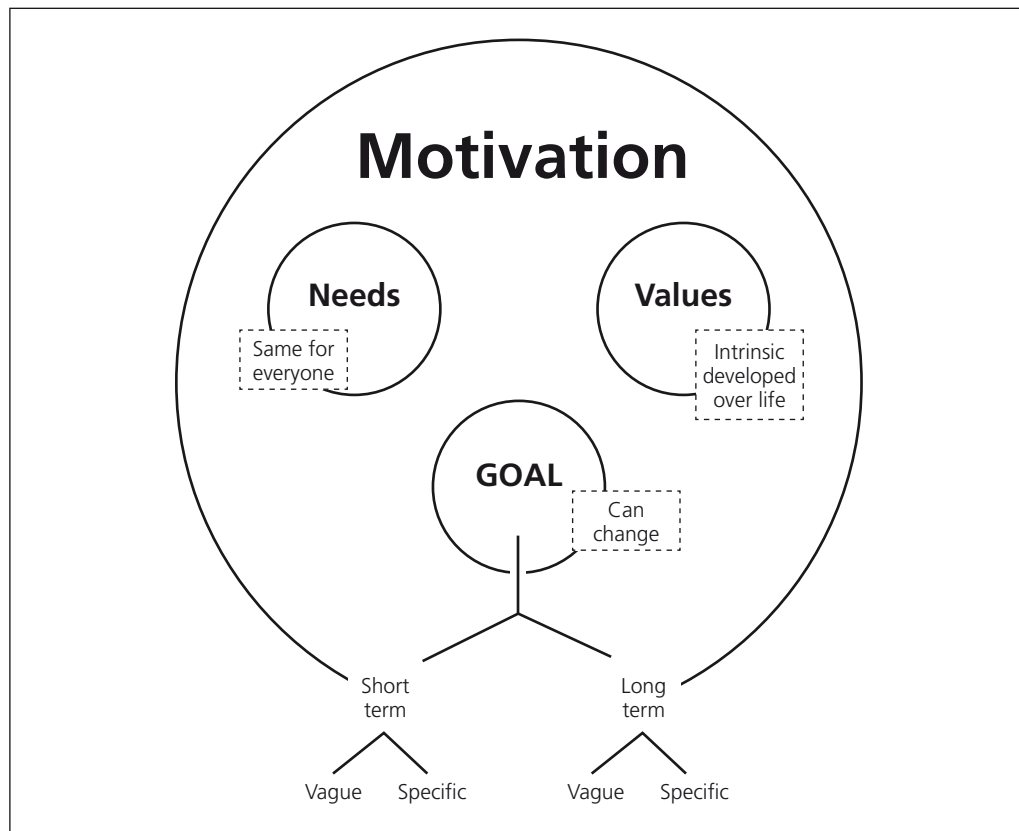
Goals

Motivation is an internal construct and as such cannot be directly observed, but must be inferred. Locke's (1968) theory of goal setting deals with the relationship between goals and performance at a task. An individual's conscious intentions or goals are said to regulate the actions that follow. Goals provide motivation by directing behaviour, making behaviour more persistent and intensifying the desired behaviour (Komaki et al. 1978).

Setting goals is the final component of motivation and is the one most readily susceptible to organisational intervention (Locke 1991). Figure 1 is a graphical representation of motivation with respect to employment. The construct of motivation is divided into the three significant areas of needs, values and goals, showing that needs and values are not readily changeable for the unemployed person. This highlights the importance of specific goal setting with respect to motivational intervention programmes, as this area of motivation is the one most likely to be developed during short-term interventions.

An analysis of the current underlying philosophy for motivational interventions is that participants are given the tools and support to overcome increasing challenges on the course. These challenges are carefully selected and facilitated so that they are achievable, while still being perceived as challenging, such as rock climbing (Rohnke 1989). By facilitating the success of participants in this new and challenging environment, participants typically have feelings of increased self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem by the end of the course (O'Brien 1988, Swindells 1988). This in turn leads to the participant feeling more motivated to go out and re-engage with the job search process.

Figure 1 Employment motivation factors



This view of increasing motivation is fine while the participants are on course, but post-course participants return to their home environment with little support. Feeling more motivated or confident in the short term may be all some participants need to re-engage in the workforce, but the longer-term employment results (Johri et al. 2004) do not show that this increased motivation is necessarily effective. I propose that participants not only need to feel more confident or reinvigorated upon completion of motivational intervention programmes, but also need some practical goal setting skills in order to achieve greater success in their employment status after the course.

GOAL SETTING

If you don't know where you are going, you will probably end up somewhere else. (Laurence J. Peter, US educator and writer, 1919–1988)

Effective goal setting is paramount to the success of youth development programmes, with the literature stating that goal setting coupled with high-quality feedback is

a “simple and powerful motivator of human action” (Roberts-Gray 1999). Locke and Latham (1990), in a comprehensive review of studies, have shown that positive goal-setting effects have been shown in 90% of investigations with respect to task performance. A number of studies have revealed that both individual and group goal setting are critical components of adventure education programmes (Marsh et al. 1986, Meyer and Wenger 1998, Schoel et al. 1988).

Goals can be divided into proximal (oriented during the course) or distal (post-course oriented) goals, and also vague or specific goals. Research shows that whether participants set proximal or distal goals, this does not have an effect on course outcomes (Crane et al. 1997, Locke et al. 1981). Locke and Latham (1985) have hypothesised that using proximal plus distal goals will lead to better outcomes than using distal goals alone: firstly, a proximal goal to work towards while participating on a course, and secondly, a distal goal in which learnings from the course are transferred post-course to facilitate later achievement. Distal goals can be further divided into short-term and long-term goals. Bandura and Cervone (1986) have argued that short-term goals are far more effective because they provide more immediate feedback on an individual’s progress.

Many students do not know what they want to do when they commence a course, and exposing them to many different options may help them find what they want to do. Therefore, having more focus on goal-setting sessions would be advantageous to enable participants to set more goals as they become aware of them and to refine goals throughout the course. Goal setting close to course commencement enables participants to set proximal goals that facilitate course attendance, and also to start to form distal goals which they may want to pursue upon course completion. Further goal-setting sessions during the course enable participants to set more goals and refine goals post-course.

Setting a mix of proximal and distal goals implies that more than one goal should be set by participants (Crane et al. 1997). Studies show that only setting a single goal does not adequately account for the multiplicity of goals that motivate behaviour (Wentzel 1989). Crane et al.’s study showed that the highest-rated participants on an outdoor adventure experience set twice as many goals as the lowest-rated participants (1997) .

Participants who have specific and challenging goals are shown to consistently out-perform those with vague, non-challenging or no goals, across a wide variety of work, sport and personal development tasks (Bandura 1989, Locke et al. 1981, Roberts-Gray et al. 1999). It has also been shown that setting freedom/autonomy-type goals such as “having fun” does not lead to success in programme participation (Crane et al. 1997, Wentzel 1989). Kirschenbaum (1985) claims that goals that are too specific restrict

individual choice and hence debilitate the self-regulatory processes that are required to attain goals. Kirschenbaum suggests that moderately specific and flexible goals are most likely to be attained, and that the participant should have the opportunity to select his or her own goals, because externally appointed goals can not only restrict choice, but also offer little intrinsic motivation.

An effective method of obtaining participant commitment to specific goals is through participative goal-setting sessions (Latham and Saari 1979). The person on an outdoor education programme best suited to facilitate a participatory goal-setting session is the contact instructor, as they are the person who spends most of the time with the participants (Crane et al. 1997). Feedback on goal attainment assists in the attainment of goals, and this feedback can be facilitated by instructors, the individual or through the attainment of intermediate indicator goals (Bandura 1986).

Crane et al. (1997) have demonstrated that if participants set specific and challenging goals, then their self-efficacy and sense of accomplishment are more likely to be enhanced, and further that commitment to these goals by not only the participant but also instructors and staff can lead to increased outcomes and extending the longevity of the effects post-course.

Research shows that participants are more likely to experience psychological success if they are able to define their own goals, which relate to their needs and values, and are able to define paths that lead to goal attainment. "The extent that members participate in their own goal setting they will be more active learners, be more invested in the process, and be less likely to scapegoat or act out" (Lewin et al. 1939). These goals need to be realistic, but also high enough to challenge the participant.

A range of literature on goals has been reviewed and synthesised in respect to the long-term unemployed population group. It has also been shown that the formation of specific, short-term goals is paramount in the development of effective motivational outcomes for long-term unemployed participants on motivational intervention programmes.

CONCLUSION

The motivation construct of values, needs and goals has been widely acknowledged for many years. This paper brings to light the importance of goal-setting concepts and the relevance of these within the area of motivating the long-term unemployed person to actively seek employment.

Early work on motivation had simple explanations for how people were motivated, ranging from punishment and reward (Perrow 1972) to choice (Vroom 1984), and Maier (1961) proposed that motivated behaviour is variable, constructive and goal directed. Further work on motivation (Locke 1991) showed that it can be divided into three areas: values, needs and goals. It has been shown that for a person to participate in motivational unemployment intervention programmes they first must value work as an end result in order for them to enrol on such courses, otherwise there would be no point in them attending. Needs have been shown to be the same for all people, with the lower-order needs (which the immediate outcomes of employment can satisfy) able to be provided by the unemployment benefit. Higher-order needs, such as social interaction, can be fulfilled through social networks outside of employment. Thus, the importance of goal-directed behaviour has been refined with respect to unemployment to show that specific, short-term goals are the area that motivational intervention programmes can best direct their energy to enhance the desired outcome of motivating their participants (Locke and Latham 1990, Roberts-Gray et al. 1999). Is it time to look beyond the boot camp mentality and equip the long-term unemployed with a more focused set of goal-setting skills in order for them to achieve positive lasting outcomes?

RESEARCH AGENDAS

There have been many studies on goal setting and motivation, and this paper extends the knowledge into the realm of unemployment and job seeking. However, further research is required to establish links from the theory to the actual outcomes for motivational intervention courses, thus enabling further development of the practices of programme delivery and design. The internal links between activities and outcomes such as motivation could be established to enable a better understanding of what processes internally contribute to corresponding outcomes, and a better understanding could lead to further improvements in course design.

In summary, an understanding of the role played by goal setting with respect to job searching, as well as the processes of developing motivation within long-term unemployed people, is critical to the advancement of knowledge in the field. It is likely to be rewarding for academics to develop a theoretical understanding of more realistic and real-world motivational processes within the unemployed population. This in turn will provide insights to practitioners in many ways, from developing richer, more representative and more accurate programme designs for interventions, resulting in increased course effectiveness, to developing staff training programmes. I believe that the further examination of motivational intervention programmes represents a topic of immense potential for social researchers.

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