

EMPOWERMENT IN MENTAL HEALTH: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE, OPERATIONAL PERSPECTIVES FOR USER SELF-DETERMINATION

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Abstract: *Health is the most important component of human life, and mental health even more so; the quality of mental health depends on the way individuals understand social relationships, manage to integrate in the family, in the group of friends, in the community, in social life. The European project KA202 - Strategic Partnerships for vocational education and training (Empow'Them) aims to develop an innovative methodology, which offers continuous, non-disruptive, free training addressed to all professionals. The project is a plea for the important role of self-determination in the recovery and reintegration of people suffering from various mental illnesses. This idea is in line with the Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020 (WHO, 2013) and the*

European Commission Green Paper of 2005, which states that self-determination and empowerment of people with mental disorders are fundamental concepts in mental health to improve social inclusion. Self-determination is seen to act as a catalyst for beneficiaries' ability to make decisions about their own lives, remobilize, take responsibility for their choices and become full citizens, regardless of the severity of the illness. The project represents a reflection, search and implementation of viable solutions to support people in a vulnerable moment of their lives. The "Empow'Them" project is consistent with the actions supported by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2008), as it aims to contribute to the respect and dignity of people affected by mental illness through professional practices that support their individual freedom.

Key words: *mental health; self-determination; reintegration; social inclusion; dignity*

Introduction

Mental health is a person's ability to maintain a balance between all intellectual and emotional psychic functions, so that they can easily adapt to the challenges of social life (Johannes Thome, and all, 2020). Mental health ultimately represents that state of well-being that manifests itself in three poses: feeling good with yourself, feeling good with the others and being able to fulfill the duties of everyday life (Gavrila-Ardelean, M., & Kelemen G., 2021). Any disease, but especially the mental one, means "a break in the biological balance, followed by social maladjustment, social disengagement and therefore the break in the social balance of the individual", so vital for health (Chiara Samele, Stuart Frew and Norman Urquía, 2013). The "Empow'Them" project aims to help with their recovery and social reintegration through a methodology of developing self-determination at the level of patients with mental disorders (medical, psychological and sociological). The medical research recorded in the specialized literature brings into discussion the possibility of recovering the mentally ill even after a serious mental illness by stimulating motivation and self-determination (Ryan M., Richard, Deci L., Edward, 2017).

1.Recovery, readjustment, reintegration

Recovery is defined by specialists as the development of a new meaning and purpose in life, with an emphasis on the capacity and potential of each individual for recovery, readjustment and social reintegration. Achieving this

goal involves a process that leads to the rehabilitation of the person who has suffered a mental illness (Corbière, M., Lecomte, T., Lachance, J.P., Coutu, M.F., Negrini, A., et Laberon, S. 2017). Recovery also aims at psychological preparation for creating an appropriate affective-motivational state by experiencing satisfaction in relation to the performed activity and maintaining a prolonged psychological comfort through it. Social policies recommend a collaborative relationship between the different sectors and professions in order to recover and reintegrate the mentally ill into activity. People with severe mental disorders rarely experience positive results at the workplace (Gavrila-Ardelean, M., 2016). Their employment rate is very low, no more than 11%. At the same time, people with mental illnesses represent a constantly growing category among the beneficiaries of sickness pensions, which represents a burden for the social insurance budget, representing a failure of the public integration policies (Corbière, M., Coutu, M. -F., Bergeron, G., Samson, E., Negrini, A., *Sauvé, G., et Lecomte, T., 2018). Despite these statistical data, many mentally ill people want to work, and social reintegration through work is an important part of the rehabilitation efforts. When a person with serious mental health problems intends to enter the free labor market, she has to overcome a series of obstacles. These can be at the level of the patient (lack of vocational experience and cognitive disabilities), at the level of the potential employer (stigmatization of the mentally ill) and at the level of mental health services (deficient offer of social and vocational rehabilitation services). Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to find ways to optimize the skills and practices of all interested parties: beneficiaries, professionals and employers with the aim of employment and social reintegration of the beneficiaries.

2. Self-determination, stimulus for intrinsic motivation

Currently, specialists discuss the impact of self-determination as a factor of social inclusion, and recent research shows that this ability, if properly stimulated, contributes to the improvement of the beneficiaries' lives (Deci and Ryan, 2016). The "EmpowThem" project is in line with the actions supported by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2008), as it aims to contribute to the implementation of those measures that lead to the respect and dignity of users through professional practices that support their individual freedom. In the last decades, there has been put a lot of emphasis on the practical implementation of some measures starting from the theory of self-determination in the case of people suffering from mental problems. Thus, a number of researchers leaned on this theory, looking for methodological solutions for the recovery and reintegration of the mentally ill, establishing objectives, targets and practical applications (Edward Deci and Richard Ryan). The self-determination theory of motivation contradicts the prevailing belief that the best way to get human beings to perform tasks is to

reinforce their behavior with rewards. So Ryan also claims that if motivation is supported from the perspective of human needs, then it becomes intrinsic and acts as a stimulator in mobilizing the individual towards recovery. It is said that there are three things that people feel the need to satisfy in order to be internally motivated: the need for autonomy, competence and relatedness. When we refer to autonomy, of course, we think of choices: being free to decide how you do your task and how you achieve your goals (Okon, S., and Webb, D., 2014). This does not exclude the need to establish some limits, but it contradicts the theories of current management, focused on command and control (I say something and I make sure you will do it). Motivation determines work with pleasure, while punishment makes people inactive, inhibits and blocks them. Demotivation can happen very easily, it appears when there is a conflict between words and actions, through criticism in public, by restricting the power of choice, by preventing development or by manipulation. It is important to realize that in the work process there is also the need for competence from the desire to do things well, from the desire for development, growth and performance (Ryan M., Richard, Deci L., Edward, 2017).

Equally important is the need for relationships, group membership, common contribution to something considered important. This is where intrinsic motivation interferes. You can motivate a person to participate with pleasure and interest in carrying out a task if you create an environment that respects the person's intrinsic needs: autonomy, competence and relationship. Only this way will the individual get involved in the action, according to expectations. Most of the time we don't just do things that make us pleasure and bring us various benefits, most of the time we are forced to make compromises due to certain external stimuli, which become determinants. Finding inner balance is especially important for maintaining well-being. The theory of self-determination proposes certain tools to contribute to the achievement of this emotional balance and to the stimulation of intrinsic motivation in different social contexts: in sport (Pelletier et al., 2013), in professional activity (Gagné et al., in press), in education (Vallerand et al., 1989, 1992) and even in very specific situations (Guay, Vallerand & Blanchard, 2000). Some researchers propose the self-congruence model, explained as being based on those goals that represent people's real interests and passions, as well as their core values and beliefs (Sheldon, 2002; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). In the theory of self-determination, positive emotion and subjective well-being are determinants of need satisfaction, all forms of mental health are ultimately supported by the fulfillment of psychological needs, they are "psychological nutrients" (Kennon M. Sheldon, 2012). This model states that self-determining elements create a congruence between the self and external variables and lead to the most adaptive behaviors

regarding motivation from the perspective of human needs. Health care providers have the responsibility to respect and encourage the autonomy and self-determination of all individuals in their care. This desideratum is also a need for people living with a mental illness. Their journey to personal recovery should rely heavily on personal involvement, on their own choices.

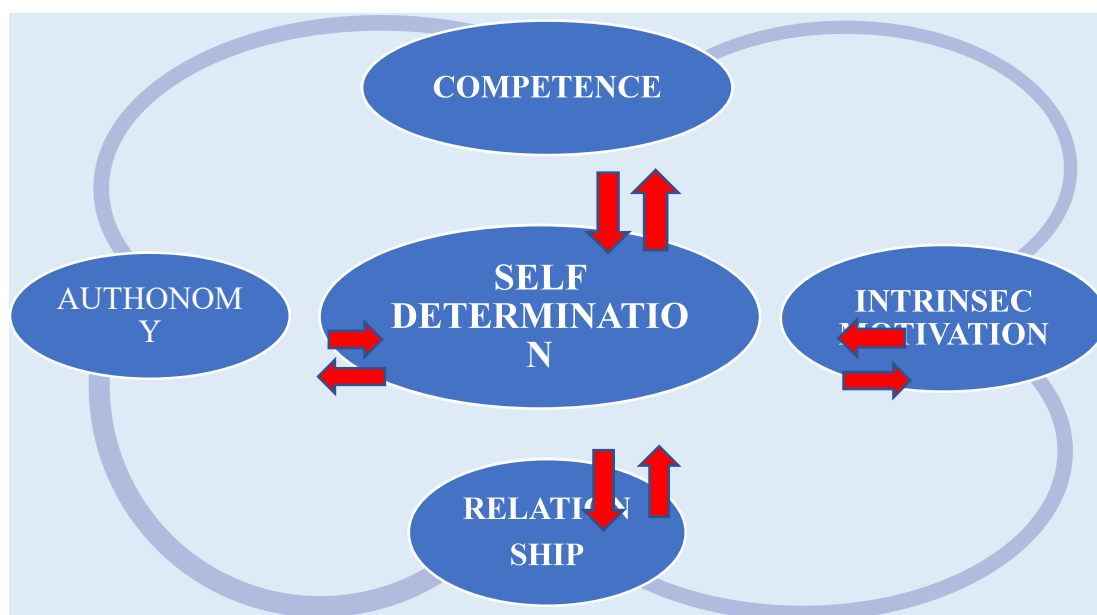


Fig.1. Model of self determination

3. The objective of „Empow’Them” project

The goal of the project comes as "a challenge, an innovative approach of pedagogical engineering, a training that allows professionals to respond to the needs of the beneficiary-professional binom effectively (project guide). Thus, the project mobilizes a multidisciplinary team, made up of eight partners, from six different countries and with complementary expertise, in actions aimed at creating a specific training that will remain available with open access (Creative Commons license) on a Moodle platform for a period of at least three years after the end of the project. To begin with, a practice analysis guide will be developed in the form of a questionnaire based on the main scientific databases. The development of the educational methodology is inspired by reverse pedagogy and constitutes the heart of the innovation of the "Empow'Them" project. It focuses on the belief that there is a need to introduce innovative tools that allow the mobilization, stimulation and activation of self-determination for the development of the interpersonal skills of the beneficiaries.

4. Methodology

The project claims to offer professionals, beneficiaries and all interested parties' courses on digital media (videos) with an approach inspired by inverted pedagogy. Videos are built on theoretical, scientific knowledge, such as definitions and history of self-determination, principles of support, socio-pedagogical relationship. The course material is developed in such a way as to be a guide for facilitators on the field, for those who work directly with people affected by various mental illnesses, but also for the direct beneficiaries. The educational activities, inspired by the reality on the field, are presented in a sequential, short-term and progressive manner.

5. Results of the activities of the project

- Production of hat videos for each of the themes;
- Production of a hat video for the training of facilitators;
- Creation of a shared file to centralize all feedback on the first training sessions;
- Production of a summary sheet: "What message did the future facilitators/facilitators get across?";
- Update of the questionnaire for the two training courses;
- Created of a PPT update for facilitator training;
- Realization of a certificate model for the two training courses;
- Realization of the translation of the scripts in each language of the country implied in project;
- Progressive evaluation.

6. Conclusions

Respecting the person's intrinsic needs: autonomy, competence and sense of belonging is how the individual will engage in action. These goals will be concluded in the form of practical courses within the Empow'Them project.

The innovative part of the project is the intellectual product on digital support in the form of a guide with educational videos. Its purpose is to provide easily accessible materials both to professionals, but also to beneficiaries and their families, to stimulate the empowerment of people with special mental health needs. The guide was built using reverse pedagogy approach techniques. It started from the real needs of the beneficiaries, tested on the basis of a guided interview. The work of the project team was focused on these needs and the results were finalized at the international level.

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