

What Inspires Career Professionals In Ontario's Non-Profit Employment Agencies to Remain Intrinsically Motivated?

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Abstract

This exploratory case study sought to find out what motivates career professionals in Ontario's non-profit employment agencies to reach and exceed their pre-set targets. Unlike profit-earning organizations, career professionals of non-profit employment agencies in Ontario do not get any additional financial incentives for exceeding their targets of helping job seekers find sustainable employment. In this study, seven mid-level managers and seven career professionals of non-profit employment agencies were interviewed. The research used a transformative learning theory lens (Mezirow, 1991), and also an interpretivist framework (Merriam, 1998) to understand the data. A semi-structured interview format was used for the one-on-one interviews. Additional data were collected via document perusal, field notes, and the researcher's reflective journals. The data were coded and analyzed thematically using a content analysis method. Triangulation and member-checking were performed for ensuring reliability of data (Yin, 2009). The study suggests that the career professionals of the seven non-profit employment agencies are by and large, intrinsically motivated, and three of their key motivators are "passion for their jobs", "empathy for the clients" and "changing other people's lives" in a positive way.

The three tiers of government of Canada make various efforts to reduce the rate of unemployment in

Ontario, which is considered a major political, social, and economic issue. CBC News (2018) reported that Canada lost 88,000 jobs during January 2018, and the largest employment declines were in Ontario and Quebec. CBC News (2018) noted that in Ontario, which increased its minimum wage in January 2018, employment rates fell during the month of January, due to losses in part-time work opportunities. CBC News (2018) also indicated that the unemployment rate in the province of Ontario saw very little reduction at 5.5 per cent as fewer people participated in the job market. In response to issues relating to the actual or possible unemployment of Ontarians, a number of not-for-profit organizations in Ontario are delivering various government-funded programs and service to help people find sustainable and meaningful jobs, which means jobs aligned with job seekers' relevant professional fields and/or educational/training backgrounds. These services are tailored to meet each individual job seeker's needs and can be provided to their clients one-to-one or in a group format (Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, 2014).

Non-profit employment agencies help job seekers find meaningful employment through the support provided by employment counselors and job developers. While employment counselors provide employment preparation services to job seekers, job developers continuously promote job seekers to local employers, ideally helping newcomers, foreign trained professionals and any local job

seekers find meaningful jobs. In the main, employment counselors assess job seekers' employment needs, refer them to appropriate programs and services, assist them in preparing and targeting resumes, and help navigate their job search efforts. Job developers build professional relationships with employers for promoting job seekers to them. They also organize job fairs and recruitment events so that the job seekers can get opportunities to meet with employers. In this study, employment counselors and job developers were operationally termed "career professionals". According to the National Occupational Classification, Government of Canada (2016), employment counselors provide assistance and information to job-seeker-clients (people who are looking for jobs) on all aspects of employment search and career planning. Career professionals also provide advice and information to employer-clients (employers who want to hire candidates through non-profit employment agencies) regarding relevant employment issues and human resource matters. As well, employment counselors are employed by human resource departments of organizations, employment service agencies, consulting firms, correctional facilities, and by federal and provincial governments.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore why career professionals of non-profit employment agencies in Ontario are intrinsically motivated to

reach and many times exceed their targets. In addition, the researchers for this study were keenly interested in understanding the impact of the leadership approaches used by mid-level managers on career professionals' intrinsic motivation in non-profit employment agencies in Ontario. At present, non-profit employment agencies help a large number of job seekers including immigrants, youths, and people with multiple employment barriers. They also assist local employers to find suitable candidates for various positions. Hence, not only do they help job seekers find employment, but they also indirectly contribute to the economic growth of the country by assisting employers in filling their vacancies, which in turn leverages the smooth functioning of the manufacturing, service, construction, engineering, financial, information technology (IT), accounting and many other sectors. Many small and medium size businesses benefit from the services rendered by these agencies.

Research Question, Collection and Triangulation of Data

This study sought answers to the question, "What aspects of their work inspire the intrinsic motivation of career professionals in the non-profit employment agencies to reach and sometimes exceed their targets? Typically the employment counselors have a target to serve a certain number of job seekers every month among whom certain portions need to find employment or start training. The job developers' have to meet the target of building business relationships with a certain number of employers, holding employer-events and placing a certain number of job seekers in relevant employment. The perceptions of mid-level managers

and career professionals were drawn upon via one-to-one interviews to respond to research questions. As well, document perusal was drawn upon to provide triangulated data. Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals (e.g., a participant and another type of participant), type of data (e.g., field notes and interviews) or methods of data collection (e.g., documents and interviews) in descriptions and themes in qualitative research (Creswell, 2002).

Literature Review

For this study, research was drawn from peer-reviewed works on motivation of employees of non-profit and government organizations in general which had been published in local and international journals of education, management, and psychology. A literature search was also performed on transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) because that theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study. Mezirow (1991) points to the view that significant learning in our lives involves 'meaning making' which can lead to a transformation of our personality or worldview (Anfara, & Mertz, 2006). Calleja (2014) described the evolution of Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory (1991) and pointed out that the theory is grounded in robust theoretical traditions, and presents a process of transformation among adults which leads the learner through a process which sometimes begins with a moment of disorientation and ends in transformative self-reflection that result in the transformation of one's perspective. Literature was also searched on the interpretivist framework (Merriam, 1998). Harrison, Birks, Franklin & Mills (2017) informed that Merriam (1998)

upholds a constructivist approach to case study research, whereby the researcher presuppose that reality is constructed intersubjectively through meanings and understandings build up socially and experientially. The authors also pointed out that, according to Merriam (1998), when information is abundant and concepts abstract, it is important to utilize processes that help interpret, sort, and manage information and that adapt findings to convey clarity and applicability to the results.

After finding literature relevant to the main research question, the findings were reviewed and information was synthesized in the body of the literature review. Key findings from the literature review are briefly discussed below:

In terms of leaders' relationship with frontline staff in non-profit employment agencies, some leaders stay close to the frontline staff and some leaders choose to stay away or be somewhat removed from them. Such leadership tendencies, one way or another, may have an impact on employee motivation. For example, Buskey (2014) pointed out that, in many instances, the further up the organizational hierarchy one goes, 'the more removed from the ground' one becomes. Buskey (2014) defined servant leaders as people who view themselves as instruments of those they serve. Servant leaders tend to rely on expertise and informational power to support and influence others more than the power of their position. Buskey (2014) also indicated that, metaphorically, those who act as servant leaders remain closest to the ground, which in turn, often acts as a motivating force to their followers. This finding was potentially of relevance to the study, which in part, focused on leadership approaches used in Ontario's non-profit employment

agencies and the relationship to employee-motivation.

Vandenabeele (2014) assessed the impact of one particular aspect of transformational leadership behavior - which was, promoting public values on public service motivation in work settings. Public service motivation refers to the motivation to “do good for others and shape the well-being of society” (Perry & Hondeghem, 2008, p. 3). Transformational leadership is popular in public administration as a means to establish a form of “values-based” management in the public sector.

In their paper exploring the impact of leadership on climate and performance of workshops in a non-profit organization, McMurrray, Islam, Sarros, and Pirola-Merlo (2012) asserted that transactional leaders usually work within existing organizational culture(s) to progress and complete goals, while transformational leaders usually try to change culture(s) as they attempt to achieve the organizational goals and mission. Tebeian (2012) conducted a literature review aimed at presenting a new approach to motivating and increasing employees’ performance. His approach was based on the assumption that the leader is the key factor, the generator, and sustainer of a healthy and productive work environment. Tebeian’s (2012) research focused on identifying how two leadership styles, namely transformational and servant leadership are used by existing leaders to achieve desired team performance. Findings from Tebeian’s (2012) study suggest that there is interdependence between the degree of satisfaction and the motivation of employees.

According to Gagne, Forest, Gilbert, Aube, Morin, and Malorni (2010), in broad terms, intrinsic motivation is defined as doing something

for its own sake because it is interesting, meaningful, and enjoyable. This definition was derived from the findings of a study where data were collected through convenience sampling, which, according to Creswell (2002) is the selection of participants because they are willing and available to be studied. The researchers sampled participants from Canadian workers in different industries. Gagne et al. (2010) defined several terms relating to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation was identified in the study as doing something largely for instrumental reasons.

Studies conducted by Becchetti, Castriota and Tortila (2013), and Dwyer et al. (2013) suggest there is a strong presence of both intrinsic motivation amongst employees and transformational leadership in the non-profit sector. Intrinsically motivated workers often find superior non-financial compensation when working in the non-profit industry, and therefore, in effect, agree to sacrifice a part of their wages in return for that work satisfaction (Becchetti, Castriota & Tortila, 2013). Dwyer et al. (2013) also examined the extent to which personal motives and their own or others’ leadership behaviors influence general volunteers’ perceptions of how meaningful their work is, which may subsequently affect higher levels of satisfaction and contribution. Findings of the study of Dwyer et al. (2013) suggest that organizations seeking to enhance employees’ intrinsic appreciation of their work amongst formal and informal leaders should cultivate transformational leadership.

Extrinsic incentives can sometimes be counterproductive in some organizations. Research conducted by Benabou and Triole (2003), and James Jr., (2005) implied that rewards, which are considered im-

portant components of extrinsic motivation, are not necessarily capable of strongly reinforcing people for protracted periods of time. Benabou and Triole (2003) conducted a study to analyze the ‘hidden costs’ of rewards and punishments from an economic and cognitive perspective. Benabou and Triole (2003) showed that rewards might be only weak reinforcers in the short term and that they might have hidden costs, and also that they sometimes became negative reinforcers once they were withdrawn. They also showed in the study that explicit incentives may, but need not, be negative reinforcers; the analysis by Benabou and Triole (2003) actually suggests when, how, and why rewards and punishments work, and when, how and why they backfire. These were useful concepts and background information for the study, which attempted to assess how employees of non-profit employment agencies in Ontario are motivated, and how their intrinsic motivation is influenced by the leadership approaches used by their managers.

While studying the variation in levels of employee intrinsic motivation across 51 countries, Cowley and Smith (2014) found that there is a tendency for public sector workers to have a higher level of intrinsic motivation than private sector workers when there is corruption, which refers to dishonest or fraudulent conduct, at play in the organization. Clearly this finding is far from being a universal or all-encompassing situation/explanation however it also points to value that public sector employees place on pursuing outcomes that are for the public’s benefit.

Also, although Ontario non-profit employment agencies that were studied in this research are not known to have experienced corruption, the research of Cowley and

Smith (2014) brings important aspects of intrinsic motivation to light. Their investigation suggested that the level of corruption in the public sector was likely to affect its mission – a more corrupt public administration was likely to be less attractive to intrinsically motivated workers. The authors showed that corruption had a negative effect on the (average) leader of motivated workers in the public sector relative to the private sector. Cowley and Smith (2014) also showed that intrinsically motivated workers were less likely to work in the public sector when levels of corruption are notable.

Baines et al. (2014) drew on data collected as part of a larger study of the experience of employees of restructuring in the non-profit social services sector in Canada and Australia. This research explored the responses of employees in the non-profit sector to four overlapping interview questions. The questions examined (i) their motivation drawing them to the non-profit sector, (ii) the positive aspects of working in this sector, (iii) the negative aspects of working in the sector, and (iv) if given the power, what would be the main element that they would change in the sector. The study found that working in a job consistent with their values was a major motivation drawing the employees of non-profit organization to the sector. Some participants indicated that an opportunity to work with service users/clients and providing the necessary supports to them was a source of motivation for employees. Findings about negative aspects of working in the non-profit social services included lack of helpful supervision, absence of the opportunity to ‘live their own values in their work’, routine types of tasks in serving people, the presence of increased workplace violence and harassment, intensity of crises and delayed interventions, and stressful

experiences of dealing with other peoples’ experiences. In response to the last question regarding one change that the participants wanted, most respondents nominated increased funding for the sector. However, other respondents also prioritized higher wages for employees, more training for supervisors, and development of leadership capacities, and more focus on management’s priorities with respect to service users and staff.

Overall, findings of the study suggested that values-based practices draw and keep workers working in the non-profit sectors (despite many of the limitations that this sector now commonly faces). Some of the findings of the study of Baines et al. (2014) echo several findings of our study. For example, the literature review revealed that leaders of educational organizations frequently use elements of a transformational leadership style, and this study found that mid-level managers of Ontario’s non-profit employment agencies mostly use elements of transformational leadership. As noted earlier, there are similarities between the educational organizations and non-profit employment agencies in terms of their broader goal of serving the public as the major priority instead of making profits. The literature review pointed out that leaders’ close relationship with frontline staff can motivate employees; similarly, this study also indicated that mid-level managers of non-profit employment agencies maintain a close relationship with career professionals, and this often helps career professionals stay motivated. Further, the literature review suggested that employee motivation is stronger in non-profit organizations than other organizations, and this study showed that generally that these career professionals are intrinsically motivated. The literature review also

pointed out that extrinsic motivation can be counterproductive under certain conditions. Employees’ intrinsic motivation in public and non-profit sector is stronger compared to other sectors. Jobs that are, in effect, consistent with employees’ values can be a major source of motivation, drawing prospective employees of non-profit organization to the sector.

Methodology

An exploratory case study methodology was used to investigate what motivates career professionals in Ontario to reach and exceed their targets. This study also examines the impact of leadership approaches used by mid-level managers on career professionals’ intrinsic motivation in non-profit employment agencies in the province. Yin (2009) indicated that if all the cases turn out as expected, these cases, in aggregate, would provide compelling support for the initial set of propositions. As noted above, this qualitative case study was conducted to explore the reasons why career professionals of non-profit employment agencies in Ontario are intrinsically motivated.

Gay, Mills and Airasian (2012) define case study research as a qualitative research approach in which researchers focus on a unit of study known as a bounded system (e.g., individual teachers, a classroom, or a school). By contrast, Yin (2009) claims case studies can be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method research. According to Eisenhardt (1989), case study is a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings. As well, the case study method potentially allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 2009).

The research term used for the particular sampling approach employed in this study is termed purposeful sampling, in which, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2002). Qualitative sampling is a process of selecting a small number of individuals for a study in such a way that it is hoped the individuals chosen will be good key informants who will contribute to the researcher's understanding of a given phenomenon (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012). Sampling in case study research is often purposeful, because it includes the selection of information-rich cases for in-depth study. The case study approach offers flexibility in terms of the justification of sampling choice, the number of investigated cases, and sampling techniques (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010).

As previously noted, the interviews for this study were semi-structured rather than fully structured or entirely pre-set and fixed in nature. This interview technique was helpful in building a rapport with the participants because it easily enabled an opportunity to ask tailored follow-up questions to each individual's responses.

The documents collected for this study included printed, published, and online information about the Employment Ontario program and different bridging programs delivered by non-profit employment agencies in Ontario designed for helping job seekers find sustainable jobs, along with policies and procedures of respective organizations, and various online and printed reports on such programs.

As noted earlier, career professionals (employment consultants and job developers) and mid-level managers of Ontario's non-profit

employment agencies comprised the units of analysis. Patton (2015) stated that one or more groups are selected as the units of analysis when there is some important characteristic that separate people into groups and when that characteristic has important implications for the particular setting or program. Only those mid-level managers who supervised career professionals were considered for inclusion in the study. Other managers responsible for functional areas of management including finance, marketing, HR and IT were excluded.

Data Analysis

This section briefly outlines the plan that was used for analyzing data. Yin (2009) suggests four general strategies of analyzing data for case studies, such as relying on theoretical proposition, developing a case description, using both qualitative (and quantitative data if relevant) and examining rival explanations. A theoretical proposition shapes the data collection plan and therefore gives priorities to the relevant analytic strategies. The following steps were taken for analyzing the data of the study:

Transcription: Transcription is the process of converting audiotape recordings or field notes into text data (Creswell, 2002). First the audiotape interviews were transcribed verbatim in word processed documents. The transcriptions were returned to participants for checking, and possible amendment or additional comments. Field notes were taken during the interview process, and later these field notes were read when analyzing data. The transcribed data were placed into several tables for organizing them.

Organizing Data: Two matrices or tables of sources were used to help organize data. For example, all audio-taped interviews were

transcribed first, and then relevant information was entered in the first table named "Data Analysis Organizer for Codes". On that table, all interview questions were listed on the first column in the left side; answers from each participant to each question were listed in the next columns. Similar answers were colour-coded and collapsed into patterns or codes. The other table listed all codes in the left hand column, recurrence of each code was listed in the next column, emerging themes were listed in the next column, and the pertinent leadership approaches were listed in the last column (to the right).

Data Analysis: A preliminary exploratory analysis in qualitative research consists of obtaining the general sense of the data, memoing ideas, thinking about the organization of the data, and considering whether more data are needed (Creswell, 2002). Also, in the analysis of the data, researchers sometimes need to use a 'window' (Guest, McQueen & Namey, 2012), a process of focusing on some of the data and disregarding other parts of it (Creswell, 2002). In broad terms, content analysis method was used in analyzing data, which, according to Patton (2015), refers to searching the text for and counting recurring words or themes. Patton (2015) stated, "Even more generally, content analysis refers to any qualitative data reduction and sense-making efforts that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempt to identify core consistencies and meanings" (p. 541). Patton (2015) referred to an example of case studies, which can be content analyzed. The researchers have deployed content analysis method as the 'window' for focusing on important data for this case study.

The transcripts of 14 participants were read and recurring phrases or words were identified, which

helped us to code information. We combined similar codes together to obtain important themes. This process has been graphically shown as below in Figure 1. Figure 1 shows the three phases of data analysis that were used for obtaining themes of the study from the raw data. In this exploratory case study there was no statistical generalizability possible due to the design (and especially the sample size). However, this type of case study offers analytic generalization (Yin, 2009).

An Interpretivist stance was adopted in this research whereby there was a clear attempt to understand phenomena through the meanings that people assigned to them. Interpretive research focuses on the complexity of human sense-making as the situation emerges. According to Thanh and Thanh (2015), it is theoretically understood that the interpretive

paradigm allows researchers to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants in this study. An interpretive approach provided a view of the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants of our research, namely career professionals and mid-level managers of Ontario’s non-profit employment agencies.

Findings and Discussion

As noted earlier, the analysis of data revealed seven themes obtained from career professionals’ data: passion, change other peoples’ lives positively, empathy, putting in a lot of efforts, exceeding targets to help the community and for their own satisfaction, past experience brings career professionals to this profession, and sticking to this profession because of loving this job. Data obtained from

seven career professionals were analyzed by taking the following steps: Table 1 depicts how the themes were generated on the basis of recurring patterns/themes.

Passion

All seven career professionals who took part in the interviews indicated that they are passionate about their work. It is noteworthy that each of the participants faced challenges in finding their own jobs, which, in part, made them motivated to work in the non-profit employment agencies because they could relate to the grief of being unemployed and joy of eventually finding employment.

As depicted below, the participants were passionate about their work. All of them greatly valued the fact that they were serving the community and changing the lives of

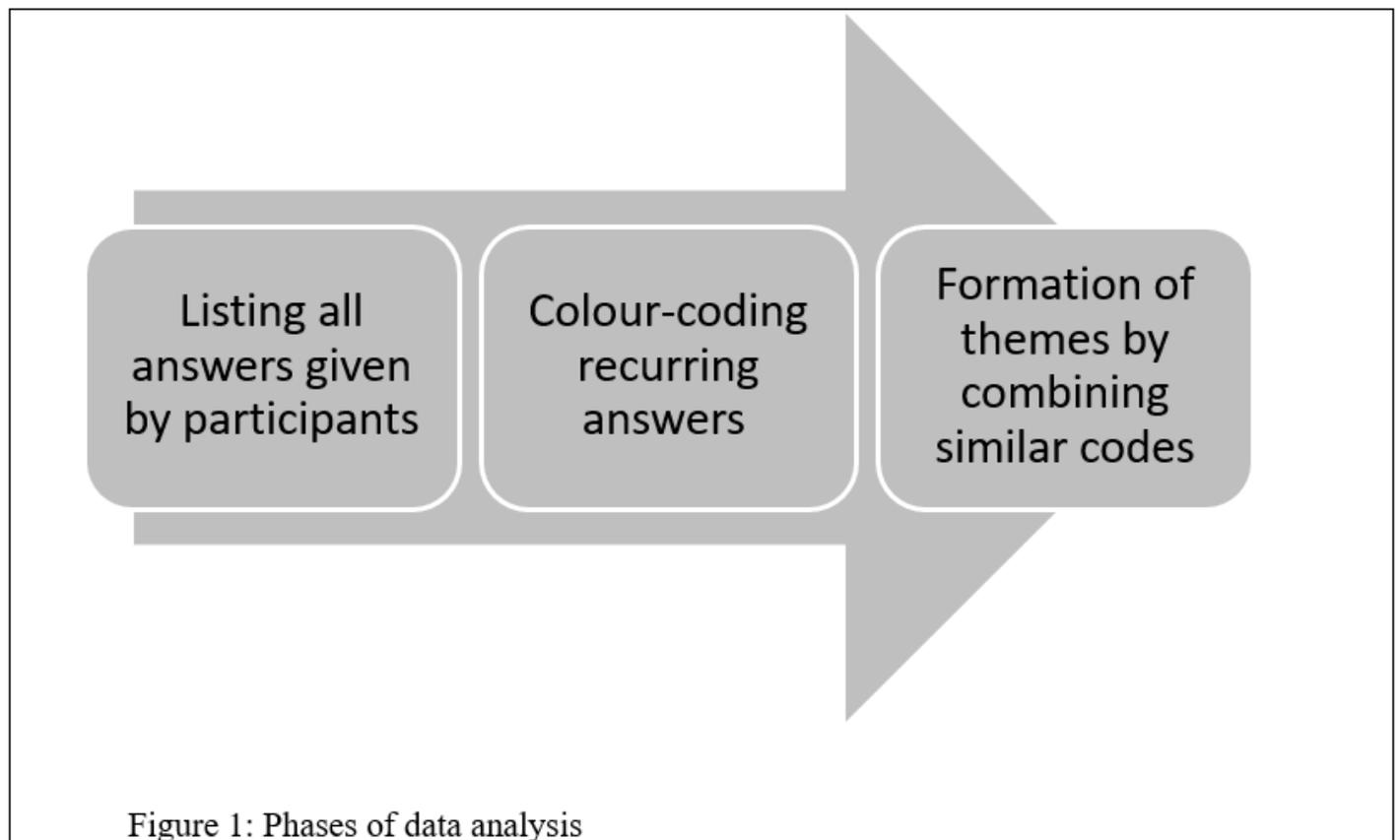


Figure 1: Phases of data analysis

Table 1

Patterns/Codes, Recurrence of Data and Themes from Career Professionals' Interviews

Patterns/Codes	Recurrence	Themes
Passionate about work	7	Passion
Change other people's lives	4	Changing other people's lives
Empathy	4	Empathy
Putting in a lot of effort	5	Putting in a lot of effort
Past experience	3	Past experience brings career professionals to this profession
Exceed targets to help the community	5	Exceed targets to help the community, and for their own satisfaction (as employees)
- Love this job	3	Sticking to this profession because of loving this job
- Do something meaningful	4	
- How work tasks contribute to organization's vision is clear	4	
- Inner peace	7	
- Managers recognize good performance	4	
- Managers delegate authority	6	

their clients. One of the career professionals said, "Yes I am very much passionate about my work because I am working with newcomers in particular." She also described how she loves her job, "I mean I love what I do and why, I believe this is the only thing I could do ..." Another career professional announced, "Well, serving people is my passion". Another participant said, "This is the work that I like. I liked it from the beginning. And to what degree, I can say it is the most like ... the top level of my career ... like I always wanted to be to work with [the] employment sector." Gagne and Deci (2005) indicated intrinsic motivation involves people doing an activity because they find it interesting and derive spontaneous satisfaction from the activity itself. All career professionals indicated that they love their jobs, because of what they help to create, namely opportunities for unemployed individuals to

secure employment in their respective fields and this, in a substantial way, suggests that they were all largely intrinsically motivated.

Changing Other People's Lives

All participants shared the same perception, namely that they were passionate about their work because they potentially changed other people's lives positively through their work. One of the participants said, "I have been working in this field for a long time, and it is a hugely rewarding opportunity for me to work with people and add value to other people's lives." Another participant, who has been passionate about helping others and changing their lives since his childhood, commented about this by saying that as he grew older, his habit of helping others also grew bigger. Another participant reflected on the fact that he himself had struggled

to find a decent job. At that time, employment services were not as available in Ontario as they are now, and the lack of support services made it harder for him to obtain a sustainable job. Referring to his experience, he said, "20 years ago I'm talking, when there were not that many services for newcomers (people who came to Canada within the last 3 years), I felt so lost and confused. So many complications! I joined this sector, in order to have others not repeat those horrible experiences that newcomers [often experience]. What happened to me should not happen to them." Another participant, who had prior experience working as a recruiter in the private sector, elected not to take on higher paying jobs because she loved changing other peoples' lives in a positive way via what she could achieve in her current role. Those perceptions suggest that these career professionals had chosen this field, and were work-

ing contently (at least in part) because they were not only doing this for their clients but also their own sakes as it was an interesting, purposeful and enjoyable work. The perceptions of all these career professionals showed they were largely intrinsically motivated in terms of their work.

Empathy

Out of the seven career professionals who were interviewed, six had an experience of immigrating to Canada and personally facing the struggle of looking for a job. They understood the complexity of what it took to move to a different country permanently in order to start a new life. Hence, it was not difficult for them to put themselves in the newcomer job seekers' shoes. One of the career professionals stated, "At one stage I had a similar situation, I was looking for jobs so I know how valuable it is to give some kind of guidance to the newcomers, job seekers and foreign-trained professionals." The one career professional who was born and raised in Canada, faced this issue in one respect namely that she had also experienced unemployed many years earlier. She experienced what unemployment did to her self-esteem, self-efficacy and her entire perspective on life. Another career professional reflected, "... when I landed myself, nobody helped me, nobody guided me in those days ...". So all of the career professionals empathized with newcomers (as well as others) looking for jobs in this province or other parts of the country. This may be one of the reasons why this sector employs so many foreign-trained-professionals. Career professionals' empathy towards their clients (job seekers) can be viewed from two different perspectives. First, those instances of empathy can be

considered (together) as an example of intrinsic motivation because the respective career professionals helping others to find employment. Second, almost all of the career professionals experienced the same challenge when they immigrated, or graduated from an educational institution, and started to look for work.

Putting in a Lot of Effort

All seven career professionals confirmed that they put a lot of effort into their work. One of the career professionals indicated that he did not only put his effort to meet his numeric targets, but he also tried to set a high standard overall for his quality of service: "I do put a lot of effort, and I always try to meet my targets...not only the quantitative targets but also the qualitative aspects of my service." Another career professional stated, "Yes, I do definitely put in a lot of effort to ... meet my targets, because it's ... not that everything is like a financial issue ... I mean money is an important issue; however, it's also something you believe in and you contribute to and ... it depends on overall work ethics, I believe." Becchetti et al. (2013) stated that intrinsically motivated workers who find that their motivation is satisfied through the work they do and in the mission of their organization, are willing, in effect, to donate labour to them by putting in longer hours, shortening lunch-time, and being very work-focused. In light of the claim made by Becchetti et al. (2013), and the quotes from participants, it is evident these career professionals can be positioned as being largely, intrinsically motivated.

Each of the seven career professionals shared that they exceeded their respective targets to help the community and the unemployed in-

dividuals concerned. Those reasons make sense because, in the absence of additional financial rewards other than salary and benefits, career professionals found meaningful work in helping as many unemployed clients as possible and in that effort, exceeded the agency imposed targets. That said, some of the non-profit agencies may also want their career professionals to exceed targets for ensuring that the funding- ministry continues to provide funding. One of the participants stated, "That's my target, a personal target". Her statement referred to being intrinsically motivated because of her own love of doing the job. Another career professional's answer to the question of why he exceeded his targets was similar, "... I feel this is a very satisfying role I am playing right now and it gives me huge pleasure and absolutely I feel good when I can see that some of my clients, or the clients of my organization have found jobs, ...they are settled in their respective fields, ... there is a huge value-adding ... and also the demand is increasing from the job seekers' point of view. It is not that I limit myself with certain numerical targets ... I always try to increase targets both in terms of quality and quantity." Another career professional's answer to this question could be viewed from a different perspective. That participant said, "... we work to exceed our targets, that's not only because it's like we have extra time, or we want to work late hours, that's because we have clients who are looking for jobs. It's not that we only achieve our targets and we sit back. We feel there's still more needs like, the need for work". Only by exceeding his target would it be enough to get sufficient employment opportunities for most of his clients.

According to one of the career professionals, helping clients find

jobs is a valuable activity, and Gagne et al (2010) described such a scenario as one where people accept the regulation of the activity because it is judged valuable/useful and it fits their value system. This type of motivation has been described by Vallerand and Ratelle (2004) as one which makes people perform an action out of obligation to avoid anxiety, shame, and pressure.

Past Experience Brings Many Career Professionals to this Profession

When asked why they decided to become a career professional, one of the career professionals said, “The first reason is that I have over 25 years of experience in the non-profit sector mostly focused on human potential development.” Two other career professionals mentioned previous relevant experience as being a reason for choosing this profession. One of the career professional’s reasons for choosing this profession was because, “... personally I have a strong desire to help people, and I have a strong desire to feel that I am doing something meaningful.” Another career professional noted that although his job in Canada paid his bills, he did not see much prospect for promotion or career advancement there. He said, “... so forget about promotions, or ... incentives, or ... any increases [of] any kind. The reason again, it’s my pure commitment, and dedication, and passion to do something different, and bring some positive changes in the lives of newcomers.” Hence, one of the reasons why he chose this profession was to help people, which implies he was intrinsically drawn to the work. One participant also mentioned that he did not intend to leave his job (despite not having much potential for career prospects), because

of perceived limited employment opportunities for himself in the labour market.

In responding to a question about why they remain in this profession, three career professionals said that they stayed in this profession because they loved this particular job. In one of the career professionals’ words, “I always wanted to become a career professional”. Another career professional confirmed that working as a career professional was something that she truly valued. According to Deci and Ryan (1987), intrinsic motivation means that the task itself is a reward, and intrinsically motivated people thus consider themselves as initiators of their own behavior, select desired outcomes, and choose their own ways to achieve them. Six out of seven participants indicated that the major reason for their sticking to this profession was their love of being a career professional. One of the career professionals indicated that she continued to help different community agencies to assist their clients in finding jobs. When helping people to find employment, she did not care whether the job seekers were clients of her organization or other organizations.

Career Professionals’ Expressions of Intrinsic Motivation through a Transformative Learning Theory Lens

Findings from this study suggest that by and large, career professionals of non-profit employment agency were generally intrinsically motivated. While describing the reasons for working in Ontario’s non-profit employment agencies, career professionals talked of passion, gaining satisfaction by changing other people’s lives, having empathy for job seekers, helping the community, and

loving their jobs. They also pointed out that they put a lot of efforts in to performing their work because they found this job rewarding. Most of them also reflected on their previous experience of looking for job in Canada as newcomer, or as a Canadian graduate, “starting out” and indicated that they found it rewarding to help people get jobs and reduce their struggles to enter the labour market. As indicated earlier, intrinsic motivation involves people doing an activity because they find it interesting and derive spontaneous satisfaction from the activity itself (Gagne & Deci, 2005). One of the career professionals interviewed for this study (a job developer) commented,

I am extremely passionate about my work. As a matter of fact, I am a 24/7 job developer, and employment advisor ... because ... you want to know why? Because once upon a time, I too, was unemployed, and ... what that did to my self-esteem, my self-efficacy, and my entire perspective of life was detrimental. So I was a client of [name of the agency where she sought employment services], I came in because I was having ... for 25 years I was having the most painful career process ... ever ... I just couldn’t figure out what I wanted to do, where I wanted to be and it’s not like I didn’t go to school, I still went to university, I made it through - but it was just brutal, and it was just taking such a toll on every aspect of my life. That [unfavorable job search experience] motivated me even further for my passion and to make sure that everybody has an opportunity to have the dignity of an employment, for sure, meaningful and long-time sustainable employment ... so

that's kind of what led me into this whole world.

The same career professional shared at one stage of her interview that she could have easily taken a job as a recruiter and made a lot more money had she wanted, but she decided to stick to this profession because of being intrinsically motivated toward the job.

One statement by the Career professional pertains to her capacity for empathy. Most of the responses of the career professionals showed a sense of empathy and how the quest to help achieve employment opportunities for clients was intrinsically motivating for the participants. As we look through the lens of transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991), the above statements imply that the career professionals, in broad terms, are transformative learners, because, according to Mezirow (1997), transformative learners move toward a frame of reference that is self-reflective and integrative of experience. The career professionals above reflected on their previous experience of facing multiple barriers while job searching in Canada, and indicated that those experiences motivated them to become career professionals so that they could help job seekers in finding sustainable employment. Another career professional said:

When I was younger, I enjoyed helping my mom with household works. As I grew older, that habit grew and I wanted to help others as well. I like helping people find solutions that met their specific needs. Working as a career specialist is a rewarding job, and I like it. On a scale of 10, 1 is lowest, and I would say I like it as 9. I am passionate about making a difference. When I am involved

with a project at work, I want most of all to achieve success. I feel the same way about what I do in my personal life.

The above statement illustrates how this career professional's values, and relational tendency to help his mom as a child gradually shaped employment choices, and eventually led him to choose job development as his career. As he grew older, he extended his passion to encompass helping people in a larger context. One process of learning for adults, according to Mezirow (1997), is to elaborate an existing point of view and expand the range or intensity of that point of view enactment.

The career professionals also referred to some management practices that were indicative of their receiving intrinsic motivation through the leadership of mid-level managers. One of the career professionals informed that she receives clear guidance from her manager regarding her target, what to do to meet the target, and how to meet her target. Her supervisor explained to her the importance of meeting targets, and also points out how the survival of the organization depends on reaching, and often exceeding targets. When required, her supervisor showed her how she should do her job so that standards are met. Her supervisor also provides some on-the-job learning opportunities for career professionals. One of the career professionals indicated that she found such support, guidance, and opportunities for open communication very helpful for her to strategize how to reach and exceed targets. At the same time, she enjoys some autonomy in using her own judgment and discretion about doing her job. Her supervisor delegates some projects or tasks to her sometimes. She observed, "... we

sometimes get small funding from here and there, and that funding has to be utilized and ... [to] introduce new things, and I believe I'm the ... one of the most versatile one in the agency. I'm always picked up ... and this is easier on their employers' perspective as well because, for a small project prospect like that it's not easy to hire a new person."

Another career professional said that he enjoys his work environment, where he can seek suggestions from his supervisor whenever needed. He pointed out that the career professionals are given the opportunity to discuss different barriers they faced in helping clients, how to overcome them, and how they can attain success in achieving targets. His supervisor delegates important tasks to him and provides him with necessary autonomy to carry out the task, and also demonstrates how to do the job. When career professionals achieve success, his supervisor, a mid-level manager, recognizes that by arranging occasional potluck or pizza lunch, or dinner for the team. He stated: "...so [those] who have performed well get recognition in terms of ... like most of ... all get gifts or we can say they [get] some recognition awards and all those things were distributed in that annual dinner." Therefore, success in his organization is celebrated during annual work dinners, and by providing recognition awards to team members. Two more career professionals' experiences echoed the above description. They both commented that their supervisors, who are mid-level managers, play a supportive role and provide them with necessary supports so that they can reach and exceed targets without any issues. Those mid-level managers maintain an open door policy for career professionals which enhances career professionals' intrinsic motivation.

Through the analysis of information and discussion of findings, it became increasingly evident that the career professionals in this study of several non-profit employment agencies in Ontario were largely intrinsically motivated and had themselves been shaped by transformative learning experiences.

Conclusion

The key research question asked what motivates career professionals of Ontario's non-profit employment agencies to reach and exceed their targets. The study showed, on the basis of data including voices obtained from career professionals of Ontario's non-profit employment agencies, that, by and large, they are motivated to reach and exceed their targets because they love their job, are able to empathize with the circumstances and needs of the job seekers, and want to help those people improve their lives via the gaining of employment. Notably, the career professionals' intrinsic motivation was shaped, in part, by their own past experience of struggles in finding employment. More pragmatically, the career professionals remained grateful to be working in a job where there was ongoing need for such services. Each of the career professionals' perceptions revealed considerable empathy, and a strong willingness to help job seekers find employment. The career professionals emphasized that they loved changing their clients' lives by assisting them to find meaningful jobs.

Ontario's non-profit employment agencies play a crucial role in building Ontario's economy by bridging the gap between job vacancies and job seekers, and by preparing and connecting skilled professionals with Ontario's major employers. Career

professionals impact the lives of job seekers, and mid-level managers impact the lives of career professionals. Hence, it is imperative for non-profit employment agencies to build and sustain the intrinsic motivation of career professionals for agency productivity purposes, helping the economy of Ontario grow, by reducing the unemployment rate in the province. Ontario's non-profit employment agencies also provide opportunities to unemployed or underemployed individuals to gain employment or new career work experience.

Several limitations were encountered in conducting this study. As noted before, one of them concerned the small sample size. The perceptions and experiences gleaned from seven career professionals and seven mid-level managers cannot be considered as typical representation of the population; however, the data obtained through semi-structured interviews provided us with the opportunity to obtain deeper insights into the concepts of Ontario's career professionals' intrinsic motivation. Despite the study's limitations, it is clear that this sector and the employees of these agencies are contributing significantly to the well-being of thousands of Ontario residents, and indirectly the prosperity of the province and indeed Canada as a whole. As a result, it is important for Ontario's non-profit employment agencies to maintain an environment where career professionals' intrinsic motivation is supported, so that they can continue to be highly generative in their work and engage meaningfully with both clients and their own career purposes.

The elements of transformational leadership employed by mid-level managers complement the intrinsic motivation of the career professionals and in that respect are an important consideration for

those leaders who wish to support colleagues who are passionate about their work and the positive impact they have on their clients, job seekers and employers.

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