Theoretical Orientation to Performance Excellence

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CPSY-4671

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11-21-22

Author Note

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to develop and construct my theoretical orientation to human behavior and performance based on the concepts that I have learned from the courses: Theoretical Aspects of Sport and Performance Psychology, Foundations of Counseling Theories, and Theories of Performance Excellence. You will find the theories that I most resonated with, my belief on how people's problems develop, how change occurs and how I will facilitate change, what I believe leads to performance excellence and breakdowns, my belief on how groups develop, and finally how I will navigate multicultural considerations.

Theoretical Orientation to Human Behavior

Theories I Draw From

My philosophy before this program stemmed from three things: 1.) Being authentic and holding myself to a high standard, 2.) Making a positive impact, and 3.) Continuing to refer to morals/values. With the conclusion of this quarter, my philosophy (Theoretical Orientation) has now been reshaped with proven research and clarity. Humanistic and ACT are two theories that are foundational to understanding and changing human behavior.

Humanistic

As we grow older, we develop physically, mentally, and philosophically. Through that process, we strive to become our better selves and achieve self-actualization (Jones-Smith, 2021). This process uncovers one's values and what they deem as "important" to live their authentic self. Authenticity can be described as being aligned with one's true self by leading with values, morals, and character (Jones-Smith, 2021). One can see that this can be a daunting task, for some, as it requires true self-evaluation and time. However, as many people say, "It's the simple things in life…" Ultimately, I believe humans need the basic needs to truly reach their full potential in life. Like Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the more we are satisfied with common human essentials, the easier it is to reach the better self.

Acceptance and Commitment Theory

The saying, "Go with the flow" holds true in that letting things happen rather than controlling situations provides less resistance. Like ACT, there is an understanding that suffering happens and will happen, but we must accept our truth, lead with our values, and commit to changing certain behaviors (Jones-Smith, 2021). As humans our brains produce thousands of

thoughts and at times we can get in the way of our thoughts. I believe that allowing those thoughts to generate freely but implementing psychological skills to coexist with your thoughts, will help individuals move forward in their lives.

Development of Problems

A problem isn't a problem until someone is aware that it is maladaptive behavior. Fundamentally, once problems progress one must develop self-awareness to change behavior. Self-awareness can be described as observing one's thoughts, feelings, and actions (Jones-Smith, 2021). Through self-awareness, I think individuals will discover that incongruence with oneself and values ultimately leads to inconsistent behaviors. The lack of inner self-development leaves a void and misunderstanding of themselves. As we grow older, the more we don't understand ourselves the more we fill these voids with other things such as mimicking others' lives and easily going with the status quo.

Additionally, we must be satisfied with basic human needs otherwise problems start to occur. As one can imagine, without shelter, nourishment, and social fulfillment how can individuals focus on psychological and mental betterment? After all, we are a species that needs to survive and that requires satisfying those innate needs first.

Lastly, negative self-talk leads to disruption. With the advancement of things such as social media, music, and movies there are a plethora of opinions and persuasions, particularly negative ones, that can influence one's mind (Jones-Smith, 2021). Even without those platforms, physiologically we have this flight or fight mechanism that consistently fires off threatening (or perceived) stimuli that affect our thoughts. How we talk to ourselves is critical in how we behave

in society and if we accept the way we think or even become aware of our thinking, we can have a better grasp on how we live our lives.

How Change Occurs/Facilitating Change in Consulting

As a future consultant, I believe my role is to guide and influence an individual's behavior rather than change them. Ultimately the client will decide to change if they find my advice useful and informative to them. The client-therapist relationship I'm looking to foster starts with authenticity and positive regard (Person-Centered). Being true to oneself and promoting affection and care for my client is the utmost principle in the relationship (Jones-Smith, 2021). Furthermore, the tools I plan to utilize in guiding my client are ACT (mindfulness and acceptance skills), Motivational Interviewing, and some Cognitive Restructuring.

I believe the humanistic and ACT approaches go hand and hand with guiding behavior. Unlocking the awareness of one's thoughts and feelings allows for personal growth to develop. This can start with cognitive defusion which allows the client to dissociate with unproductive thoughts (Jones-Smith, 2021). If I can guide the client from thinking "they are their bad thoughts" to "I'm an individual who just so happens to have bad thoughts", I believe this can give clarity to positive self-talk and ease through the process of self-actualization. Similarly, I plan to use mindfulness tools to help individuals become more present/aware of their attention. This will allow for psychological flexibility and room for things such as performance excellence and self-betterment (Jones-Smith, 2021).

Similarly, according to Miller & Rollnick, motivational interviewing can help individuals discover their natural tendency toward personal development (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). I see MI

being a tool that focuses on a conversational relationship-based intervention that discovers personal values, fosters communication and empathy, and focuses on adaptive behaviors. Lastly, although my theoretical approach is not focused on CBT, I do believe cognitive restructuring can be useful, specifically when using Socratic questioning to challenge negative thinking (Jones-Smith, 2021).

Theoretical Orientation to Performance Excellence

Of the many theories we learned and discussed, the ones that most resonated with me came from the works of Dr. Ottley, Dr. Haberl, Dr. Aoyagi, Dr. Jones, Dr. Henschen, Dr. McCann, Dr. Pensgaard, Dr. Cohen, and Dr. Fink. Each of these professionals demonstrated an element of focus on the athlete's progression in both performance and as a person. Their theories provided unique tools to help guide athletes in a way that will give them complete control over their excellence in performance and life. I believe the core of performance excellence stems from (i) the level of motivation one must compete at a high level, (ii) role identity, (iii) the environment/ecosystem one is in, (iv) awareness of self, and (v) directed attention.

Motivation/Role Identity

Self-determination theory describes that there are behaviors associated with an athlete's values that will lead to intrinsic motivation (Williams & Krane, 2021). As Dr. Henschen explains in his chapter, rarely do athletes have both high intrinsic motivation and unquenchable work ethic (Henschen, 2021). He continues by suggesting that if athletes do possess the two, it is where performance excellence becomes easiest and more enjoyable (2021). I believe that the more we unpack and discover one's substantive motivations, the easier it is to thrive and maintain one's performance. As described, intrinsic motivation stems from one's values and goal

orientation (Williams & Krane, 2021). The next question is: how do individuals find their inherent desires for personal rewards? A small but effective way of finding some value in an organization or as an individual is defining what one's role is. If one finds that he or she enjoys their responsibilities and expectations, there may be a level of intrinsic motivation to do well and perform at a high level. For example, recently, football players have become more versatile in playing multiple positions. If a player is extremely talented at one position but has a good skill level and the desire/passion to play the other position, I believe the player would be more effective in the position he most desires. Talent and skill level may be the vehicle for success but choosing the right fuel (motivation) yields different levels of success.

Dr. Ottley describes her living systems approach as interlocking structures that function as interdependent systems (Ottley, 2021). Like structural functionalism theory, the level of one's importance and role in a system truly matters in how we best operate together as a unit. If we can succeed in operating together, as Dr. Ottley states, "the whole is greater than the summation of parts" (2021, p. 257).

Environment (Motivational Climate)

Furthermore, having a good motivational climate can boost the level of group cohesion if done properly (Williams & Krane, 2021). I believe that fostering a well-developed environment while also catering to the needs and motivations of the athletes, will lead to top performance. Moreover, effective communication and feedback generate a great support system. Support and guidance in performance are necessary to an athlete's excellence. As Dr. Fink describes, "Working with coaches and athletes on how you deliver and receive feedback and how to communicate effectively with teammates and coaches on and off the field is essential" (Fink, 2021, p. 72). Even within an individual season, the journey can be overwhelming for some, and

communication and emotional intelligence must be working efficiently to prevent breakdowns in performance. Emotional intelligence is foundational not only to helping others but also to having the awareness to check in on oneself (Williams & Krane, 2021).

Self-Awareness

Additionally, having self-awareness is a huge benefit for both the individual and the team/organization. The ability to zoom in and out of different perspectives without outside help gives you the autonomy to achieve self-improvement in performance. One of the goals of mental performance consultants is to help athletes become more aware of their thoughts, behaviors, and physiological states. As you can imagine, having this skill of meta-awareness, the process by which individuals attend to their ongoing experiences by focusing on their current thoughts (Schooler, 2002), offers athletes the opportunity to fix problems through mental performance interventions. It is important to realize that the more proactive these performance enhancement interventions and tools are being implemented, the easier it is for athletes to retrieve these skills on their own. Moreover, the investment in mental performance skills is long-term and requires time and consistency. If the goal is for athletes to have mental performance sharpness and toughness, we must broaden, train, and educate the brain.

Attention

Lastly, directed attention is a key component in performance excellence. Dr. Haberl mentions in his chapter that being focused on present-moment execution allows for outcomes (Haberl, 2021). This can be achieved with tools like pre-performance routines, five senses of grounding, and somatic anxiety reduction. Pre-performance routines help with improving focus by using cues and regulating arousal. Similarly, the five senses of grounding direct your thoughts

to your body and somatic anxiety reduction focuses on one's breathing (Williams & Krane, 2021). These tools allow athletes to direct their attention from their thoughts and physiological symptoms to having the ability to execute the task at hand.

Performance Breakdown

A key contributor to performance breakdown is the lack of one's confidence to perform a specific task. Alternatively, this can be defined as a lack of self-efficacy (Cervone, 1992). Dr. Aoyagi believes that trusting your body to execute without thought leads to performance excellence (Aoyagi et al., 2017). If there is a lack of trust to perform well, ultimately one would have a lackluster performance. Dr. Pensgaard would agree that faith in one's abilities to perform at a high level is required (Pensgaard, 2021). Similar to my belief about motivation, I believe that confidence is another fuel that drives people to perform. Without it, performance will be shaky, and an athlete will not be able to peak in their performance because of the thought processes that are ongoing either consciously or subconsciously.

Another key component in performance breakdown is the lack of guidance and support. Athletes who perform individually already feel like it is them against the world. Some may have coaches who only care about outcome goals. These conditions can be hard for athletes to grapple with if performance is already poor. In addition, an athlete can be torn with finding their identity within an organization that promotes a toxic environment. With these crippling factors, it may be hard to perform at a high level. Dr. McCann would describe this as disruptive pressure (McCann, 2021). To combat this, tools that can be effective are needs assessment, performance readiness plan, and offensive and defensive mental skills. The needs assessment helps athletes determine what psychological skills could be hindering their performance (Williams & Krane, 2021).

Additionally, Dr. Cohen describes performance readiness assessment as how athletes discover their obstacles and identify the behaviors and how they want to change by addressing preparation, resilience, intensity, and focus (Cohen, 2021).

Lastly, I believe that a lack of self-regulation contributes to performance breakdown. We are unaware of how much impact many self-regulating behaviors, such as arousal and physiological symptoms, have on athletes and individuals. Although lack of talent can be a performance factor, what is the result of an athlete losing or being injured? Poor self-talk? Low confidence? Anger/frustration? The truth is, it is probably a combination of all of these and many more. The ability to control self-regulation can be achieved through adopting offensive and defensive skills as described by Dr. McCann in his chapter (McCann, 2021). These tools can be truly effective; however, awareness and attention to self must be present.

Group Development

Assembling individuals into a collective group or team can be a complex situation. One must consider one's values, mission, multicultural sensitivities, motivations, and many other factors. These factors can be described as inputs under an Input-Process-Outcome (IPO) Framework. Using the IPO model assumes that organizations consist of different levels of inputs stemming from individuality, group dynamics, and environmental factors that yield certain outcomes when individuals interact with their team members (Hackman & Morris, 1975). Understanding the different levels of variability can ultimately enhance one's awareness when bringing all walks of life together. It's important to note that no matter the model, time is an essential ingredient if you want to understand individual people, how they work with one another, and how they react to structural/organizational dynamics.

In conjunction, support from systems and organizations must create the conditions for the team to work effectively and achieve high performance. Similar to what Maynard et al. (2012) suggest, I believe that encouraging team and individual psychological empowerment will result in positive affect reactions and overall better performance. By doing so, each respective team member has an opportunity to be seen and heard without the fear of judgment because of the initial environment that was created.

Three group principles that are important to me are roles, communication, and "coopetition". As described earlier, I find that role identity is an important factor that contributes to motivation and a sense of inclusion at the individual level. This idea can help the initial team building stage as there is first individual alignment, then can proceed to the complexities of team/group dynamics. Furthermore, communication can often get lost when working with teams. Particularly when voices can't be heard from team members to leadership or persons with more authority. Using a top-down approach, I believe that leaders should focus on the mutual regard and respect of the people as Blake & Mouton (1972) described when leaders are aiming for a "Team Management" style. The team management style will capture the importance of the person and the task at hand. Lastly, "coopetition" is an important principle. Coined by Wenpin Tsai, "coopetition" is described as simultaneously competitive and cooperative behavior (Tsai, 2002). In the study, he describes that less centralization and social interaction amongst team members fosters trust and interunit knowledge sharing. In a space where the goal is typically to win, competition is inherent but must be balanced with cooperation within a team.

Many of my group management skills will consist of reflecting, summarizing, linking, and supporting. I think these skills encompass the humanistic psychology principles of putting

the client first and promoting a sense of self-actualization. I want my clients to vocalize what they are going through in the moment while I try to simplify and guide them through their journey. Much of my management is creating the conditions where athletes/teams can thrive.

As much as we know about the importance of multiculturalism and how we want to be inclusive and considerate, we all have blind spots. In addition, we have biases and feel more comfortable advocating and or supporting some things over others. Particularly when managing a group of people, it can be easy to overlook things and disregard voices. Areas of growth where I still need to develop more awareness and knowledge are topics on disability, LGBTQ+, and women's disparities. Although I may have limited knowledge in these specific areas, I feel as though I would still be able to handle these issues with care and honesty in hopes of fostering genuine relationships that revolve around minor rupture and repair.

Multicultural Aspects

Curiosity, openness, and willingness to mess up are things that come to mind when I think about multicultural awareness in my work. Curiosity is the idea to inquire more about something and to satisfy the urge to know more. I believe that the more we are curious about different cultures, languages, ideologies, and ultimately just humans, the more we can understand people for just being them. Not coming from a place of judgment or noticing glaring differences from oneself but just out of curiosity. When you look at kids, they tend to ask several questions as they develop. This is due to their infancy stages of life and being exposed to many different things all at once. Part of their development consists of trial and error, success and failure, and even reward and punishment. With this in mind, we can't blame children for saying the wrong things or making mistakes because, after all, they are innocently making mistakes. As we get

older, we tend to shy away from mistakes because of the fear of failure and eventually can become close-minded to new ideas and perspectives thus limiting our curiosity. I hope that I remain curious about whatever comes my way and meet my clients where they are.

Openness can be a tall task depending on the situation. Generally, I think it is fair to say that people can be open to things that keep them comfortable. However, things can change when someone is sharing that they have different political views than you or are anti- “fill in the blank ". I believe that I am neutral as it relates to most things. There are pros and cons to being neutral and I think an area of growth for me is being in a space of advocacy in spaces where I have privileges. As I mentioned earlier, groups for which I can be a better advocate are women, persons with disabilities, the LGBTQ+ community, and many more. When I think about advocacy, I would describe it as loud, bold, and conflicting. Naturally, my personality is quite the opposite, so my challenge is to push myself to be those things or find windows and pockets that can promote advocacy that isn't just in “secrecy” or behind the scenes.

Lastly, the idea of willingness to make mistakes. Oftentimes as people, we get in our way of learning. The constant, “what ifs”, “Did I say that correctly?”, “I don’t want to hurt their feelings”, etc. This can lead to avoidance behavior and lead to superficial conversations with people. My goal when working with individuals is to bring in the different cultural aspects and not shy away from wanting to know more. Ultimately, the hope is that this will lead to more authentic conversations where we can have fruitful discussions about life and what they are experiencing.

A couple of strengths as it relates to multicultural aspects consist of listening/offering space to understand and being nonjudgmental. I think it is understood that a group of people is

not a monolith. This perspective for me is key to understanding who my client is. I truly want to know more about the person and how they navigate life with all their identities if given the opportunity. This starts with listening, and I believe that I am a great listener who listens to understand rather than to respond. In conjunction with that, I like to think that I am nonjudgmental. Naturally, as humans, we judge individuals in a split second however, the key is to recognize the judgment and redirect your thoughts to being curious about an individual. Fear of judgment is a real problem in society, particularly in your adolescent/young adult years. With all the outside factors and stressors in life, the last thing a person wants is to be judged for just being themselves. My hope when I work with individuals is that I offer a space where they can be their authentic selves for the fifty minutes I see them so that they can build the confidence to shine bright, be bold, and be carefree in the world.

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Glossary

Foundations of Counseling Theories:

Humanistic: the client can reach towards self-actualization and growth through freedom, choice, creativity, spontaneity, and peak experiences (Jones-Smith, 2021, p. 202).

Self-Actualization: the most prevalent and motivating drive of human existence that we strive towards as we get older (Jones-Smith, 2021, p. 204).

Positive regard: a basic craving for affection that is within each person (Jones-Smith, 2021, p. 205).

Incongruence: The gap between the real self and the ideal self, the " I am" and the "I should" (Jones-Smith, 2021, p. 209).

Self-talk: the conversations people have with themselves or what people say to themselves when they are thinking (Jones-Smith, 2021, p. 126).

Authenticity: being aware and having genuine contact with self and others (Jones-Smith, 2021, p. 146).

Mindfulness: developing psychological flexibility and clarifying value behavior (Jones-Smith, 2021, p. 227).

Cognitive Defusion: distancing oneself from unhelpful and maladaptive thoughts (Jones-Smith, 2021, p. 148).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Maslow's theory that people are motivated by basic needs that will eventually lead to self-actualization (Hopper, 2020).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Acceptance and Commitment: the belief that suffering is inevitable and that learning to recontextualize and accept

experiences, deepen their values, and commit to behavior change is key (Jones-Smith, 2021, p. 146).

Theoretical Aspects of Sport and Performance Psychology:

Role: a set of responsibilities and expectations given to different people within an organization to help a team. (Williams & Krane, 2021, p. 129).

Conceptual model for group cohesion: this model demonstrates the complexities of group cohesion and how it relates to an individual's personal motivation and integration to a group (Williams & Krane, 2021, p. 127).

Motivational Climate: environmental factors that foster mastery and ego involvement (Williams & Krane, 2021, p. 365).

Self-determination theory: distinguishes between behaviors that individuals perform freely or autonomously and those that they pursue for more or less extrinsic or controlled reasons (Williams & Krane, 2021, p. 66).

Goal orientation: the criteria individuals use to define success (Williams & Krane, 2021, p. 365).

Emotional Intelligence: the ability to know one's own and other emotions (Goleman, 1983 as cited by Williams & Krane, 2021, p. 106).

Needs Assessment: reveal psychological skills that are deficient or appear to have the most adverse effect on performance (Williams & Krane, 2021, p. 339).

Self-efficacy: the belief that one is capable of successful behavior (Cervone, 1992 as cited by Williams & Krane, 2021, p. 51).

Pre-performance routines: modifying arousal to optimal levels and that used behavioral steps, attention control, and cue words to improve focus (Williams & Krane, 2021, p. 311).

Somatic anxiety reduction: learn to control your breathing in stressful situations by controlling physiological responses (Williams & Krane, 2021, p. 230).

Theories of Performance Excellence:

Living System Approach: interlocking structures that each retains consistent input, output, and processes that function as an interdependent whole (Ottley, 2021, p. 257).

Attention: focused on present moment execution to prevent judgment on worry about the outcome (Haberl, 2021, p. 100).

Mental FITness: focus, inspiration, and trust are key pillars in one's ability to perform at a high level (Aoyagi et al., 2017, p. 7)

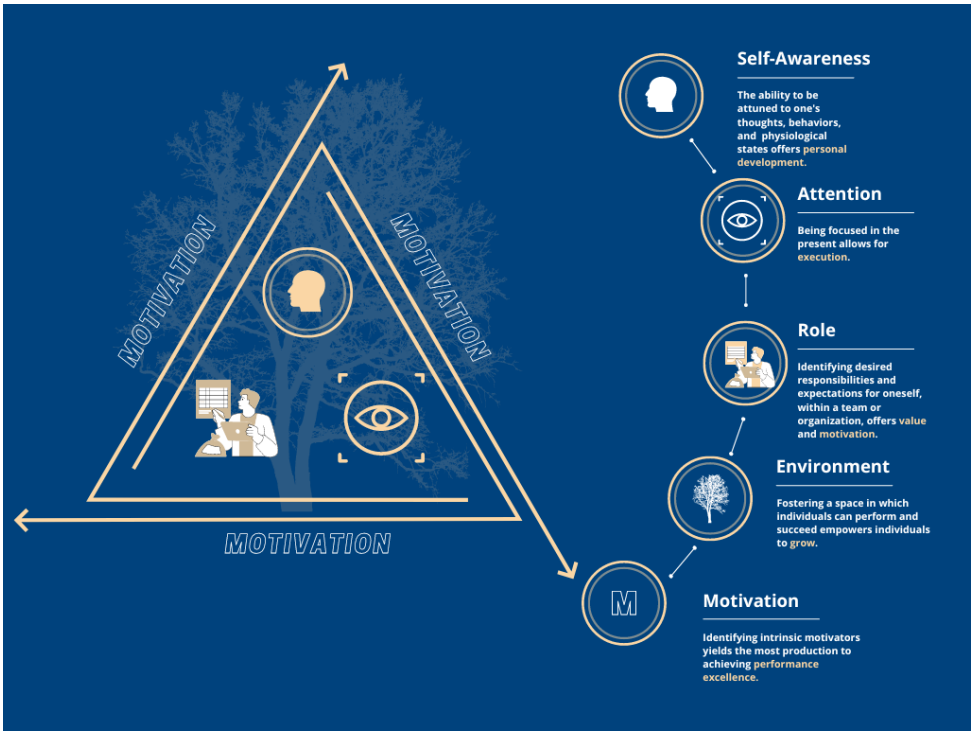
Five Senses of Grounding: utilizes the five senses to direct your thoughts to your body (B. Jones, personal communication, October 6, 2022).

HEART model: consists of two components that leads to athlete motivation: intrinsic motivation and unquenchable work ethic (Henschen, 2021, p. 165).

Offensive/Defensive Mental skills: mental skills that can help with competition and skills that help with being consistent in different environments (McCann, 2021, p.177-178).

Faith: the strong belief in your own and your team's abilities (Pensgaard, 2021, p. 287).

Disruptive pressure: a level of pressure so high that it overwhelms your normal stress and pressure management skills (McCann, 2021, p. 184).

Performance Readiness Plan: integrates the concepts described in detail within a structured framework addressing four main areas: preparation, resilience, intensity, and focus. (Cohen, 2021, p. 55).

Communication: delivering feedback allows the receiver to internalize the information (Fink, 2021, p. 73).