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Construction of collective self-determination in development-oriented group discussions

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to explore the construction of collective self-determination in development-oriented group discussions. This paper provides empirical understanding of how collective self-determination is constructed in social interaction using certain communication styles.

Design/methodology/approach – The qualitative data were based on four development-oriented group discussions (totaling 180 min) of supervisors from Finnish central hospital and information and communication technology organization. Participants from hospitals worked as head nurses, while those from information technology organizations worked as leaders and project managers. The data were analysed through interaction and content analyses.

Findings – Based on the findings, collective self-determination is constructed in social interaction through speech sections in which individuals' different speech acts facilitate basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. In collective self-determination, the individual and the collective are emphasized at the same time, meaning that collective self-determination cannot occur without individual-level self-determination.

Practical implications – Organizations and teams should focus on finding suitable ways to implement collective self-determination and consider the importance of social interaction and certain communication styles. Moreover, employees should be offered enough resources and support to be able to work in collectively self-determined manner.

Originality/value – The study offered an approach to understand self-determination and its construction in group discussions aiming at collective learning. Collective self-determination emphasizes the group and its ability to be autonomous, responsible and capable to learn and to orient toward common goals and tasks. As



such, it extends the previous understanding of self-determination as collective-level phenomenon. More research is needed in the context of working life.

Keywords Collective self-determination, Self-determination theory, Group discussions, Workplace learning, ICT organization, Hospital

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Due to continuous change and the increased amount of expert work, organizations have been forced to find new ways of organizing work to increase employees' learning and development and thus achieve a competitive advantage (Power and Waddell, 2004). Modern expert work, seen as continuous learning and development, requires autonomy, freedom and responsibility (Saks and Leijen, 2014; Noe and Ellingson, 2017). Employees are expected to be active, willing, able and interested in learning – in other words, be self-determined and have strong intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000). However, expert work is rarely completed alone. Learning emerges as a collective form in addition to individual practices. Cooperation, sharing expertise, teamwork and group situations with colleagues are essential to ensure the completion of daily work tasks (Lemmetty, 2020; Stabel *et al.*, 2022). Self-determination is not the only essential requirement of expert work; collective team-level self-determination is as well (Keronen *et al.*, 2023). Although autonomous and self-organized teams have been used in organizations in response to demands for continuous change and learning requirements (Lee and Edmondson, 2017), studies on collective self-determination in the context of learning in expert work are lacking (Keronen *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, the current study approaches self-determination at the collective level.

In the field of adult education, previous studies have shown that collegiality and social interaction are vital resources for learning at work, as learning occurs through participation in socially shared practices in the work community (Billett, 2014). In addition to individual-oriented perspectives, self-determination has been studied from a sociocultural perspective that emphasizes the collective nature of expert work (Lemmetty, 2020). These practices are essential enablers of self-determination and the fulfillment of basic psychological needs that intrinsically motivate employees (Keronen *et al.*, 2023). When enhancing people's basic psychological needs and their commitment to certain behaviors, autonomy-supportive communication styles are crucial (Martela *et al.*, 2021). When the responsibility of the work and learning has shifted from organizations to teams (Ellinger, 2005; Noe and Ellingson, 2017), the focus should be on self-determination as a collective activity (Lemmetty, 2020), not as individual abilities (Hetzner *et al.*, 2012). The essential question is how the team can orient itself in social interaction toward a common direction of learning, achieving goals and completing complex and problem-driven work tasks.

Research on self-determination has tended to focus on individual-oriented perspectives (Rigby and Ryan, 2018), although the fulfillment of basic needs not only relies on the individual's own activity but is also influenced by the demands, obstacles and affordances of the sociocultural context (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Thus, the motivational processes behind self-determination theory (SDT) at the individual level may also operate at the group level (Thomas *et al.*, 2017). Collective self-determination has been previously studied in the context of indigenous people and democracy (Murphy, 2014; Zuehl, 2016) but not in the context of work (Keronen *et al.*, 2023). Martela *et al.* (2021) offered theoretical techniques for using autonomy-supportive communication styles to engage in certain behaviors, but empirical research on these communication techniques is needed. Moreover, SDT should be used more in organizational contexts (Gagné and Deci, 2005) and different learning environments

(Hsu *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, this study explores self-determination from a collective perspective as a sociocultural phenomenon constructed through speech acts in social interactions. The study approaches the construction of collective self-determination in the context of development-oriented group discussions with supervisors from a central hospital and an information and communication technology (ICT) organization. This study contributes to previous research on self-determination by empirically exploring on the interpersonal level how basic psychological needs are enhanced by certain communication styles (see [Martela *et al.*, 2021](#)). Hence, the study aims to increase the understanding of self-determination as a collective-level phenomenon approached from adult education perspective.

2. Collective self-determination

SDT is based on three basic psychological needs that are essential for optimal development and well-being: autonomy, competence and relatedness ([Ryan and Deci, 2000](#)). Self-determination can be described as a perceived sense of autonomy and possibility of choice, need for knowledge and competence, need to belong in the community and meaningfulness ([Rigby and Ryan, 2018](#)). When the three needs are fulfilled, individuals can be assumed to be self-motivated, active, inspired ([Ryan and Deci, 2000](#)) and learning-oriented through personal initiative they take ([Hetzner *et al.*, 2012](#)). In other words, they have strong inner motivation. The three needs underlie proactivity, engagement, and thus certain behaviors ([Rigby and Ryan, 2018](#)). As noted above, research on basic psychological needs has tended to focus on individual-oriented perspectives ([Rigby and Ryan, 2018](#)). However, the fulfillment of these needs depends on the social and contextual conditions, opportunities and requirements that either facilitate or hinder people's self-motivation, performance and development ([Ryan and Deci, 2000](#)). In the context of learning at work, social interaction in the community enables basic psychological needs to be fulfilled on individual ([Keronen *et al.*, 2023](#)) and collective level. In social interaction, autonomy can be supported by offering certain limitations for behavior in autonomy-supportive ways, that is, by explaining why limits are necessary and giving a clear rationale ([Martela *et al.*, 2021](#); [Rigby and Ryan, 2018](#)). Moreover, providing structure, feedback and guidance on how to adhere to the necessary rules supports the need for competence ([Martela *et al.*, 2021](#)). In addition, relatedness is supported by enhancing the sense of belongingness, connection, mutual bond and trust ([Martela *et al.*, 2021](#); [Rigby and Ryan, 2018](#)).

From sociological perspective, collective self-determination is defined as a phenomenon in which people jointly control the institutions that structure their social world ([Zuehl, 2016](#)). In collective self-determination, the roles of autonomy and self-determined motivation stem from group membership rather than from individuals. Collective self-determination can be described as the freedom to decide what actions the group takes and why ([Thomas *et al.*, 2017](#)). Thus, behind collective self-determination is engagement in certain behaviors (see [Martela *et al.*, 2021](#)) as one unit. Collective self-determination can be approached as a group's collective capability to enhance freedom and well-being ([Murphy, 2014](#)). Although the phenomenon of collective self-determination has not been studied in adult education or the workplace context, the practices and features that manifest collective self-determination have already been used in organizations.

3. Self-organized, autonomous teams as manifestations of collective self-determination in the work context

In the organizational context, collective self-determination manifests as different team-level practices and processes through which employees at the team level work in a self-determined and self-organized manner toward their goals and tasks. The aim of these practices and

processes, which usually use self-organization and lower hierarchical configurations (Lee and Edmondson, 2017), is to improve employees' work and learning (see Bunderson and Boumgarden, 2010; Power and Waddell, 2004). Different autonomous and self-organized teams are understood as examples of collective self-determination, as teams have autonomy, responsibility and more control over their own work and ongoing projects (Auvinen *et al.*, 2018; Laloux, 2014; Langfred, 2000) and thus have strong self-determination regarding daily work tasks (Wall *et al.*, 1986). Teams regulate their behavior when completing work tasks (Cohen and Ledford, 1994), for example, by setting goals, analyzing problems, making plans and evaluating their performance (Laloux, 2014). Higher autonomy and responsibility of work support intrinsic motivation behind employees' actions (Laloux, 2014), emphasizing the idea of SDT as basis for function of teams. They have high degree of independence, leadership, dedication and collation (Patanakul *et al.*, 2012), which requires increased communication among team members (Muthusamy *et al.*, 2005). Moreover, communication, coordination, mutual support, effort and cohesion have been found to define the self-organized team's quality and performance (Zaimovic *et al.*, 2021). Successful implementation requires self-organized team's ability to align their tasks goals and strategies (Nederveen Pieterse *et al.*, 2019).

Although self-organized and autonomous teams work largely on their own and have autonomy, they are not uncontrolled. Leadership is needed to avoid instability, ambiguity and prevent chaos, although at the same time leadership should not be controlling, diminishing creativity and spontaneity (Moe *et al.*, 2008). Leadership in these teams can be approached from a plural perspective as "power-with" leadership, in which the knowledge needed to complete the work tasks is held by individuals and teams instead of individual leaders. This refers to a model in which leadership is collectively everyone's responsibility and constructed through social interaction. (Salovaara and Bathurst, 2018). The self-organization of teams does not mean that there is no structure. There are practices and structures that indicate how teams should work, make decisions and share roles (Laloux, 2014). Clear structures are also needed to ensure that colleagues provide enough support for learning (Bunderson and Boumgarden, 2010) and that supervisors avoid unwanted outcomes, such as unclear responsibilities and outsourcing of or absence of responsibility (Bell, 2017; Collin *et al.*, 2021). In innovative work, self-organized teams with stronger capabilities, freedom and autonomy can perform better than other teams (Patanakul *et al.*, 2012) based on intensified commitment to the team (Muthusamy *et al.*, 2005). Although, teams with higher levels of structure (i.e. higher levels of specialization, formalization and hierarchy) can promote learning by creating a safe and predictable team environment where information is shared freely and conflicts are reduced. However, the different ways of self-organizing work do not mean leaving individuals or teams without support (Collin *et al.*, 2018) or structure. Instead, finding a balance between autonomy and support (Collin *et al.*, 2021) when implementing self-organized teams is essential.

4. Learning through group discussions as a context for collective self-determination

In this study, collective self-determination is explored in the context of development-oriented group discussions aimed at developing participants' competencies and knowledge through discussion, dialogue and shared meaning. Therefore, these group discussions are approached as collective learning situations. Learning through group discussions is essential also in participant's daily work environments at hospital and ICT organization, since learning and social interaction can be seen intertwined rather than separate elements of expert work (Collin, 2008). In these both work environments, multiple practices and processes of learning through discussions are crucial, since the completion of daily work tasks is based on employees' expertise and at the team-level sharing competencies and working together. These

kinds of practices and processes emphasize the importance of collective learning based on collegiality, social interaction and participation in socially shared practices (Billett, 2014).

In hospital, learning occurs in social interactions with colleagues (Brooks *et al.*, 2017; Stabel *et al.*, 2022) through one's own work, theory or guidance, reflections on work experiences and life outside of work (Berings *et al.*, 2008). Collaboration and giving feedback play a critical role in sharing of what has been learned (Kyndt *et al.*, 2016; Riera Claret *et al.*, 2020) when completion of everyday tasks is based on consulting and interprofessional teamwork (Pimmer *et al.*, 2013). In the ICT field, learning is linked to everyday work and framed by solving complex problems (Collin, 2008) and working with technologies (Vähäsantanen and Eteläpelto, 2017). Learning takes place either through interactions with colleagues and customers or independently as information retrieval (Gijbels *et al.*, 2012; Lemmetty, 2020), which requires employees' autonomy and control over their own learning processes (Bell, 2017; Frenkel and Sanders, 2007). Although learning in the ICT field takes independent forms, it should not be seen as totally autonomous or independent (Lemmetty, 2020), since the work is completed in projects that include multiple experts and customers requiring learning together and sharing competencies. Therefore, in both work organizations, learning as collective-level phenomenon relies on collegiality, community, group situations and teamwork (Lemmetty, 2020).

5. Research aim and question

The purpose of this study is to explore the construction of collective self-determination in development-oriented group discussions. Moreover, this study approaches collective self-determination in social interaction and through speech acts facilitating autonomy, competence and relatedness in these discussions. Thus, the following research question is posed:

How is collective self-determination constructed by speech acts in development-oriented group discussions?

6. Methodology

As the purpose is to explore collective self-determination in development-oriented group discussions, this study relies on understanding self-determination and learning as socially constructed phenomena. Hence, in this study, learning at the group level is approached as a sociocultural phenomenon, such as an interaction among the individual, others and the environment (Billett, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). We understand learning occurring in interpersonal activities among people in a social learning system (John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996; Wenger, 1998) and interactional processes through which the basic psychological needs are either fulfilled or hindered (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

The aim of this study was to examine how the participants in the group construct collective self-determination through social interaction (Poole *et al.*, 1999) and look at how their behavior in the meaning-making process creates new knowledge and understanding (Burtis and Turman, 2006). The interaction analysis at the interpersonal level (McLeod *et al.*, 2010) was applied because the interest was in interactional activity. Particularly, we explored the underlying actions and meanings of speeches constructing collective self-determination. The interaction analysis allows to reveal dialogical details of the meaning-making process (Marková *et al.*, 2007) constructing collective self-determination in the group interaction. Moreover, content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) was applied to understand the content of the discussions.

6.1 Data

The data for this study was collected as part of a larger research and development project in Finland aimed to produce understanding of sustainability of learning in expert work. Part of this project was to conduct a group coaching sessions as an intervention aimed to increase participants' knowledge of workplace learning in sustainable way and how it can be supported in supervisory work (Collin *et al.*, 2023). The data used in this study was collected from these group coaching sessions, which occurred as concrete development-oriented group discussions. The data consisted of audio recordings ($n = 180$ min) from four sessions – two at a central hospital and two at an ICT organization. These two organizations were chosen because daily work tasks in these rely on teamwork, project work, collaboration and employees' ability to communicate with each other in a multiprofessional manner. Moreover, the work can be described as expert work requiring continuous learning and development at individual and collective levels.

As the aim of the group coaching sessions was to increase the participants understanding of how to support workplace learning, all participants had supervisory roles that included employees' guidance. The participants from the ICT organization were team leaders and project managers, and the participants from the central hospital were physicians and head nurses. The group coaching sessions were conducted by two people, one facilitating the conversation and the other as a researcher, focusing more on taking notes and observing the situation. The first author conducted the hospital meetings. The role of the facilitator was to guide each session, instruct and facilitate the tasks. Group discussions conducted as face-to-face meetings, and either four or five participants attended the sessions. The content for the discussions was designed by the researchers of the project and was not part of the university's curriculum or of specific learning goals or certificates. At the beginning of each session, a short orientation for the current topic was provided by the facilitator, and then planned tasks were conducted through which the participants shared their own experiences, knowledge and competencies in group discussion aimed to achieve learning. Interaction and open conversation between the participants and between the facilitator and the participants were emphasized during the discussions. In both groups, the participants mostly knew each other, although they did not all work with each other on a daily basis.

6.2 Analysis

Before the systematic analysis, the audio recordings were transcribed. The analysis process, methods and data used are described in Table 1. below. In the first phase of the analysis, learning episodes were identified and reviewed to limit the data to those relevant to the study. In this study, an "episode" is defined as a coherent section of speech that can be distinguished from the rest of the discussion (Marková *et al.*, 2007) based on sections where participants create new knowledge and learn together through shared understanding and negotiations of meanings. First, the ends of the episodes were located by finding the point at which the participants made a conclusion or summary or when new knowledge and understanding occurred based on the preceding conversation. Then, the beginnings of the episodes were located by reading the transcripts from the end backward and locating the point at which participants started to discuss the current topic, and others actively brought their own perspectives and thoughts to the conversation. This phase required to focus on the content of the conversation, highlighting the content analytical approach of the analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). In learning episodes, individual participants bring their own knowledge and understanding of the topic; this can be understood as individual learning. After these perspectives are challenged and discussed together by other participants, they are either accepted, modified or rejected. At the end of an episode, conclusions or summaries can be

Table 1. Framework of the analysis

Phase of analysis	I Learning episodes	II Answering research question	
Analysis section	New knowledge and learning in the group	Initial analysis: Construction of learning episodes by speech sections illustrating autonomy, competence and relatedness	Subsequent analysis: facilitative speech acts
Data	Development-oriented group discussions	Learning episodes	Speech sections illustrating autonomy, competence and relatedness
Target of the analysis	Episodes	Speech sections	Speech acts
Analysis method	Classification into episodes based on the theme discussed (Marková <i>et al.</i> , 2007)	Interaction analysis (McLeod <i>et al.</i> , 2010) and analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005)	Qualitative content
Basis	Data-based	Theory-driven	Data-based
Findings	Learning episodes	Speech sections illustrating autonomy, competence and relatedness	Speech acts facilitating autonomy, competence and relatedness in group interactions

Source: Authors' own work

understood as new knowledge emerging in the group – that is, collective learning. All these coherent sections of speeches, i.e. learning episodes, were separated from the rest of the data. Altogether, 16 learning episodes formed a basis for the second phase of the analysis, which answers the research question.

In the initial analysis of the second phase, speech sections illustrating autonomy, competence and relatedness were located and color-coded from the learning episodes in a theory-driven manner (Martela *et al.*, 2021; Ryan and Deci, 2000). These speech sections were part of learning episodes, consisted of multiple comments, and were formed by the analysis process. For instance, a section of the speech was interpreted to demonstrate competence when the conversation indicated that the participants' goal was to acquire and develop new knowledge and skills.

In the subsequent analysis of the second phase, the focus was on individual speech acts that facilitate autonomy, competence and relatedness in speech sections found in initial analysis. The speech sections were further divided into speech acts. Hence, the unit of analysis was speech act (McLeod *et al.*, 2010), and interaction analyses at the interpersonal level (McLeod *et al.*, 2010) and content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) were applied. In data-driven location of the speech acts, individual speeches were approached as activity aimed to construct collective self-determination (see Burtis and Turman, 2006). Moreover, the focus was on how the information has been shared in the discussion, what is the tone of the speeches and what is the underlying function of the speeches in discussion. Hence, the way participants communicate in group was the focus on analysis (Poole *et al.*, 1999), and therefore, the behavior was analysed at the social interactional level (Burtis and Turman, 2006). Furthermore, the content of the conversation was examined at the same time to make sure the interpretation of the meaning and function of the speeches were understood

Table 2. Example of the interpretation of analysis process

Participant	Citation	Interpretation of the meaning and function of speech	Speech act
Participant 3:	<i>And that is our goal that one of our head nurses would always do a shift [at the department] during three weeks period, because that is where you get the information that oh lord this is how things work now</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → can be interpreted as a common and mutual goal since the participant uses the word “our” in speech and because the following participant continue providing instructions related to goal → create structure to discussion since it expresses of what is expected or required behavior → aims to engage and participate people to discussions through achieving this goal 	Setting goals
Participant 4:	<i>But you have kind of remind yourself that you don't stay, you must put it on your calendar that you actually go there, because they [visits at the department] are very useful</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → provides concrete instructions how working at the department would be possible and explains possible obstacles (limitation of time) for others to be considered → by considering the instructions others can make a change as capable and competent people → support competence by acknowledging the actions required to achieve the goals → engage others to the goal and discussion by describing the positive benefits 	Providing instructions

Source: Authors' own work

correctly. Although the aim was not to determine specific themes, as is usually the case in content analysis. (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) All speech acts were located and coded by describing their initial meaning and function in group discussion. For example, participants' comments asking to get more information or criticizing something were categorized under speech act of evaluating information and offering critical comments. Moreover, the speech acts of evaluating information and offering critical comments were understood to support competence since they offered construction and structure into conversation and support possibilities to participate. All speech acts were categorized under three categories: autonomy, competence and relatedness based on which psychological needs they are facilitating. Table 2 below shows an example of the speech section of competence including data citations and illustrates the interpretation process of speech acts from hospital's group discussion.

7. Findings

7.1 Construction of collective self-determination: speech sections illustrating autonomy, competence and relatedness

Collective self-determination was constructed in learning episodes by speech sections illustrating autonomy, competence and relatedness and the facilitating speech acts. The

learning episodes contained multiple speech sections, which varied during each episode. The length of the speech sections included several comment periods attended by one or more people. In addition, one comment attended by one person could consist of several sentences, for example, first illustrating competence and then changing to illustrate autonomy. In learning episodes, every speech section *illustrating* autonomy, competence and relatedness was important, since each had its own purpose and role in constructing collective self-determination, as seen in [Figure 1](#). As illustrated, every speech section contained individuals' speech acts *facilitating* autonomy, competence or relatedness. The purpose of speech acts was to construct the group's common and shared practices and activities to promote interaction, creation of common direction and learning, and thus construct collective self-determination. In the following sections, we first describe every speech section illustrating either autonomy, competence or relatedness with data example. After every speech section, we describe the facilitative speech acts that describe the speech sections in more detail.

7.2 Autonomy: supporting self-reliance and freedom of choice and action by sharing knowledge

Speech sections illustrating autonomy consisted of participants' speech acts that shared knowledge and competencies, gave meaningful rationale and provided choices and suggestions. The learning episodes usually started with a speech section illustrating autonomy, aiming to bring up information, knowledge and expertise to conversation through one's own expertise. Moreover, aim was to deepen the groups' understanding; therefore, autonomy speech sections were the most frequent in the learning episodes. In addition, the speech acts in these speech sections overlapped, and the differences in speech acts were the most subtle. Participants' freedom and self-reliance were supported by autonomy speech sections. The citation below from a group discussion with the ICT organization illustrates a speech section of autonomy, as Participant 4 provides a rationale regarding the organization's brand and its visibility. After this, Participant 1 elaborates and deepens the conversation by explaining what might affect the brand's visibility on social media based on his/her own expertise:



Source: Authors own work

Figure 1. Construction of collective self-determination by speech sections illustrating autonomy, competence and relatedness and the facilitating speech acts

Participant 4: So [company name] does not appear on the media platforms. Is it our marketing that causes us to not have the same kind of visibility as those kinds of interesting student brands?

Participant 1: I think this is partly because [company name] is quite fresh as a brand. [The previous name of the company] was not like that at all.

7.2.1 Speech acts facilitating autonomy. The aim of sharing knowledge and competence was for one participant to introduce their knowledge and understanding to the group for discussion, thus deepening their understanding of the topic. When participants shared knowledge and competencies, the topic is somehow important to the speaker, and it is based on the speaker's own experiences, perspectives or expertise, as the following citation shows. Participant 4 (hospital) uses the words "I see" to illustrate how the comments are based on his/her own experiences from work: "I see that you also need to have pure organization hard work. Sharing responsibilities, sharing tasks – so many times, you need to organize first before it [learning] starts to flow." The participant does not tell others how they should perform but let others review the comment and then agree or disagree, thus participating as capable individuals making their own conclusions.

Speech acts providing a meaningful rationale consisted of examples of the topic discussed or reasoning that could uncover the potential consequences of the issue or highlight why an issue was essential. Providing meaningful rationale broadened and deepened the conversation and raised issues that had not been previously addressed. Providing meaningful rationale supports autonomy and voluntary commitment, as the participants themselves could commit to arguments and perspectives as responsible actors after evaluating the information. The following citation represents speech act of giving meaningful rationale because Participant 1 (ICT) continued the previous conversation of the developmental discussions by justifying that they actually go through the current and previous work tasks as well as the future tasks: "Yes we go through what is going on currently, what kinds of work tasks and how stressful or time consuming they are and then we consider the goals we have set, what has happened last year, what we are doing right now and what is supposed to be done in the future." When others understand why some decisions have been made, they can evaluate it and thus make own conclusions. Giving meaningful rationale helps to understand the reasons behind conclusions.

Providing choices and suggestions regarding the topic under discussion offered new ideas and thoughts to all group members to ponder together. Choices and suggestions supported autonomy because they offered other possibilities to actively contribute to the decisions and thus be part of the meaning-making process. They were not presented as truth, guidelines or plans, although the main purpose was to influence the discussion. Instead, they suggested possible courses of action and supported participants' freedom of engagement, choice and action as competent people. Making suggestions and choices encourages others to engage in conversation and draw their own opinions. For example, participant 2 (hospital) suggests that they could have thematic events in their work organization, and by this suggestion she/he leaves room for other opinions and thus makes it possible to exchange ideas and receive other opinions: "But it could be this kind of thematic event, what we could [go through], not necessarily all [topics] mixed up, but such as for example event related to medicines."

7.3 Competence: supporting capability and participation by providing structure and guidance

Speech sections illustrating competence consisted of speech acts of providing feedback, evaluating information, providing critical comments, making concrete plans, setting goals or providing instructions. Aim of speech sections of competence was to support participants'

capabilities, offer opportunities for reflection and participation and provide guidance and structure for the discussion. Speech sections created structure and direct discussion since orientation was toward both the future and past at the same time. Speech sections illustrating competence offered checkpoints to ponder previous discussions and direct discussions toward future, if needed. In the following discussion from the hospital group, Participant 1 makes a critical comment aimed at evaluating the work and practices of the surgery unit. Discussion continues with Participant 5, asking a clarifying question to confirm that the topic was understood in the same way. After the question, the participants continued to try to understand the problem raised by Participant 1:

Participant 1: We have made some serious mistakes over the years when you thought about it. For example, we have eliminated one of the biggest policy lines, so that it has really changed.

Participant 5: What do you mean by that?

7.3.1 Speech acts facilitating competence. Speech acts providing feedback could be either positive or negative and focused on the issues discussed, for example, highlighting the pros and cons. In addition, participants usually provided arguments and reasoning to support their feedback. These types of speech acts had an evaluative tone and were directed at an issue raised earlier in the discussion. The following citation describes the speech act of providing feedback, since the participant refers directly to the previous comment by calling the participant by name and then continues explaining the positive aspects of the organization's employer image: "Kind of what you [name of the participant] said that the employer image is pretty strong and in my opinion it is something we should focus on significantly more, because things are actually pretty good here compared to lot of other companies our size, or smaller or bigger." (Participant 2, ICT). Competence is supported since specific feedback signals recognition and appreciation of efforts. Feedback can also be corrective, highlighting necessary changes.

Evaluating information allowed participants to ponder issues at a deeper level. Information was evaluated through critical comments or otherwise by taking a strong stance on the issue at hand or by asking specific or challenging questions. By this speech act, participants could obtain more information or confirm issues discussed previously. These critical comments and questions were unexpected and direct comments that were not multidimensional. They simplified or exacerbated issues evoking emotions in other participants and invited them to participate, thus facilitating their competence and participation. The following example facilitates competence because making a critical question participant offers other's possibilities to engage in conversation and participate by answering the question: "But are these [online courses] actually an improvement when compared to the old practices? Was there before any [induction process] at all?" (Participant 5, hospital). Evaluating information made participants question their perspectives and allowed them to speak directly and face problems. Participants could understand the issue at hand and use their competence and capability to make decisions. Without this kind of criticism, some important issues might not have been considered in the conversation.

Competence was facilitated by making concrete plans, setting goals and providing instructions through evaluation and in-depth reflection of information in the group. In this way, participants learn new things, develop themselves, influence the issue at hand or change their own behavior, supporting their sense of capability. Making plans, setting goals and providing instructions summarized the previously discussed issues and led the conversation to an end. By setting goals, participants could acknowledge challenges or problems by first identifying them and then providing an instruction on how the situation could be handled in a different way, as the following citation shows: "I also try to organize [the project cycle] so that there always would be the new person, who needs to go back through the basics again and after that takes responsibility of

induction process.” (Participant 4, ICT). This citation is an example of making goals and instructions based on previous comments, highlighting the aim of circulating people so that anyone does not have to take care of the process alone for too long. Participants provided others with instructions of what is expected or what is desirable behavior and how the goal could be achieved.

7.4 Relatedness: creating shared understanding and common ground by acknowledging others’ perspectives

Speech sections illustrating relatedness in the learning episodes consisted of speech acts showing a sense of community and compassion, encouraging and supporting others and considering the perspectives of others. Speech sections illustrating relatedness were difficult to distinguish from those illustrating autonomy or competence. Speech acts facilitating relatedness followed those facilitating autonomy or competence in the same or next sentence. Based on the following conversation, it was possible to interpret speech acts facilitating relatedness. Speech sections illustrating relatedness played an important role in constructing collective self-determination by creating a common and shared understanding and providing conclusions. Speech sections illustrating relatedness were essential because their aim was to confirm ideas discussed were understood in the same way and thus accepted, allowing participants to create a shared vision and foster collective learning.

The excerpt from the hospital’s group discussion below illustrates a section of relatedness because Participant 3 humorously replies to Participant 5 with a comment on how physicians’ particular working methods and behavior are reflected in nurses’ work. Other participants replied positively, reinforcing Participant 3’s comment. Through this kind of positive and relieving moment, participants create a sense of community and connection with each other with this specific group of people. After this positive moment of relatedness, participants were able to continue the conversation in depth:

Participant 5: Well, yes, or no. Yes, I identify [...] But from a different perspective, the doctor’s or physician’s work is different in a way that I do not have that kind of community, where there would be more of these so-called problems. It is kind of an expert organization where everyone works as they please, and then you have to figure it out.

Participant 3: It [the physician’s way of working] will be reflected back to us.

Participant 1: That is an excellent comment.

Participant 4: That is a good one: everyone does what they like.

7.4.1 Speech acts facilitating relatedness. Relatedness was facilitated through a sense of community and compassion in the conversation. Humorous and ironic comments which served as relief of tension usually evoked positive responses and allowed others to acknowledge these comments by joining it. Comments included jokes or humor only this group of people can understand because content was linked to their everyday work and field. This common understanding supports their belongingness to the group and connection to each other. For example, Participant 5 (hospital) explained how the [name of the building] “contributes to the lack of physical facilities to discuss with colleagues, share ideas, and thus learn together.” This comment can be understood as ironic since group previously discussed how they had moved to a new, larger hospital, but the facilities in new hospital didn’t offer places to hold discussions as a team. This speech act sends a message of “rowing the same boat” facilitating relatedness. After comments evoking positive emotions, participants deeper the conversation which can be understood as a sign of creating common ground and a

sense of belongingness. Comments were also an important sign to others that specifically this group of people can handle sensitive topics or problems.

Relatedness was facilitated by encouraging and supporting each other through making positive comments, praising others or offering other positive expressions. Supportive comments are understood as an important indicator for commenters that others value their opinions and ideas as trusted messengers. As the following citation shows, participant could, for example, indicate that the issue is important by encouraging: "Now we are on the right track." (Participant 4, ICT). Relatedness was facilitated through encouraging and supportive comments, since the participants created a positive and open atmosphere where everyone can participate, express their ideas and be part of the discussion and the community. These speech acts support relatedness since they created compassion between the participants by expressing enthusiasm, pursuing ideas expressed and praising each other.

The aim of considering, appreciating and accepting others' perspectives is to confirm ideas expressed were accepted and that all group members understood topics discussed in the same way. This enables group to make mutually shared decisions and conclusions. Accepting speech acts were also important, as they enable group to internally create shared and accepted ways of communicating. In the following example participant facilitates relatedness by listening others' opinions and taking them into account by respectfully saying that he/she understands the previous participant's point of view. After this, participant continues to provide a meaningful rationale for his/her opinion: "As such, I also understand that point of view if you see that it [training] does not fit his/her career path. Although I don't know the context of the training or what the options were that he/she would have wanted and what were offered to him/her." Participant 3 (ICT). By this speech act, other's opinions are not ignored, which creates trustful and respectful atmosphere, thus sense of relatedness, allowing participants to also offer different opinions. When everyone's opinion is valuable, participants are allowed to make mistakes and learn from them. Thus, relatedness is facilitated by openness and commitment to common and shared visions.

8. Discussion

This study has elaborated the understanding of self-determination as a collective-level phenomenon. Based on the findings, collective self-determination emphasizes the group and its ability to be autonomous, responsible and capable (Murphy, 2014) to learn and to orient toward common goals and tasks. Collective self-determination can be approached as freedom to decide what actions the group takes and why (Thomas *et al.*, 2017) to be able to develop their competence and knowledge, thus complete the work tasks. Furthermore, essential feature of collective self-determination is group's freedom to create these required actions to learn and complete the tasks through social interaction. Collective self-determination is constructed by speech sections and the facilitating speech acts of autonomy, competence or relatedness that describe the sections in deeper level. Participants used certain communication styles to support the group's autonomy and motivation to engage in certain behavior (Martela *et al.*, 2021) – that is collective self-determination. The findings of this study confirm the previous idea of the importance of collegial and collective learning situations relying on social interaction in supporting self-determination in individual (Keronen *et al.*, 2023) and collective level. In this study, the autonomy-supportive communication techniques have been contributed and elaborated empirically (Martela *et al.*, 2021) in the context of collective learning.

First, autonomy can be facilitated by sharing knowledge and competencies, giving meaningful rationale and providing choices and suggestions. The findings demonstrated that the meaning of these speech acts is to treat people as responsible and reasonable individuals

rather than subordinates who need to be controlled (Martela *et al.*, 2021). In line with previous understandings, autonomy-supportive communication means explaining why certain issues are important to consider and providing meaningful rationale (Martela *et al.*, 2021; Rigby and Ryan, 2018) for others to be reviewed. Second, competence can be facilitated by speech acts that provide feedback, evaluate information, offer critical comments, make concrete plans, set goals and provide instructions. The meaning of these competence-supportive speech acts is to provide structure and clarity regarding what is expected and how to achieve a certain behavior (Martela *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, aim is to support participants capability and participation in interaction as competent people. Although addressing key obstacles for behavioral change (Martela *et al.*, 2021) did not play a major role in supporting competence in this study, essential was to address possible conflicts and complex problems by criticizing and evaluating information. Third, the findings show that relatedness can be supported in interaction by showing a sense of community and compassion, encouraging and supporting others and considering others' perspectives. In line with previous studies, the sense of belongingness, connection, mutual bond and trust are essential in supporting relatedness (Martela *et al.*, 2021; Rigby and Ryan, 2018). Moreover, acknowledging others' perspectives demonstrated that people have a natural desire to be understood and to care for others (Martela *et al.*, 2021), which creates trustful, respectful and supportive atmosphere needed for learning and working in the group.

Based on the findings, collective self-determination is based on individuals' actions and initiatives in social interaction. In collective self-determination, the individual and the collective are both emphasized, meaning that group-level self-determination cannot occur without individuals and their actions. Behind collective self-determination is individual-level self-determination (see Keronen *et al.*, 2023), but the actions of individuals in collective self-determination are targeted at orientating others' behaviors instead of one's own, and the group and its actions are emphasized. However, every group working together cannot be considered automatically collectively self-determined. Based on the findings, a group can be seen as using collective self-determination when it makes decisions about work assignments and working methods (Cohen and Ledford, 1994), sets goals for actions, analyses possible problems occurring, makes plans and evaluates its own performance (Laloux, 2014). An essential feature of collective self-determination is group's autonomy and responsibility for its own work and the working methods (Auvinen *et al.*, 2018).

The balance between guiding and supporting autonomy and freedom is essential for collective self-determination (see Collin *et al.*, 2021). Based on the findings, it seems that clear and appropriate structures are needed to ensure enough support for learning from colleagues (Bunderson and Boumgarden, 2010) and supervisors. Support from both colleagues and leaders is needed to avoid unwanted outcomes that challenge work and learning (see Bell, 2017; Collin *et al.*, 2021). Supervisory work and structures are needed to confirm that collectively self-determined teams are in line with the organization and its strategy, but inside the individual teams, participants can regulate their work and behavior autonomously through social interaction. This refers to a new approach to structures instead of traditional structures following a rigid hierarchy. Thus, the results show how everyone in the group, rather than just an individual leader, can have the knowledge needed to complete work tasks and learn together (Salovaara and Bathurst, 2018). This leads to new practices and features of leadership emerging inside the group as collectively being everyone's responsibility. Moreover, supervisors need to find new ways to support and lead collectively self-determined teams. This means that coaching and training should be emphasized in supervisory work when supporting team's self-determination. As learning in expert work and employees' resources for self-determination might differ depending on the situation (Lemmetty, 2020), essential is to ensure that employees

in these kinds of teams have enough knowledge and resources to engage the behavior required to collective self-determination. Each speech section and its facilitative acts have their own meaning and function in construction of collective self-determination. This means that relying only on one communication style can lead teams to be too independent and far from the other teams and goals of the organization. Therefore, organizations and teams using collective self-determination should elaborate all these three needs in their actions as well as explore suitable ways for the certain context to implement collective self-determination.

Regarding the limitations of this study, it could be argued that the results might be context-related and therefore not transferable to other contexts. As the concept of collective self-determination has not been studied in the field of adult education or the context of working life, this perspective, as used in this study, is only one approach to explore the phenomenon. Moreover, the facilitators and researcher's role in development-oriented group discussion should be considered, although their role was not to guide the conversation or the learning but to facilitate the group. Therefore, the results might be different in real-life working situations depending, for example, on whether the official supervisor is present or not in the situation or depending on the combination of the group of people. An apparent limitation of the method was that group communication was analysed only using audio recordings; thus, facial expressions and gestures were excluded.

In the future, studying employees' experiences of working and learning in collectively self-determined teams would be essential to get their own experiences of the phenomenon. As employees' resources and capabilities for self-determination might differ depending on the situation and work tasks, collective self-determination could be expected to be also situational and contextual. Exploring the dynamics of the phenomenon in different organizational context, such as nonprofit organizations, education institutions or government agencies, would broaden the understanding of how these communication styles apply across different sectors. Understanding how collective self-determination operates in various settings could offer information to develop more effective team and leadership practices. Supporting practices and processes in a sociocultural context need to be explored in more detail in relation to collective self-determination. In addition, everyday learning and team-level situations could be explored qualitatively by using observation and ethnography. Using different methods would deepen the understanding of the emergence and occurrence of self-determination as a collective-level phenomenon. Using remote work and different online environments to complete daily work tasks creates new frameworks and challenges for teams' collective self-determination. Moreover, as the learning and completion of daily work tasks rely even more on collective and collegial practices, shared understanding and sharing competencies, collective self-determination, rather than individually oriented practices and processes, might be emphasized in the future. More research is needed to define and determine the phenomenon in the context of working life.

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