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Ali Threet

University of Idaho, thre4475@vandals.uidaho.edu

Michael Kroth

University of Idaho, mkroth@uidaho.edu

Davin J. Carr-Chellman

University of Dayton, dcarrchellman1@udayton.edu

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Conceptualizing An Abundance Mentality and Its Relationship to Lifelong Learning, Human Flourishing, and Profound Learning

Ali Threet¹, Michael Kroth¹ and Davin J. Carr-Chellman²
University of Idaho¹
University of Dayton²

Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory literature review is to describe and continue to develop the concept of an abundance mentality and how it relates to lifelong learning, human flourishing, and profound learning.

Keywords: abundance mentality, human flourishing, profound learning

Stephen Covey's, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, published in 1989, popularized the terms "abundance mentality" and "scarcity mentality". Since that time, few scholarly articles further elaborated, refined, or altered his original information and definitions. The purpose of this exploratory literature review is to describe and continue to develop the concept of an abundance mentality and its relationship to the adult education topics of lifelong learning, human flourishing, and profound learning.

Literature Review

Abundance Mentality

In the book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Covey (2004) describes a scarcity and an abundance mentality. With a scarcity mentality, "it's almost as if something is being taken, when someone else receives special recognition, a windfall gain or has remarkable success or achievement" (Covey, 2004, p. 250). Individuals with this viewpoint believe there is only so much to go around, and that when others gain, they will have less. Other authors have given their interpretation of this concept as well. Individuals with a scarcity mentality, Stephens (2009) suggests, often hoard things like time, possessions, and talent. They view their lives through the lens of loss, which may lead to burnout, hostility, and resentment. Those with a scarcity mentality believe there is little time to learn new things or to work with others. When a person feels they have less than they need, life becomes more a "survival of the fittest" mentality (Morton, 2017).

In contrast, the abundance mentality paradigm suggests that there is enough for everyone. Such a perspective and approach results in sharing prestige, recognition, profits, and decision making. It means working together, taking time for others, and finding true happiness for others' success and the good things that occur in their lives (Covey, 2004). With an abundance mentality, people share freely and understand that everyone can grow and succeed together (Steffen, 2009). Those with this perspective recognize that every individual has something unique to offer the bigger community. There is a focus on giving to others and bettering the whole (Yost et al., 2019). An abundance mentality may provide a shift in thinking. "Every person and organization can learn and adopt practices to discover their unique strengths, employ strategies to compensate for shortcomings, and make use of the results of self-discovery to serve others and bring greater flourishing to the world" (Yost et al., 2019, p 189).

Economics

To further explore the concepts of abundance and scarcity, we considered additional perspectives such as money management, economics, and other business literature (Morton, 2016; Norris, et al., 2019; Peach & Dugger, 2006; Wiedmer et al., 2020; Yost et al., 2019). These studies primarily look at scarcity of products, services, and resources, rather than as a mentality, or a way of being. The scarcity point of view has essentially had a monopoly on academic economics, “In fact, economics is taught in the schools as if it were the science of scarcity. More specifically, economics is commonly defined in textbooks as the study of the allocation of limited resources to meet unlimited human wants” (Peach & Dugger, 2006, p. 694). Notwithstanding, many economists still discussed the “possibility of an economy of abundance” (Peach & Dugger, 2006, p. 693). Based on conflicting insights, Adel Daoud (2018) discussed the need for more in-depth theorizing about scarcity and its direct relationship to abundance and sufficiency, championing the need for the Scarcity, Abundance, Sufficiency (SAS) framework. He stated that “scarcity arises in the relationship between a need or want for a good, and its satisfier (resources)” (p. 147). Abundance occurs when one has more resources than one desires, he says, and sufficiency is when there is a balance between wants and resources. However, this is a subjective process. How does a person know when they have enough? How do they determine if their needs or wants are satisfied?

The Concept of Enough

The philosopher Lao Tzu said, “Only he who knows what is enough will always have enough” (2005, p. 95). Gro (2018), shared that a person’s perception of “enough” is the basis for determining what one considers to be scarce, sufficient, or abundant, when considering resources such as: time, knowledge, love, talent, and money. Perception, and our view of the world, is what creates a subjective view that one has enough. The Social Comparison Theory (SCC) (Festinger, 1954; Park & Salmon, 2005) could provide clarity to understanding the subjectivity associated with an abundance or scarcity mentality. SCC proposes that humans will objectively or subjectively compare themselves to others. They may evaluate themselves relative to their neighbors, co-workers, family members, religious leaders, individuals in the news, or others. People who perceive they are doing better than their comparison group typically report having a higher sense of contentment and an overall sense of wellbeing. Those who assess themselves as doing worse than their comparison group report having a lower sense of contentment and their overall sense of wellbeing (Gro, 2018).

In addition to the SCC, the concept of satisficing may help determine when someone perceives they have enough. Through a decision-making process, an individual determines if they have reached a sufficient level of achievement relative to their overall goal. If they have, then they ascertain it to be ‘good enough’. Satisficing, determining if an individual has obtained enough informational resources, has been used in the scholarly world of research for quite some time. However, ‘the good enough’ principle is also used in other industries. “The consequences of putting time and effort into finding optimal solutions can be costly, therefore, decision makers must be willing to forgo the best solution in favor of one that is acceptable” (Prabha et al. 2007, p 77). If this concept of enough is used in fields like research and business, it may be applicable to individuals in their efforts to determine a state of scarcity, abundance, or sufficiency in their own lives.

Another approach to determine an individual's comparison group, or what is good enough, is the use of religion, spirituality, values, and core beliefs. Several world religions “cherish the same basic values such as humanity, righteousness, deep love and faithfulness” (Korac-Kakabadse et al., 2002, p. 168). Spirituality refers to a sense of connectedness between

us and the world (Korac-Kakabadse et al., 2002). Rafael Domingo (2021) wrote a discussion paper on business and spirituality. He classified the business triad as abundance, interaction, and resources, and the spiritual triad as love, communion, and gift. “Abundance is a manifestation of love; interaction is an expression of communion; and resources are a sort of gift” (p. 180). He claimed that “intention precedes abundance” (Domingo, 2021, p 177). According to this theory, it may be likely that the intention to show love, even in a business environment, might be the manifestation of an abundance mentality. It would seem likely that the abundance mentality then is dependent on interactions with others. Santos (2017) also stressed the importance of interaction with others. He said, “the capacity to flourish is actualized through the connection or relationship with oneself, with others, with God and with all creation” (Santos, 2017, p. 236). Santos believes that this vision of human flourishing is dependent on reciprocity, where individuals learn, grow, and work together in an interdependent capacity. Flourishing is not realized in isolation (Santos, 2017).

Human Flourishing & Profound Learning

Weźniak-Białowolska et al., (2019) suggested that flourishing “extends beyond psychological well-being and might be understood as a state in which all aspects of a human life are good” (p 2). Wolbert et al. (2018) proposed that “human flourishing can be understood as autonomous, wholehearted, and successful engagement in worthwhile relationships, activities, and experiences, in which ‘success’ is defined in the broadest sense of achieving what one has aspired to achieve” (p 83). Amartya Sen looks at human flourishing as a measurement of what a person can do, or their capabilities, rather than what material possessions they have or what subjective wants they can satisfy (Nussbaum et al., 1993). In addition, there are building blocks of flourishing that must sufficiently be met, prior to someone being able to flourish. These building blocks include housing, basic income, intimate relationships, and good health (Wolbert et al., 2018), among others. Once again, the “good enough” or minimalist principles are used (i.e., good enough health, safe enough). The question arises, does someone possess enough of the building blocks to be considered flourishing? In each definition, listed above, an individual could be labeled as flourishing even though they are not finished growing. There is not a designated path or specific point one must reach. Human flourishing is not a destination; it is an intentional, and oftentimes messy, journey.

Profound learning, as defined by Kroth, is “someone who pursues deeper knowledge regularly over time” (2016, p. 29). Carr-Chellman and Kroth (2017) discussed how individuals become profound learners over a lifetime. The profound learning process involves continually going deeper with an increased openness to additional and never-ending knowledge. As conceptualized by Kroth (2016), profound learning can be related to any growth opportunity such as deep relationships and spirituality. It is not specifically tied to increased cognition. Carr-Chellman and Kroth (2019) identified qualities of a profound learner that include: depth of thought, emotionally wise, take life seriously, are adventurous in thought and deed, are unbounded, and are humble. “Qualities of unboundedness and being adventurous in thought and deed suggest profound learners have a spirit of exploration. This spirit builds upon the idea of human flourishing through blooming, extending, and unfolding which, over time, manifests in profound learners through deep experience” (p. 119).

Methodology

This was an exploratory literature review. Utilizing the University of Idaho database, “abundance mentality” and “abundance mindset” were individually used as key terms (636

results). To continue narrowing the results, only peer-reviewed articles were selected (78). Additionally, book and article reviews were eliminated (8). This left the total number of relevant articles to 71. Additional articles were selected by utilizing the advanced search options in the University of Idaho database. Various combinations were explored utilizing the terms: enough, simplicity, abundance, wellbeing, and spirituality. Following those searches, we also explored various combinations of human flourishing, spirituality, education, and abundance. Finally, articles related to profound learning were included in our review. When applicable theories or concepts were referenced in these articles, such as conservation of resources, SAS framework, and the Broaden and Build theory, they were explored as well.

Findings and Discussion

After reviewing the literature, several preliminary ideas seem likely, and are ripe for further research. First, much like Santos' (2017) views on flourishing, connection and interdependence seem necessary for an abundance mentality. Second, individual action may be required to shift from perceived states of sufficiency or scarcity, to one of abundance. An individual experiencing a sense of contentment may be in a state of sufficiency. However, to experience an abundance mentality may necessitate doing something, such as acting with charity, kindness, and generosity. This may lead to increased gratitude and a better sense of wellbeing. These types of behaviors are likely to reinforce themselves. "People experience emotional benefits from sharing their financial resources with others, not only in countries where such resources are plentiful, but also in impoverished countries where scarcity might seem to limit the possibilities to reap the gains from giving to others" (Aknin et al., 2013, p 649). Evidence indicates that experiencing recurrent positive emotions leads people to be more trusting of others (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005), to form more inclusive social groups (Dovidio et al., 1995), and can be detected on a neural level in the part of the "brain regions implicated in the experience of reward" (Aknin et al., 2013, p 636).

Following Kroth et al.'s (2022) discussion of formation, developing an abundance mentality from either scarcity or sufficiency mentalities may also be a formative process. Once an individual develops the intent to move toward an abundance mentality, disciplines and practices may shift an abundance mentality over time to an abundance disposition and ultimately to living abundantly. Kroth et al. (2022) provided specific definitions for these terms.

Disciplines are specific practices that interact with dispositions. Dispositions, which are inherent tendencies to behave in certain ways, shape and are shaped by disciplines and practices. So, not all practices are disciplines, but all disciplines are practices. Disciplines are established, durable, and historically grounded. Practices and disciplines can become habits" (p 30).

At the onset, an abundance mentality may be a practice or discipline, however, with continued effort, it is likely to become a habit, leading to increased and deepened growth.

Lifelong Learning

In a recent article by Kroth et al. (2022), lifelong learning was identified as "a process of continuous formation" (p 27), leading to transformation. The learner's commitment to formative practices, disciplines, and habits, may help form, deform, reform, and transform lifelong learning continuously across the lifespan. Over time, these will contribute to an individual's identity evolution, which involves a "self-understanding of who they are as people within a particular family, geographic location, profession, and religion, among other considerations" (p 28). Taking into consideration the Social Comparison Theory, an individual's identity formation will also be

affected by those with whom they compare themselves. We suggest that an individual who understands the concept of enough may be able to cultivate an abundance mentality as a potential practice or discipline of Profound Learning. An abundance mentality could be instrumental as they enter the deformation and reformation stages of Kroth et al.'s, Profound Learning Conceptual Model.

Kroth et al. (2022) identified the following four meta-learning skills needed for human flourishing. They include spirituality, cognition, body, and relationships. It is likely that the intentional practice of an abundance mentality could directly impact spirituality and relationships, and indirectly impact cognition and body. “Profound learning practices are likely to lead toward profound living, more broadly described as human flourishing” (2022, p 35).

Implications

This study introduces the concept of an abundance mentality for consideration within the lifelong learning, scholarly community. Further work needs to be conducted in order to more substantively define an abundance mentality, determine the characteristics and practices of one who lives with an abundance mentality, and to develop a robust conceptual framework which can lead to empirical research. Additional studies could consider topics such as: an abundance mentality in educational leadership, the effects of an abundance mentality in adult learners, the relationship of abundance mentality to wellbeing, gratitude, and generosity, and the effects of an abundance mentality on mental health. Future studies could also continue to identify similarities, differences, and relationships between abundance mentality, human flourishing, and profound learning in the context of and impact upon lifelong learning.

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