

Self-determination and Positive Psychology Interventions: An Extension of the Positive Activity Model in the Context of Unemployment



Leoni van der Vaart and Anja Van den Broeck

Abstract Positive psychological interventions (PPIs) are approaches, methods, and intentional activities that cultivate positive behaviours, cognitions, and emotions. PPI's are proven to be effective and valuable, also to complement traditional interventions. Nevertheless, they are largely ignored in the context of unemployment. This chapter first contends that PPIs should be developed for and implemented in the unemployment context. PPIs are warranted in this context because they may facilitate the well-being—and therefore also indirectly alleviate the suffering—of a vulnerable population. Second, we argue that the effectiveness of PPIs can be enhanced by using theoretical frameworks, such as the self-determination theory (SDT). As an influential motivational theory, SDT provides a comprehensive framework for the mechanisms (i.e. basic psychological need satisfaction) through which well-being can be enabled. Satisfaction of the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness could therefore serve as key foci of PPIs, but they may also provide guidance on how PPIs can be implemented to facilitate client adherence, engagement, and intervention outcomes. This chapter aims to theorise on the use of SDT and basic psychological need satisfaction to inform the content and delivery of PPIs. In doing so, the chapter contributes to the limited literature incorporating SDT principles into PPI interventions, in general, but also more specifically in the unemployment context.

Keywords Self-determination theory · Basic psychological needs · Need satisfaction · Positive psychology · Unemployment · Mechanisms

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1 Introduction

Some things in life are bad
 They can really make you mad
 Other things just make you swear and curse
 When you're chewing on life's gristle
 Don't grumble, give a whistle
 And this'll help things turn out for the best
Always Look on the Bright Side of Life
Eric Idle

Positive psychological interventions (PPIs) are intentional and simple initiatives, that could be practised regularly to mimic the myriad healthy thoughts and behaviours associated with naturally happy people (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013). These initiatives foster positive emotions, thoughts and behaviour (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009), enhance well-being and could therefore—indirectly—alleviate suffering (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005). PPIs are also preventative, non-stigmatising, easily accessible (Bolier et al., 2013) and their well-being message highly resonates with people (Bolier & Abello, 2014).

We see PPIs as well-suited interventions to enhance people's well-being, also for vulnerable populations such as the unemployed. Unemployment is a problematic issue around the globe: it not only has important economic and societal costs (e.g., criminality, poverty and substance abuse), it is also a burden for unemployed individuals themselves as they suffer from various physical (e.g. stomach aches and headaches) and psychological ailments (e.g. depression and anxiety) (Paul & Moser, 2009; Wanberg, 2012). Unemployed individuals could therefore use some assistance in maintaining their well-being. Interventions for the unemployed, however, typically focus more on re-employment (Koopman, Pieterse, Bohlmeijer, & Drossaert, 2017) or employ cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), that traditionally aims to address mental disorders by identifying and countering negative thoughts (see Koopman et al., 2017). Hence, these interventions aim to directly alleviate suffering by fostering reemployment or removing a barrier (i.e., negative thoughts) to well-being (Duckworth et al., 2005). Although problem-based interventions are effective (Koopman et al., 2017), individuals want more than just the absence of suffering (Duckworth et al., 2005) and PPIs may assist the unemployed in maintaining mental health. This in turn is also likely to support them in (keeping on) engaging in job search behaviour. Despite the proven effectiveness of PPIs (see Bolier et al., 2013; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009), only one study previously used and showed the validity of the positive approach in the context of unemployment (Dambrun & Dubuy, 2014). So, more PPIs are needed in psychologically vulnerable populations, such as the unemployed.

However, such an approach warrants a sound theoretical framework as a basis. As a second contribution, this chapter argues that self-determination theory (SDT) is valuable in providing such basis. This is because SDT takes a positive meta-

theoretical approach by theorising that human beings will move towards thriving and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2017), which is much in line with the premises of positive psychology. SDT furthermore explains the mechanisms through which well-being is achieved (Vansteenkiste & Mouratidis, 2016) and also supports calls from positive psychology to investigate change mechanisms (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013; Shin & Steger, 2014). More specifically, SDT holds that the basic psychological needs are the nutrients required for healthy functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2017) which is supported by recent meta-analyses (Ng et al., 2012; Van den Broeck, Ferris, Chang, & Rosen, 2016). Although the positive activity model acknowledges that the basic needs explain the effect of PPIs on outcomes (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013), a more detailed analysis of how SDT provides a theoretical background to explain both the effect of and the context in which PPIs succeed is needed.

In the current chapter, the strategic integration of the positive activity model of PPIs and SDT provides a nuanced understanding of the psychological processes through which PPIs may influence people's well-being, specifically here: the unemployed. The theoretical framework of SDT is described as the theoretical backbone of positive interventions to provide suggestions for positive activities aimed at enhancing basic psychological need satisfaction among unemployed. Specifically, the chapter extends the mediating role of need satisfaction in the positive activity model, by positioning it as a contextual pre-requisite for effective PPIs (i.e. a moderating role). In doing so, it allows shifting the focus away from problem-based psychological interventions which mar the current body of knowledge in the unemployment context to a more positive point of view.

2 Positive Psychology Interventions and the Positive Activity Model

Positive psychology is seen as the “science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). Hence, any approach, method, or intentional activity that cultivate positive behaviours, cognitions, and emotions can be referred to as a PPI (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). PPI's come in different kinds. Using card sorting procedures, Gorlin, Lee, and Otto (2018) broadly categorised PPIs into six domains (with several sub-domains) according to the conceptual overlap of the intervention content: (1) positive processing of past and present events, (2) positive processing of future events, (3) gratitude, (4) acts of kindness, (5) strength identification, and (6) goal pursuit domain. The first two sets of strategies centre around positive processing of past, present and future events. In these strategies, clients are tasked with talking, thinking and/or writing about positive events that happened, is currently happening, or that they could imagine happening in the future. The third and fourth sets centre around expressing gratitude and performing acts of kindness (Gorlin et al., 2018). These two domains are combined in the current chapter because of its joint ability to satisfy the need for

relatedness. While the fifth set of strategies centres around identifying and utilising personal strengths, the final set centres around pursuing goals (Gorlin et al., 2018).

Two meta-analyses of randomised controlled studies demonstrated the capability of PPIs in promoting well-being and alleviating depressive symptoms (Bolier et al., 2013; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009) among various groups (i.e., clinical patients, employees, elderly, teachers, students) in a variety of settings (i.e., campus, community, clinic, lab, home, online, work) (Hone, Jardin, & Schofield, 2015).

Despite the proven efficacy and effectiveness of PPIs, limited studies are available on PPIs for the unemployment setting. This is unfortunate given the need for effective psychological interventions for this vulnerable group. One published intervention study ventured into this domain using a positive psychology approach. Specifically, Dambrun and Dubuy (2014) tasked participants with five exercises: performing altruistic tasks, writing down three good things and their causes, writing and delivering (if they wished to) a gratitude letter, identifying their strengths and using it in a new way, and reflecting on new opportunities that transpired from others that ended. Results showed that PPI significantly increased well-being (e.g., life satisfaction, self-esteem) and significantly decreased psychological distress (e.g., depression, anxiety) (Dambrun & Dubuy, 2014). The positive psychology approach of Dambrun and Dubuy (2014) stands in contrast to the more traditional focus of interventions trying to improve chances of re-employment and/or the well-being of the unemployed (Koopman et al., 2017). Such traditional interventions improving the skill levels of the unemployed or the way the unemployed communicate or sell their skills may increase the self-efficacy or employability, while interventions based on cognitive therapy (i.e., cognitive restructuring negative thoughts into rational thoughts, avoiding thinking errors, reframing active problem-solving or relaxation skills) may help to alleviate negative thoughts. A positive approach to improving people's well-being may thus be complementary to a focus on avoiding suffering, particularly among unemployed.

Although studies show that PPIs may increase well-being and decrease psychological distress, little or no information is provided about the processes through (i.e., how) or the conditions under which (i.e., when) these positive activities work. Several researchers in the domain of positive psychology stressed the importance of understanding change mechanisms as they enable the design of even more effective interventions (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013; Shin & Steger, 2014; Smith, Harrison, Kurtz, & Bryant, 2014). Given that current PPIs have only small to moderate effects immediately after cessation of the intervention and small (for well-being) and non-significant (for ill-being) over the longer term (see Bolier et al., 2013), increasing the effectiveness of PPIs would be helpful.¹

¹“A composite moderate and statistically significant effect size (Cohen's d) was observed for subjective well-being $d = 0.34$ (95% CI [0.22, 0.45], $p < .01$). For psychological well-being, Cohen's d was 0.20 (95% CI [0.09, 0.30], $p < .01$) and for depression $d = 0.23$ (95% CI [0.09, 0.38], $p < .01$), which can be considered as small. For those studies examining effects from three to six months (short-term follow-up), the random-effects model demonstrated small but significant effects in comparison with the control groups for subjective well-being (Cohen's d 0.22, 95% CI [0.05, 0.38], p

In an attempt to address the concern about mechanisms, Lyubomirsky and Layous (2013) developed the positive activity model. This model postulates that “positive activities are positive for an individual only to the extent that they stimulate increases in positive emotions, positive thoughts, positive behaviours, and need satisfaction, which in turn increase happiness” (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013, p. 60). The role of need satisfaction as an explanatory mechanism for the effects of PPI was echoed by Van Zyl and Rothmann (2014) in the development of a conceptual model for happiness interventions. Furthermore, Lyubomirsky and Layous (2013) argue that features of the positive activity (e.g., dosage, variety), features of the person (e.g., personality, effort) and the person-activity fit impact on the degree to which the engagement in PPIs increase people’s well-being. This chapter wants to go one step further and suggest that the basic psychological needs as defined in SDT, may not only be the crucial mechanism in explaining *why* PPIs have a positive impact on people’s well-being (i.e., mediation effect) but also *when* this is the case (i.e., moderation effect). In doing so, a deeper and more elaborate understanding of the effectiveness of PPIs is provided through elaborating on the role of need satisfaction—as defined in self-determination theory—in the positive activity model.

3 Need Satisfaction in Self-determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000), is a motivation theory that builds on a positive organismic dialectic meta-theory. Specifically, SDT starts from the assumption that people have the propensity to be active (rather than re-active) organisms who want to grow and develop and interact with their environment (rather than being mere controlled by it) (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). However, despite this positive propensity, according to SDT, people may also become passive and/or counterproductive (Ryan & Deci, 2000). People’s natural growth-orientation may thus not be taken for granted; it requires fundamental nutrients. Just like plants need water, sunshine and minerals to flourish, SDT advances that people need to be satisfied with their basic psychological needs to thrive (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Based on the accumulation of empirical research (Deci & Ryan, 2000), three needs are considered to be essential: the needs for autonomy, the need for competence and the need for relatedness.² The need for autonomy is defined as individuals’ inherent desire to act with a sense of choice and volition, that is, to be the author of one’s actions and to feel psychologically free (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For example, when feeling satisfied in the need for autonomy, the unemployed would experience

< .01) and for psychological well-being (0.16, 95% CI [0.02, 0.30], $p = .03$). The effect was not significant for depression (0.17, 95% CI [-0.06, 0.39], $p = .15$)” (Bolier et al., 2013, p. 11).

²In order to be classified as a *psychological* need, a need must consistently promote psychological growth, internalisation, and well-being across different cultures—beyond the variance explained by other proposed needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Thus far, empirical research provided evidence for the essential role of the three needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001; Van den Broeck et al. 2016).

a sense of control over decisions to apply for a job such that their decisions reflect their wishes. However, on average, the unemployed may be more prone to low need satisfaction. Their daily activities may feel more like a chain of ‘musts’ and ‘shoulds’, undermining their need for autonomy (Vansteenkiste & Van den Broeck, 2018). The need for competence is the desire to feel capable of mastering the environment and to bring about desired outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Actively seeking out challenges helps people to develop their skills and adapt to complex and changing environments. For example, when they would feel competent, the unemployed experience a sense of confidence and feel capable and energised to pursue an activity (e.g., going for an interview). However, constantly facing rejections, the unemployed may experience rather low levels of competence satisfaction (Vansteenkiste & Van den Broeck, 2018). Finally, the need for relatedness is the inherent propensity to feel connected to others, that is, to be a member of a group, to love and care and be loved and cared for (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The need for relatedness is satisfied if people experience a sense of communion and maintain close and intimate relationships. For example, unemployed who would experience a sense of closeness and being connected to those who support them in coping with the frustrations accompanying unemployment, would feel related. However, after a while, most unemployed feel isolated from external networks and may experience little satisfaction of their need for relatedness (Vansteenkiste & Van den Broeck, 2018).

According to SDT, the basic needs are universal propensities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). As all individuals are endowed with these needs, rather than focusing on differences in need strength, SDT pays particular attention to the degree in which one can satisfy the basic needs and argues that satisfaction of the basic needs is beneficial for all individuals. Further, although some individuals may report desiring far less of a particular need than other individuals, all individuals will suffer when any of the needs are thwarted. Two recent meta-analyses already provided robust evidence of the positive relationship between basic need satisfaction and well-being (e.g., less anxiety, more engagement) and behavioural (e.g., exercising, performance) outcomes among health-care patients and employees (Ng et al., 2012; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Cross-cultural research supported that basic need satisfaction associates positively with well-being outcomes such as subjective well-being and lower symptoms of psychopathology across diverse cultures (e.g. Chen et al., 2015; Church et al., 2013; Sheldon, Abad & Omoile, 2009; Sheldon et al., 2004).

Some studies already provide the first evidence that satisfaction of the basic needs also supports unemployed individuals’ well-being, job search and the quality of the jobs they find. A qualitative study among people with mental health problems, participating in green work on care farms to become re-employed, showed that people benefitted from having choices and from pursuing personal interests when picking daily tasks (i.e. satisfying the need for autonomy), being challenged and finding solutions to the problems they encounter (i.e. satisfying the need for competence) and being understood and acknowledged by the farmer and the inclusion of a group of workers (i.e. satisfying the need for relatedness). In short, feeling supported in their needs and experiencing need satisfaction resulted in improved well-being and new found motivation and aspirations for the future (Ellingsen-Dalskau, Morken,

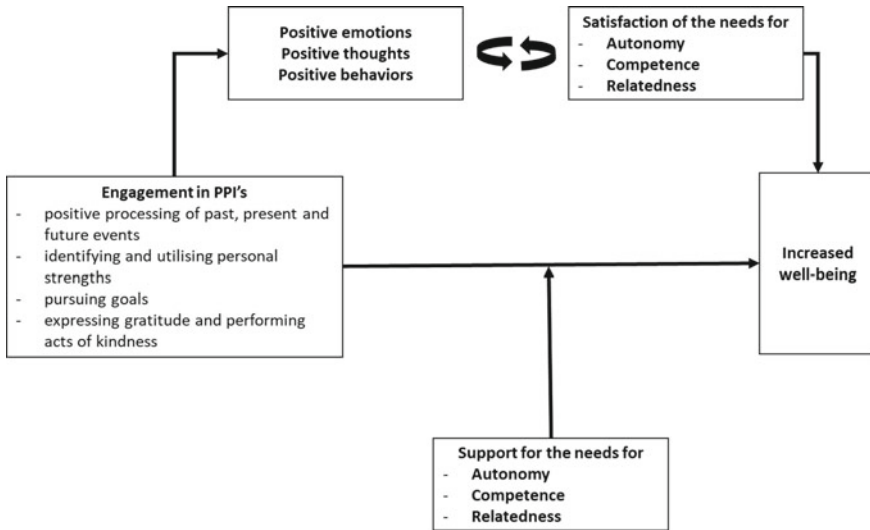


Fig. 1 Theoretical model of positive psychology interventions and basic needs satisfaction

Berget, & Pedersen, 2016). Quantitatively it was also shown that unemployed people who experience autonomy, become more autonomously motivated, which in turn increases their job search intensity, self-regulation and exploration (Koen, Klehe, Van Vianen, Zikic, & Nauta, 2010). Although more research is warranted, to further establish the importance of basic needs for the unemployed, initial research thus shows the value of need satisfaction in improving their functioning.

4 The Role of Positive Psychology Interventions to Satisfy Basic Psychological Needs

In this chapter, as outlined in Fig. 1, we advance that SDT’s basic needs serve as an underlying mechanism (i.e., ‘why’) of the different sets of strategies of PPIs, but that SDT’s notion of need support also sheds light on the conditions under which (i.e., ‘when’) this is the case.

First, building on previous suggestions (e.g., Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013), it is agreed that PPIs have a need supportive function such that the engagement in PPIs helps individuals to satisfy the basic needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. While the positive activity model depicts the satisfaction of the basic needs (as one mechanism) next to the experience of positive emotions, thoughts and behaviours (as alternative mechanisms), based on SDT, it is argued that positive emotions, thoughts and behaviours both leads to (and transpire from) experiences of need satisfaction rather than need satisfaction being parallel to them in the psychological process. For

example, developing optimistic thoughts (i.e. positive thoughts about your competence) leads to the satisfaction of the need for competence, which in turn leads to more mastering thoughts. In short, engaging in the different types of PPIs provides individuals, such as the unemployed, not only with the opportunity to enhance positive emotions, thoughts and behaviours but also with opportunities to satisfy their needs for autonomy and—perhaps most importantly—the need for competence and the need for relatedness.

Second, although all PPIs are designed to bring about positive changes, it is contended that they may have no or even unintended effects when they are delivered in a wrong way: the (interpersonal) context in which people engage in PPIs plays a big role. People can engage in PPIs themselves, but often they are also guided by a counsellor. In the latter case, it is important for counsellors to be need supportive and should deliver the PPIs in a need supporting way. In the following section, how the different types of PPIs have the potential to satisfy people's basic psychological needs are described and continue to argue how the (interpersonal) contexts in which PPIs are implemented may further help or hinder the need supporting nature of PPIs.

5 Need Satisfaction in Explaining the Impact of Different PPI Strategies

5.1 Need Satisfaction in Positive Processing of Past, Present, and Future Events PPIs

A popular PPI in the set of strategies around the positive processing of past, present, and future events participants is to list positive events and attribute causes to it (“three good things”) (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Unemployed clients, for example, are asked to write down three positive things that happened to them on a particular day and to link each of these events with one or more causes. Instructions could include that they specifically indicate how they influenced these positive outcomes. Keeney (2009) refers to this as “basking in achievement” (i.e. attributing personal achievement to internal causes). So, if the unemployed submitted job applications, they could indicate how they chose the job and how their CV-writing or IT-skills enabled them to submit the application or how their competencies fit the vacancy which means that they possess sought-after characteristics. By noticing and appreciating (i.e., savouring) these positive mastery experiences the need for autonomy and competence is satisfied. Clients could also link the events with external relational causes. In this way they acknowledge the role of others in enabling them to experience positive events (Keeney, 2009) and satisfy the need for relatedness.

Whereas in the previous activities, participants practised savouring strategies in which they noticed and appreciated past positive experiences, they could equally be encouraged to savour present or (imagined) future positive experiences (Smith et al., 2014). For example, clients are asked to savour these experiences as and when

they happen (Hurley & Kwon, 2012) as well as to actively ‘look for’ these moments to savour during the day (Bryant & Veroff, 2007). One future-focused savouring activity is the best possible self (Seligman et al., 2005) activity. In the context of unemployment, clients are asked to write about a time when they are at their best (e.g., being a good student or being employed) and then to reflect on the strengths they display during that time (e.g., curiosity or learning-orientation). They are encouraged to frequently review this written narrative and the strengths displayed, which provides them with a sense of competence.

Similarly, unemployed clients may be asked to imagine their best-possible life in the future: a moment where everything turned out as planned and things are going as well as it possibly could because the individual has worked hard to, and achieved, their goals. They can write about this best-possible future self (King, 2001) and may write down goals to help them achieve this outcome (Shin & Steger, 2014). Such challenges are key to satisfying the need for competence. Imagining a future, they would like to achieve, also satisfies the need for autonomy and depending on with whom a future is imagined, it could also satisfy the need for relatedness.

Different other interventions exist to help people positive process past, present, and future events. For example, in slightly different versions of acknowledging positive events (Lyubomirsky, Sousa, & Dickerhoof, 2006), unemployed clients are asked to re-experience one or more positive events that occurred (e.g., being invited to an interview or making a new friend at job seeker events) as vividly as possible in their minds (i.e. mental imagery). Alternatively, positive thinking with hope-based cognitive restructuring (Rashid, 2008) clients are asked to reflect on a situation in which a negative event (e.g., an unsuccessful job interview) led to unanticipated positive outcomes (i.e., being more confident in interviews or creating a new network for future job leads), with subsequent rehearsal of this memory. Depending on the content of the instructions or the counselling conversations, these activities have the potential to satisfy the needs for competence and relatedness or both. Another strategy is to be fully ‘present’ in the moment, while developing some positive statements about themselves. Once again, one could be encouraged to develop statements reflecting mastery of their environment (e.g., “I can develop the skills required by a prospective employer”) or (e.g., “I am a valued member of my community”) to satisfy the needs for competence and relatedness or both.

5.2 Expressing Gratitude and Performing Acts of Kindness

Gratitude is an emotion that transpires from one person acknowledging that (s)he received something valuable from another person. Gratitude serves to build, regulate and strengthen relationships (Algoe & Stanton, 2011) and plays a valuable role in the satisfaction of the need for relatedness (i.e., being loved and cared for). So, strategies encouraging the expression of gratitude to others (Lomas, Froh, Emmons, Mishra, & Bono, 2014) contributes to need satisfaction. In the context of unemployment, clients may be asked to write a letter to someone whom they feel gratitude is due, but

never expressed this gratitude to. The counsellor can then afford them the opportunity to deliver this letter, if (s)he wanted to, to the intended recipient. Relatedness also reflects a need to love and care for others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). So, strategies encouraging acts of kindness or altruistic activities (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005; Magyar-Moe, 2009) also contribute to perceived need satisfaction. Unemployed clients may, for example, be encouraged to perform acts of kindness (e.g., volunteering) frequently and to record these acts as a means of savouring.

5.3 Need Satisfaction in Identifying and Utilising Personal Strengths PPIs

Strength-based interventions are commonly used by positive psychology practitioners (Louis & Lopez, 2014, Seligman et al., 2005). In such interventions, clients identify perceived strengths and are encouraged to either use their top strengths more (or instead more effectively), or in new or different ways (Louis & Lopez, 2014). In the case of unemployment, counsellors can for example encourage unemployed clients to use their strength of perseverance in job applications to also persevere in improving their qualifications. In this way, a difficult task is approached using what people are good at which enhances perceived mastery and provides them with the opportunity to build new skills, which again satisfies the need for competence. Similarly, the counsellor can encourage clients to use, for example, their kindness strength to demonstrate love and care for others more often satisfying the need for relatedness.

5.4 Need Satisfaction in Pursuing Goals PPIs

The last set of PPIs centre around goals, which may satisfy the need for competence. This involves setting clear expectations, creating a detailed step-by-step plan and providing desired assistance, guidance, information and feedback as a way to guide the goal-setting and goal-achievement process (Vansteenkiste & Van den Broeck, 2018). Competence is herein also nurtured by the provision of structure and using action coaching. This is a positive approach to coaching in which clients create realistic goals and action plans, monitor and evaluate progress towards goals achievement, and make adjustments as necessary with the support of the coach (Gorlin et al., 2018). Some of these coaching initiatives include the identification and utilisation of strengths (e.g., Madden, Green, & Grant, 2011; Van Zyl & Stander, 2013) in a way that strengths supported the achievement of goals (Linley & Harrington, 2006) and satisfied the need for competence. Working together with the coach could also contribute to relatedness satisfaction (Table 1).

Table 1 Overview of needs supportive PPI strategies

Positive psychology intervention	Application in unemployment and need satisfaction
Positive processing of past, present, and future events PPIs	<p>Write down good things: submitted a job application for a job one wants (i.e. autonomy) and how one’s skills enabled one to apply and matches the sought-after skills (i.e. competence). Acknowledge support of significant other/s in the process (i.e. relatedness)</p> <p>Write about a time when one was a good student or employed and reflect on the strengths one displayed during that time (e.g., curiosity or learning-orientation) (i.e. competence)</p> <p>Imagine one’s best-possible life in the future: for example, a moment where one achieved the desired goal of being employed (i.e. autonomy) because one worked hard to this challenging goal (i.e. competence)</p> <p>Re-experience positive events as vividly as possible in their minds: for example, being invited to an interview (i.e. competence) or making a new friend at job seeker events (i.e. relatedness)</p>
Expressing gratitude and performing acts of kindness	<p>Write a letter to someone to whom gratitude is due, but never expressed. Deliver this letter to the intended recipient if one wishes to do so (i.e. relatedness)</p> <p>Frequently perform acts of kindness (e.g. volunteering in the community) and record these acts (i.e. relatedness)</p>
Identifying and utilising personal strengths PPIs	<p>Use one’s strength of perseverance in job applications to also persevere in improving one’s qualifications (i.e. competence)</p> <p>Use kindness strength to demonstrate love and care for others more often (i.e. relatedness)</p>
Pursuing goals PPIs	Set clear expectations, create a detailed step-by-step plan (i.e. competence) and accept assistance, guidance, information and feedback from a career coach (if desired) (i.e. relatedness)

However, as outlined in Fig. 1, not only the engagement in the PPIs in and of itself, but also the context in which PPIs are provided may matter for need satisfaction to occur. The authors argue that a need supporting context is essential for PPIs to be able to satisfy the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness.

5.5 Need Satisfaction in the Context in Which PPIs Take Place

In their positive-activity model, Lyubomirsky and Layous (2013) argued that the degree to which PPIs increase people’s well-being, depends on several features of the activity, of the person engaging in PPIs and on the fit between the person and the activity. For example, PPIs are said to be more effective when people not only engage in one, but a variety of PPIs (i.e. features of the activity), when they put effort into it (i.e. features of the person) and when people enjoy the PPIs (i.e. an indication

of fit). Many of these influencing features can be understood from the perspective of autonomy support or—termed more broadly—need support.

Narrowly defined, autonomy support includes (a) the acknowledgement of people's feelings, (b) the provision of a rationale for rules and demands, and (c) the offering of choice and opportunities for initiative taking (Mageau et al., 2015). Autonomy-supportive counsellors, for example, would give the unemployed as much choice as possible (e.g. on which types of jobs they would apply), provide a rationale when necessary (e.g. explain that the unemployed individual needs to look for at least some type of job in order not to lose unemployment benefits) and engage in the interaction in a warm, empathic and compassionate way such that the unemployed can be themselves as much as possible. Autonomy support is not only suggested to satisfy the need for autonomy, but also the needs for relatedness and competence. Therefore it is also termed more broadly as need support (e.g., Rocchi, Pelletier, Cheung, Baxter, & Beaudry, 2017; Standage, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2005). Counsellors can for example also support the need for relatedness when they respect and have an interest in the unemployed and build a warm relationship. They may also support the need for competence among unemployed by guiding them through activities of increasing difficulty that the unemployed can do, but also allow them to grow and improve.

The perspective of need support fits very well with the features of the activity and person that may moderate the well-being effects of PPI as outlined in the positive activity model (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013). Moreover, a need-supportive perspective may also extend the number of potentially moderating features. First, when discussing the effects of dosage, Lyubomirsky and Layous (2013, p. 59) argue that “perhaps when people are free to choose their happiness-increasing activities, they do not view the activities as cumbersome and gladly perform them for longer and more often”. Moreover, they also note that when people deliberately chose particular PPIs (i.e. an aspect of the personal characteristic of motivation), they experience high levels of well-being. Both these aspects tap into the provision of *choice*, which is a key aspect of autonomy support. Providing choice in the offering of PPIs may be particularly beneficial in interventions among unemployed as they may experience few opportunities to choose what they want to do, for example because they have to comply with different rules and regulations to keep their employment benefits or fit in their social environment. The inclusion of PPIs may therefore maximise the opportunities to make choices in interventions among unemployed (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989; Wehmeyer, 2014). Specifically, autonomy-supportive counsellors may provide information about different PPIs and encourage clients to make a choice and to initiate actions (Su & Reeve, 2011). Clients could for example choose between the type of activity (i.e., savouring or using strengths), the mode (i.e., thinking/talking/writing), frequency (i.e., daily/weekly) and duration (i.e., weeks/months) of engaging in PPIs.

It is important to balance choice within the larger framework of the intervention goals. For example, the client may prefer shorter interventions but studies have shown that PPIs are more effective when longer in duration (i.e. eight weeks or longer) (Bolier et al., 2013; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009; Chakhssi, Kraiss, Sommers-Spijkerman, & Bohlmeijer, 2018). Achieving a balance may be possible when counsellors provide *meaningful rationales* for requests during the interventions. For exam-

ple, counsellors may explain why longer interventions could be better. Similarly, as some clients may perceive interventions as uninteresting or unappealing, providing rationales why these activities can be useful or valuable likely enhances their success (Hadré & Reeve, 2009).

Autonomy-supportive counsellors may also take *people's perspective* and nurture inner motivational resources. They become aware of the interests and preferences of clients and take these into account as much as possible. Positive psychology literature also emphasises the importance of person-activity fit and personalising PPIs to enhance effectiveness (Scheuller, 2014; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009; Sin, Della Porta, & Lyubomirsky, 2011). In a similar vein, counsellors also need to listen to, rather than ignore, negative feelings (e.g., complaints or disagreement), about the activities and acknowledge that these are valid reactions to doing something that is difficult or less enjoyable (Hadré & Reeve, 2009; Su & Reeve, 2011).

Apart from supporting the need for autonomy, the PPIs may also be presented in a way or context supporting the need for relatedness. According to Lyubomirsky and Layous (2013) social support is an essential aspect of the positive-activity model, both as a feature of the activity and the person. Peers and broader social environment are imperative to bring about the positive effects of PPIs: people surrounding the unemployed may support the unemployed in seeking their strengths and celebrate with them when they perform the gratitude exercise, or support them in engaging in PPIs (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013). As such, peers, friends and family may provide a relatedness supporting context for the unemployed. Counsellors too may encourage unemployed to seek social support in engaging in PPIs and may support the need for relatedness themselves too. This may stand in sharp contrast to the conditional regard unemployment counsellors may use towards the unemployed in threatening with sanctions or induce guilt when they don't search (hard enough) for a job (Van Parys, 2016).

Finally, counsellors may implement PPIs in a way that maximises the satisfaction of the need for competence. Lyubomirsky and Layous (2013) argue that people benefit most if they practice of multiple activities, potentially because this provides them with different challenges and a myriad of experiences of being effective in different ways, which add to competence satisfaction. Lyubomirsky and Layous (2013) furthermore noticed that some activities serve as better starter activities than others. For example, based on the research of Layous, Lee, Choi, and Lyubomirsky (2013), they concluded that starting with bigger exercises such as writing a gratitude letter may be more beneficial than starting with doing acts of kindness, because expressing gratitude to someone may show a bigger impact and therefore provide people with more competence at the start of PPIs than several smaller acts of kindness. Hence, including PPIs in interventions may be highly beneficial for the unemployed, who often lack feelings of self-efficacy and effectance. Being able to engage in small activities as planned and seeing the immediate results of these activities that are challenging at first may particularly nurture their needs, which then allows them to thrive.

6 Conclusion

The current chapter aimed to argue for the introduction of PPIs in the interventions among unemployed, using SDT as a theoretical framework. First, it was argued that PPIs might be particularly welcome in complementing the interventions focused on re-employment or the few interventions that aim to improve unemployed people's well-being by minimising their suffering. PPIs such as the gratitude exercise, thinking about one's strength, adopting goals, and performing acts of kindness may directly satisfy the need for competence, the need for relatedness and—perhaps also to a lesser degree—the need for autonomy. Moreover, the (social) context in which PPIs are enacted may further stimulate the well-being effects of PPIs by being need supportive. Although several scholars have touched theoretically on the role of need satisfaction and need support (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013) and initial empirical studies have provided first evidence for their role in PPIs (Nelson et al., 2014), it is hoped that this chapter may further stimulate researchers and practitioners alike to adopt SDT in studying and implementing PPIs among unemployed.

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