

## **NORMATIVE AND DEVIANT BEHAVIOR IN TERMS OF D. UZNADZE SET THEORY BASED STRAIN MODEL**

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### **Abstract**

Normative systems are major adjustment instruments. Subjective existence of social values and activity standards reflected in norms has its mental equivalent – the system of fixed unconscious sets and expectations underlying activity. Absence of relevant normative sets hinders adaptation and results in different types of tension. Some forms of tension actualize through non-normative channels and create a basis for deviant behavior. Adaptation or the normativity of activity cannot be ensured only by unconscious systems of sets fixed through experience. To adjust to changeable environment it becomes necessary to form new sets which will be later integrated into the existing system. Formation of new sets (D. Uznadze's "primary/situational" set) requires conscious resources. When the re-actualization of fixed set or the formation of primary set faces some problems resulting in the blockage of activity and the production of tension, effective adaptation cannot be ensured either through unconscious regulation or conscious voluntary regulation. Only the synergism of the two regulatory levels can ensure the modification of fixed sets, formation of primary sets, prevention of strain/ deviation and the normativity of activity. Many classical theories try to explain the formation of strain by blockage of dynamic mental formations. Explaining strain by blockage of existing fixed sets (i.e. from the perspective of Uznadze set theory) represents an original approach to the problem. Furthermore, the explanation of strain by failure to form the situational set necessary for adaptation represents a new approach to the psychological investigation of strain and deviation phenomena.

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**Keywords:** Psychological tension, strain, set, normativity, deviation

### **Introduction:**

Strain theory is one of the central theories explaining deviant activity. The classical conceptual approach has a poorly elaborated psychological aspect, also from the perspective of set theory. Development of an original approach to the psychological components of strain theory might serve the promotion of normative activity and stability of the social system as well as reduction and prevention of deviant activities.

Along with the satisfaction of social subjects' needs and interests, adjustment to the environment implies the existence of the resulting state of balance and harmony both with oneself and the environment.

Normative systems provide ready, tested and sanctioned instruments the utilization of which ensures the effectiveness of adaptation and minimizes the risk of tension caused by disadaptation and imbalance.

Social values and activity standards reflected in norms have their mental equivalent – the system of fixed unconscious sets which represent a psychological basis of their realization and underlie adaptive activity.

According to D. Uznadze set theory, set, as the state of psycho-physical readiness for adaptive activity, creates a basis for any level of regulatory activity. One of its forms is

primary or situational set which stops existence as soon as its constituting factors lose importance. Another form of set is represented by mental formations – fixed sets, the fixation of which takes place in the course of past experience [9:26].

The concept of set developed by D. Uznadze psychological school encompasses not only fixed sets (scope of the concept of attitude) or primary sets formed with the consideration of present givenness, but also the types of set specific of the personality level of human development which reflect future, prospective aspects of social values and, due to this, ensure a maximum adaptive value of activity.

Adaptive activity running on the personality level (or the level of normative activities) implies the existence of a form of fixed set - dispositional set [1:20], having the following specific attributes: 1. existence in permanently active state; 2 ability to self - actualize (relative independence from external stimulation); 3. ability to affect a very wide range of events; 4. ability of being actualized by a very wide range of events; 5. dispositional set is social value oriented; 6. is characterized by a high level of stability. Such sets are permanently supplied with energy because they are not dependent on the satisfaction of individual needs. They are based on internalized social values that are incorporated into set structure and, for this reason, their “satisfaction” can be understood as a permanent process of the realization of sets through the activity aimed at the realization of values. Therefore, dispositional sets are never fully realized or never reach the state of balance understood as stagnation. The balanced state for like sets implies their continual dynamic existence, continual realization. It is the hindrance of such a dynamic process that forms tension, i.e. imbalanced state of the system stimulating different types of activities (including deviant activity) which are aimed at the reduction of the given imbalance [2:55].

Adaptation and normativity of activity cannot be ensured only by the systems of set fixed through past experience. To modify fixed dispositional sets and adjust them to changeable environment it becomes necessary to form new situational sets. Formation of new primary sets for the realization of fixed dispositional sets requires conscious resources, since the named sets have to take into consideration current and future social requirements, and the social value of expected results [1:22].

Therefore, prosocial normative activity implies the existence of the state of psychophysical readiness the structure of which involves prospective factors. For example, in the absence of the situational factor or the object having some valency it is replaced by a pattern of anticipated, expected event. If the level of certainty related to the realization of prospective event is high, it can serve the function of the structural factor of set and the corresponding set can initiate adaptive activity. Otherwise, inability to adapt produces tension and the tendency to use the deviant adaptation method. Subjects differ in terms of a) ability to form set on the basis of the expected; b) value systems and hierarchies able to function as a motivational determinant of activity; c) stable dispositional systems of like sets which are in the state of permanent actualization.

To adjust goals according to social needs and/or choose a normative way of reaching a desirable result, the subject has to partially give up one’s interests and expect more modest and/or delayed, but socially acceptable results. The subject makes this kind of compromise when, in addition to being attractive (i.e. being able to satisfy the interest) the result or, in this case, the motivational determinant is characterized by the corresponding level of expectancy/relevancy. To reject non-normative ways of prompt goal achievement, the subject needs a guarantee that the normative way will lead to desirable results within a reasonable period of time and that the achievement of goal is highly probable. The subjective probability underlying the certainty of achieving expected results is increased by additional guarantees provided by the following factors: a) Rule of law (guaranteeing the achievement of desirable results by means of normative activity through stability and the gains resulting from law abidance) and the legal state based on the rule of law [4:19]; b) Cognitive social

capital (co-participation of the society and the state as a guarantee of achieving results through normative activity) and a high level of structural social trust [5:72].

Therefore, normativity of behavior and the prevention of deviant behavior are ensured by the person's ability to form (and maintain) stable sets on the basis of social values. It is also ensured by successful socialization resulting in the internalization of normative attitudes.

Since social values are based on social expectations and adherence to social norms depends on a high level of certainty related to expectations, several factors, determining normative character of activity (or, consequently, deviation), have to be singled out. These are:

1. External factors – Fulfillment of expectations/realization of set or the normative space of the guarantees needed for the performance of prosocial activity ensured by the legal state, civil society and the supremacy of law;

2. Internal factors: a) on the individual level - systems of dispositional sets formed on the basis of values and characterized with the level of readiness needed for the realization of these values; formation, through socialization, of the skills required by conscious voluntary activity for the initiation and control of normative activity; b) on the collective level – normative expectations, attitudes and legal culture (legal consciousness and the experience of law abiding activity).

It is only the compatibility of these factors that ensures the stability and normativity of activity and prevents deviation.

Absence of relevant normative sets or the existence of problems with the re-actualization of fixed set/ formation of primary set hinder adaptation or make adaptation impossible. The disturbance of balance caused by disadaptation results in different forms of tension [6: 71]. The problems related to the sources of such tension are very close to the understanding of the phenomenon of set as adaptation oriented integrate psycho-physical modification and mobilization. There is also an important connection between strain and the state of readiness specific of set, which will be discussed below.

As already said, in addition to the unconscious resources provided by set, normative prosocial activity also requires involvement of the conscious level of mental activity. Stemming from Uznadze theory, connection between the unconscious and conscious levels of mental activity and the regulation of activity are ensured by objectification. From the perspective of Uznadze theory, the objectification act is related to impediment in the realization of set caused by incompatibility of the individual's fixed and actualized sets with the changed situation [8:92]. In general, irrespective of whether there are problems with the realization of fixed set or the formation of a new, situational set, objectification takes place only when it is impossible to carry out adaptive activity based on the named forms of set.

It should be emphasized that the objectification act is caused by hindrances in the realization of both actualized fixed set and primary set. We should also take into consideration that in addition to the above reasons, objectification can be also caused by failure to modify these sets or replace them with newly formed sets. In this case we are talking about the formation of primary (i.e. situational) set, where the problem triggering the objectification act is the absence of the factors necessary for the formation of fully structured primary set [3:31]. In terms of the specificity of the structure of set we are talking about the possibility of set formation in such cases where set is structured by anticipated, prospective, expected and valent events represented on the ideal level (the version of the motivational model of expected value in which motive is represented by the result determining adherence to the norm). It is clear that the formation of this type of set is only possible through the involvement of the conscious level. The primary sets determining normative behavior and shaped in this way are fixed in certain conditions and continue to exist as unconscious mental entities not requiring

any further conscious intervention for the purpose of compatibility between activity and previously imprinted normative patterns.

The absence of like sets or inadequate development of their attributes results in the failure of normative activity and a risk of deviant behavior. Like risk arises because of the absence of fixed sets ensuring normative behavior and because of the absence of organizing individual personality that would structure and shape the named resources, increase the readiness level and ensure their realization. Thus, another necessary precondition is the existence of the subject of activity who is expected to have the following characteristics: 1. a) ability to purposefully distort the existing mental balance due to the needs of the social environment; b) ability to form the type of dispositional sets described above on the basis of prospective expected results following the realization of social values; c) possession of highly developed skills enabling the subject to consciously and, also, voluntarily, regulate impulsive activity (carried out on the level of set). Existence of these characteristics increases the predictability of social subjects' behavior as well as the confidence in normativity of their activity. 2. Sufficiently developed resources for unconscious mental regulation (i.e. the presence of the system of dispositional sets ready for self-actualization as well as the initiation and regulation of activity). Stable, permanently dynamic dispositional sets, aimed at the realization of social values, impede the formation or actualization of incompatible, non-normative sets. The described mechanisms take part in the prevention of deviant behavior by blocking formation of sets preceding deviant behavior and ensuring a sort of resistance against non-normative activity.

Synergism of the conscious and unconscious levels regulating activity is a necessary precondition for normative behavior and, consequently, a precondition for the prevention of deviant behavior. Set based and conscious regulation mechanism complement and back up each other in an unusual environment and, by doing so, ensure the stability and adaptability of normative behavior [7:22]. When used as an adaptation instrument, deviant behavior can be understood as a last resort. Such a necessity arises when the social subject lacks the relevant resources for normative adaptation, including fixed sets. Therefore, deviation could be related to the following: a) Inability to form specific primary sets with the use of data only in a prospective way or anticipate the outcomes of the realization of social values, which points to inadequate development of conscious and ethical levels of reflection and regulation; b) Absence or inadequate actuality of dispositional sets caused by their weak fixation resulting from their insignificant personal value for the activity subject; c) Peculiarities of the social environment unfavorable for the formation of new socially oriented sets or the incorporation and fixation of already existing social sets

### **Conclusion:**

Absence of relevant normative sets or the existence of problems with the re-actualization of fixed set/ formation of primary set hinder adaptation or make adaptation impossible. Inability to form the state of readiness necessary for behavior or the blockage of the set realization process produce different forms of tension. Some forms of tension tend to realize in a non-normative way (strain), which results in deviant behavior. Explanation of tension by blockage of the realization of dynamic mental formations – sets, is in line with the traditional strain models (psychodynamic and/or psycho-hydraulic models) which focus on unrealized mental formations. According to these theories such mental formations tend to realize themselves through activity. When the realization process is blocked their unused energy creates tension.

As for set theory, it explains the creation of tension by a) existence of non-realized fixed mental formations, and, b) inability or impossibility to form the sets necessary for adaptation (and, consequently, necessary for the prevention of the undesirable state of strain). If we take into consideration that a general level of tension increases in case of

necessity of adaptation (which is related to mobilization, concentration, directedness and readiness) then the formation of set would imply a purposeful directedness at the adaptation tasks corresponding to the general level of tension through which it would be possible to release the tension or state of readiness. If set fails to form, then tension a) is not able to realize itself through activity, or, b) localize, acquire specific, directed character and accumulate into the readiness for prospective activity existing in the form of fixed set with delayed realization potential (e.g. conative component of set). In this case it will have a weaker tendency to transform into the set underlying another type of activity (undesirable activity). In case of the absence of set the tension meant for adaptation will transform into a counterproductive, destructive tension and might later achieve realization through undesirable activities (e.g. deviation, as an instrumental activity caused by a deficit of the relevant dispositional sets representing a resource for normative activity).

Stemming from the above we can single out several sources of strain/tension, and, consequently, deviant activity:

1. Existence of dynamic mental formations with high level of readiness for realization (i.e. existence of not only cognitive and/or affective components but also of the fully developed conative component) which have no realization opportunity or the realization of which is blocked;

2. Absence of dynamic mental formations with high level of readiness for realization or impossibility of the formation of the sets necessary for adaptation for the following reasons: 1) insufficient differentiation of one of the factors; 2) absence of the system of similar normative dispositional sets (caused by gaps in the socialization process) the energy of which could be used for the formation of new sets; 3) insufficiently developed skills involved in voluntary activity, due to which it becomes impossible to a) compensate the factor related deficit through the use of prospective entities (e.g. content of values) as motivational determinants, and b) ensure permanent experiential givenness of goals/ prospective entities.

3. Absence of the synergism between the levels of mental regulation, due to which a problem emerging on one level cannot be compensated by the other level of regulation, which makes adaptation impossible and creates a risk of strain formation;

4. In the absence of synergism between conscious and unconscious resources or in the case of incompatibility between the tendencies actualized in parallel to these levels, conscious and unconscious tendencies block each other. Because of these internal, subjective and psychological incompatibilities (rather than environmental problems, as stated in many sociological approaches) it becomes impossible to perform behavior, resulting in inability to adapt, and consequently, in the creation of tension.

Neither set based unconscious regulation nor conscious voluntary regulation can separately ensure effective adaptation. Only the compatibility and synergism of these two levels can ensure the modification of fixed sets and formation of primary sets. The latter two create preconditions for effective adaptation and prevention of deviation/strain.

Thus, adaptation problems and different forms of tension are caused by blockage of formation/ realization of the set systems underlying adaptive behavior and their existence in non-realized form. In more general terms, tension is created by the disturbance of mental balance understood as a continual dynamic process of set formation, change and realization.

Differentiation of the stages of set formation, fixation and functioning as well as interpreting the balance-tension dynamic model in terms of set, will significantly enrich the theoretical and practical research instruments which could be used for the investigation of the non-productive/destructive mental state caused by a deficit of adaptation resources.

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