

The Role of Resilience and Optimism in Job Efficacy

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Abstract

The positive psychology movement has influenced organizational research as well as contemporary life pursuits. The present investigation is geared to examine the role of resilience and optimism in job efficacy. Two hundred and eight managers from industrial organizations participated in this study. They were individually administered standardized tests of resilience, optimism and job efficacy. Results indicated no sex difference with respect to efficacy dimensions. However, male managers exhibited greater optimism especially in the context of explaining negative events. Optimism and resilience were found to be significantly related. More importantly optimism and resilience were significantly associated with generalized self-efficacy, work-related efficacy and job efficacy. The findings were explained in the light of contemporary theories. Major implications were outlined in terms of possible intervention programs.

Key words: Resilience, Optimism, Self-efficacy, Role-efficacy

Introduction

The center for Creative Leadership (CCL) conducted a study on the key events that contributed to leaders' development. Twenty percent of respondents said that they learned significant lessons from hardship, such as a job loss, career setbacks, mistakes and failures or personal trauma. The research was repeated in the late 1990s. At that time 34 percent of respondents cited hardship as key learning experience. The case of 14 percent increase reflects an increasing complexity and turbulence and it underscores the importance of developing resilience (Gill, 2006).

Resilience is important because changes are so pervasive (Masten & Reed, 2005). Organizations can change mission strategy or global focus. The capacity to minimize and prevent the negative effects of adverse circumstances is an attribute with special significance. Resilience is not just about responding to a setback. It is about continually anticipating and adjusting to

deep trends that can impair progress. It's about having the capacity to change even before the cause for change becomes obvious.

Theories abound about what produces resilience, but three fundamental characteristics seem to set resilient people and organizations apart from others. The first characteristic is the capacity to accept and face down reality. In looking hard at reality, they prepare themselves to act in ways that allow them to endure and survive the hardship. The ability to see reality is closely linked to the second building block of resilience, the propensity to make meaning of terrible times. The concept is beautifully articulated by Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychologist and Auschwitz survivor. In the midst of staggering suffering, Frankl invented meaning therapy, a humanistic therapy technique that helps individuals make the kinds of decisions that will create significance in their lives. The third building block of resilience is the ability to make do with whatever is at hand. Psychologists

follow the lead of French Anthropologist Levi Strauss in calling this *skill bricolage*. The roots of that word are closely tied to the concept of resilience. It literally means “bouncing back”. Bricolage in the modern sense can be defined as a kind of inventiveness, an ability to improvise a solution to a problem without proper or obvious tools or materials. Becoming resilient is a developmental process. It is possible to change one's views, habits and responses by modifying one's thoughts and actions in certain critical areas: acceptance of change, continuous learning, self-empowerment, sense of purpose, personal identity, personal and professional networks, reflection and skill shifting.

While a number of behavioral indicators have been identified, the nomological network of the construct is yet to be clarified. In order to develop an effective intervention (training program) for resilience building, critical parameters are to be identified. This requires an examination of its relationship with certain other major variables (Newman, 2004).

Optimism as a construct offers such possibilities (Carver & Scheier, 2005). In defining optimism, contemporary behavioral scientists go far beyond the old adage of the “power of positive thinking”. Scientists treat optimism as a cognitive characteristic in terms of generalized positive outcome expectancy. Daniel Goleman devotes considerable attention to the role of optimism in his discussion of emotional intelligence. Peterson points out: optimism is not simply cold cognition, and if we forget the emotional flavor that pervades optimism, we can make little sense of the fact that optimism is both motivated and motivating.

More recently, Seligman (1991) has explicated various dimensions of optimism. In line with his attributional approach, he has used the term *explanatory style* to depict how

an individual habitually attributes the causes of failure, misfortune or bad events. It is shown that pessimists make *internal* (their own fault), *stable* (will last a long time), and *global* (will undermine everything they do) attribution. In contrast, optimists make *external* (not their fault), *unstable* (temporary setbacks), and *specific* (problem only in this situation) attribution.

Optimism has been recognized as a positive force in workplace. Several empirical studies have documented the role of optimism in corporate excellence.

In view of the construct saliency and contemporary business dynamics, the present investigation is directed to examine the role of resilience and optimism in the context of their job efficacy. More specifically, the following objectives are set aside:

1. To identify the attributional (explanatory) styles of males and female managers
2. To examine the role of resilience and optimism in self-efficacy and job efficacy
3. To generate implications for resilience building measures

Research Methodology

Participants

The current research is derived from part of a larger study assessing a variety of positive organizational behavior. Two hundred and eight managers from industrial organization participated in this study. There were 142 men (mean age = 32.52, SD = 3.67) and 66 women (mean age = 34.67, SD = 4.15). Participants took part in this study voluntarily. The respondents were assured anonymity of responses.

Measurement Scales

Most of the scales were standardized measures. To establish the psychometric properties of these scales, we first tested the

reliability and metric equivalence between the two samples.

Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES)

Jerusalem and Schwarzer (1995) have developed a 10-item measure of generalized self-efficacy. It judges an individual's perceived belief that he/she can competently execute a function. The scale is based on Albert Bandura's (1997) construct of self-efficacy. Responses are made on a 4-point scale. The aggregation of responses across all 10 items yields the final composite score with a range of 10 to 40.

Work-related Self-Efficacy

This is a domain specific measure of self-efficacy. The scale presents a number of odds. Respondents are asked to indicate their level of confidence (on a 4-point scale) that they can execute a function despite such obstructions. Drawing on Bandura's conceptualization and operationalization, Sahoo (2000) has developed and validated this test of work-related self-efficacy.

Measure of Job Efficacy

Drawing on Bandura's (1997) conceptualization, Jones (1986) has developed and validated a measure of job efficacy. It is a contextualized measure of perceived job competency. The reliability and validity of the scale has been reported elsewhere (Jones, 1986). There are eight items and individuals are asked to indicate their disagreement / agreement on a 7-point scale. The aggregation of responses across items yields a composite score ranging from 8 to 56.

Measure of Optimistic Attribution Scale

Seligman (1991) has developed and validated a measure of optimistic explanatory styles. The scale presents 48 hypothetical (24 positive and 24 negative) events. Each event is followed by two alternative casual explanations. Respondents are asked to imagine each event happening to

them and select one causal explanation out of two alternatives. Of all positive events one third measure internality (indicating that the actor is the cause of the event); one third measures stability (indicating that the event is stable or permanent); one third measures globality (indicating that the effects are pervasive across a wide variety of domains). Similarly one third of negative items measures externality (indicating that the cause of the event involves other people or external environment). One third measures instability (indicating that the event is unstable or temporary). One third measures specificity (indicating that the effect is limited to a single domain in which it has its origin).

The administration of the scale generates scores on eight indicators of optimism (internality, stability, globality and composite scores for positive events; externality, instability, specificity and composite scores for negative events). Sahoo (2000) has adapted some of the items to suit Indian conditions. The scale has been field-tested prior to its present use.

Resilience Scale

Connor and Davidson (2003) have developed a resilience scale. The scale consists of 25 simple statements denoting various aspects of resilience. Respondents are asked to indicate their own personal assessment on a 5-point scale ranging from '0' to '4'. The response categories include: not at all true, rarely true, sometimes true, often true, and true most of the time. The validity of the scale has been reported elsewhere (Conner & Davidson, 2003).

Procedure

All 208 managers were randomly sampled from industrial organizations located in the coastal districts of Odisha. They were contacted and were individually administered all parts of the scale. The

sequence of administration involved: self-efficacy measures, job efficacy, optimism and resilience. Individual consent was taken prior to the study. Every participant was debriefed after the study was completed. Statistical computations were used to examine sex difference. Analyses were also geared to investigate the pattern of relationships amongst variables.

Result

A major objective of the study involves the examination of sex difference with respect to several positive organizational behaviors. As shown by Table 1, there is no sex difference with respect to efficacy dimensions.

Women managers exhibit as much generalized self-efficacy, work-related

Table 1: Mean Scores of Male and Female Managers

Variables	Males (n=142)		Females (n=66)		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Self-efficacy	31.5	4.7	32.1	3.9	0.75
Work-related efficacy	36.7	3.9	38.4	2.7	0.93
Job efficacy	43.4	6.2	40.1	5.9	0.67
Resilience	70.1	5.9	66.3	6.4	1.69
<i>Optimism</i>					
Positive events					
Internality	5.99	1.41	6.01	1.69	0.44
Stability	6.21	1.93	6.19	2.01	0.37
Globality	6.41	2.20	6.59	2.37	0.40
Composite	17.58	4.01	18.23	4.41	0.91
Negative events					
Externality	6.72	1.01	5.19	1.40	2.21*
Instability	6.30	.09	5.41	1.21	2.41*
Specificity	5.91	1.30	5.83	2.01	0.87
Composite	18.23	3.59	16.01	3.27	2.31*

*p<.05, **p<.01

efficacy and job efficacy as do male managers. However, there is a trend indicating women's greater resilience, though the value does not reach the level of statistical significance, $t(206)=1.69$ ($p<.10$).

In relation to optimistic explanatory style, male managers exhibit greater optimism especially in the context of explaining bad (negative) events. Male managers show greater externality (implying that they perceive other people or external environments as the cause of bad event) than do female managers, $t(206) = 2.21$, $p<.05$. Similarly male managers indicate greater instability (denoting that bad events are

relatively temporary) than do female managers, $t(206) = 2.41$, $p<.05$ (see Table 1). More importantly, male managers exhibit higher composite scores of optimism than do female managers ($M = 18.23$ and 16.01 , respectively). However, no sex difference is revealed with respect to explaining positive events.

Table 2 depicts correlations among variables. There are a number of salient features. In both the samples. Measures of self-efficacy are significantly inter-correlated.

In the group of male managers, generalized self-efficacy is significantly related to work-

Table 2: Correlations among Variables in Male and Female Managers

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Males (n=142)											
1. Generalized self-efficacy											
2. Work-related self-efficacy	.44**										
3. Job efficacy	.39**	.47**									
Optimism											
4. Good events: Internality	.16*	.13	.11								
5. Stability	.13	.09	.07	.22**							
6. Globality	.18*	.12	.05	.23**	.27**						
7. Composite	.29**	.15*	.13	.47**	.39**	.29**					
8. Bad events: Externality	.17*	.07	.08	.12	.17*	.10	.09				
9. Instability	.18*	.09	.11	.10	.19*	.11	.8	.29**			
10. Specificity	.22**	.11	.13	.18*	.09	.12	.11	.32**	.44**		
11. Composite	.31**	.14	.17*	.31**	.20**	.18*	.17*	.42**	.46**	.41**	
12. Resilience	.15*	.13	.15*	.09	.11	.13	.12	.09	.11	.10	.13
Females (n=66)											
1. Generalized self-efficacy											
2. Work-related self-efficacy	.33**										
3. Job efficacy	.32**	.26*									
Optimism											
4. Good events: Internality	.41**	.11	.18								
5. Stability	.25*	.10	.17	.27*							
6. Globality	.21	.09	.13	.29*	.31**						
7. Composite	.27*	.26*	.29*	.43**	.47**	.39**					
8. Bad events: Externality	.13	.05	.11	.13	.15	.11	.08				
9. Instability	.12	.09	.13	.09	.18	.13	.10	.31**			
10. Specificity	.17	.10	.08	.15	.23*	.19	.12	.44**	.43**		
11. Composite	.29*	.27*	.26*	.24*	.22	.21	.15	.47**	.48**	.44**	
12. Resilience	.25*	.23*	.22	.20	.19	.14	.13	.27*	.10	.13	.17

*p<.05, **p<.01

related self-efficacy, $r(140) = 0.44$, $p < 0.01$ (see Table 2). Similarly general self-efficacy is associated with job efficacy, $r(140) = 0.39$, $p < 0.01$. Work-related efficacy and job efficacy are also significantly correlated, $r(140) = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$. Similar pattern is obtained in the sample of female managers.

As expected, various indicators of optimism (internality, stability and globality in the context of explaining positive events and externality, instability and specificity in the context of explaining negative events) are significantly inter-correlated. This is indicative of scale's internal consistency.

It is important to note that there is a trend in the direction of positive relationship between efficacy dimensions and composite optimism scores, though the values do not reach the level of statistical significance in all cases.

Finally the relationship of resilience with other variables is shown to be in the predicted direction. In the group of males, the association between self-efficacy and resilience is statistically significant, $r(140) = 0.15$, $p < 0.05$. With respect to other variables, there are trends in the direction of positive association, though correlation values do not

reach the level of statistical significance. Similar pattern is observed in the group of females.

In summary, it can be stated that both optimism and resilience are significantly correlated. Optimism and resilience are also significantly associated with generalized self-efficacy, work-related efficacy and job efficacy.

Discussion and Conclusion

The emerging interest in the study of positive organizational behavior has created immense possibilities of “new look”. In this study, the primary focus has been placed on optimism and resilience. Optimism refers to positive expectation regarding future outcomes whereas resilience denotes positive adaptational process in the context of adversity. Both the constructs have been examined in the context of efficacy dimensions.

The matrix of correlations clearly suggests the positive role of optimism and resilience. These two variables are found to be significantly related to generalized self-efficacy, work-related self-efficacy and job efficacy. These findings hold for both samples of male and female managers.

A major implication of these findings involves the role of reattribution training. It is important to recognize that explaining a positive event in internal, stable and global factors is indicative of positive adaptational process. In contrast, explaining a positive event in external, unstable and specific terms is indicative of maladaptive orientation. Hence attempts need to be geared in the direction of bringing managers to the goal of adaptive orientation. Similarly, explaining negative events in internal, stable and global factors is maladaptive whereas explaining negative events in external, unstable and

specific terms is indicative of adaptive orientation. Training and counseling need to be directed towards substituting faculty attribution by appropriate attribution styles.

It is expected that a change towards functional optimism (not unrealistic optimism) would enhance efficacy dimensions. Enhancing resilience is a formidable task. Yet Masten (2006) has provided useful guidelines in terms of risk-focused strategy, asset-focused strategy and process-focused strategy. Sufficient care may be taken in organizations to remove risks and hazards. Examples of asset-focused strategy include the establishment of resource centers, career counseling centers and similar avenues. Process-focused strategy includes relationship boosting measures, competence training and coping up gradation. In sum, attempts to boost resilience are likely to contribute in the enabling and empowerment process.

The other implication entails the importance of reattribution training for female managers. It has shown that female managers lag behind their male counterparts in the area of adaptive (functional) attribution styles for explaining negative events. Women tend to use, it is shown, internality, stability and globality in explaining bad events. Consequently it is appropriate to help them develop adaptive attribution styles of externality, instability and specificity while explaining negative events. The vulnerability of women in the area of maladaptive attribution styles can be addressed in form of reattribution training.

Despite many helpful clues provided by the study, the causal link remains unclear owing to co-relational nature of the study. More fine-grained studies both in the tradition of experimental manipulation and statistical controls would unpack the causal linkages providing greater inputs for intervention programs.

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