

Abstract of Dissertation

EFFECTS OF OPTIMISM ON GOAL-SETTING PERFORMANCE

by

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The purpose of this dissertation was to extend goal-setting research by incorporating optimism as a moderating variable. A diverse sample of 298 adults from several businesses and educational institutions located in Phoenix, Arizona, and San Diego, California, participated in the study. Participants were randomly assigned to either an easy goal or difficult goal condition. All completed the Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R) and three timed trials of a simple clerical task; rated their commitment to their assigned goal, their perception of the goal difficulty of their assigned goal, their satisfaction with their performance, and their expected and desired performance score; and answered some demographical questions.

Three hypotheses were tested to explore the moderating effects of optimism on the relationships (a) goal difficulty and performance, (b) initial performance and subsequent performance on a second trial, and (c) performance and satisfaction with performance. The data did not support these hypothesized moderating relationships. Whereas optimism did not moderate the relationship between goal difficulty and performance, a post hoc analysis revealed that satisfaction with performance moderated the relationship between success and subsequent performance. This suggested that optimism is a stable trait-like personality characteristic, whereas satisfaction is a more state-like personality characteristic influenced by success. Thus, a more task-specific version of the LOT-R might better predict performance in task-specific settings. Other findings showed that optimism was positively related to subsequent performance by very optimistic people who had received negative feedback. Moreover, optimism positively related to satisfaction with performance, commitment, and a single-item Pessimism-Optimism Scale.

Some Implications for Businesses

In today's competitive business environment, organizations search for ways to increase their competitiveness. The results of this study may help organizations to gain insight into employees' behaviors. Organizations may be able to increase their productivity by contributing to their employees' satisfaction and commitment. Furthermore, organizations that consider optimism as a value-added variable in the selection process and hire and fill key positions will outperform organizations that do not find value in the concept of optimism.