

Examination of Relationship Between Goal Orientation, Work Engagement and Self-Efficacy

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Abstract: Our society is facing a growing amount of crises and the nature of co-operation and business is changing. Organizations need to be more adaptive and employees are required to be more engaged and self-efficient. This paper argues that organizations willing to support employees in terms of self-efficacy and engagement should give more focus on learning rather than performance. The study conducted on a sample of 155 working adults examines the relationships between performance & learning goal orientation, self-efficacy and aspects of work engagement (vigor, dedication, absorption). Analyses of linear regressions showed highly significant positive effects of learning goal orientation on self-efficacy, work engagement and all its sub-aspects vigor, dedication and absorption. On the contrary, the effects of performance goal orientation on any of the examined variables were not significant. Implications of the results as well as recommendations for organizations willing to support orientation for learning are further presented in discussion.

Keywords: work engagement; self-efficacy; learning goal orientation; performance goal orientation

JEL Classification: M14; M53; O35

1. Introduction

Our society witnesses great changes driven by increasing technological progress, ongoing globalization and the more recent Covid-19 crisis. All those factors force contemporary organizations to continue operating in increasingly complex and uncertain conditions (Baard et al., 2014; Shaw et al., 2020). New conditions in turn exert significant psychological pressure on employees and force them to be more engaged and self-efficient at work (Merdiaty & Aldrin, 2020). Both work engagement and self-efficacy are highly demanded in contemporary organizations, but their development and well as an understanding of their motivation antecedents continues to be an undergoing challenge (Carleton et al., 2018; Coe & Salanova, 2018; Knight et al., 2019).

Motivations factors that drive organizational actions are described by goal orientation theory that distinguishes performance and learning goal orientation (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Performance goal orientation is characterized by a belief that ability is the most important determinant of performance, while the learning goal orientation gives main emphasis on effort (Vandewalle et al., 2019). In practice, the learning goal orientation represents the willingness of individuals to learn through both pleasant and unpleasant experiences, embrace new aspects of work and perceive failures as valuable feedback (Button et al., 1996). The performance goal orientation represents a rather narrow-minded focus on the attainment

of goals that makes individuals concerned about gaining favorable judgment of their competence or avoiding negative judgments of their incompetence (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). The mainstream of business today still places the strongest emphasis on performance (Hamel, 2020). However, previous studies on goal orientation indicate that hiring employees that are mainly oriented on performance can hamper organizational progress, while the learning goal orientation is associated with numerous positive effects on quality of feedback, well-being and resilience (Gong et al., 2014; Vandewalle et al., 2019). This paper examines, whether this difference exists also in the case of self-efficacy and work engagement.

Self-efficacy is characterized by an individual's stable belief in his/her capacity to achieve across a wide range of challenges, tasks and situations (Bandura, 1977; Chen et al., 2000). This capacity is linked with numerous workplace-related benefits, such as better team leadership (Paglis, 2010), higher job satisfaction (Judge & Bono, 2001) and increased performance (Judge & Bono, 2001; Tims et al., 2014). There is also strong evidence which indicates that high self-efficacy is the result of high past performance (Sitzmann & Yeo, 2013). Notwithstanding the fact of strong relationships between self-efficacy and performance, I assume that self-efficacy is rather predetermined by one's willingness to learn, rather than his/her need to perform. It was already suggested that individuals with high learning goal orientation are more opened to new experiences, including failures (Button et al., 1996). Such an attitude seems to provide a good position for the development of confidence that is based on skill of handling the present experience as best as possible and learning from it. On the contrary, the performance goal orientation is linked with more tension, because the main focus of individual that oriented in this way is to finish the task and to prove his/her ability (Vandewalle, 1997). Therefore, I suggest that learning goal orientation is positively related to self-efficacy, while the performance goal orientation is negatively related to self-efficacy. Those hypotheses have been already examined by previous studies, but most of them were conducted on students (Al-Harthi & Was, 2013; Dull et al., 2015; Fan et al., 2008; Ford et al., 1998) or job applicants (Donovan & Hafsteinsson, 2006) and so their findings cannot be generalized for work-place settings. Furthermore, two studies that were conducted on working adults (Chen et al., 2000; Heidemeier & Staudinger, 2015) did not use validated scales of self-efficacy and so the validity of their findings is problematic. Hence the reason for the examination of the effects on self-efficacy in this study with the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Learning goal orientation is positively related to self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 2. Performance goal orientation is negatively related to self-efficacy.

This study also examines the impact of learning and performance goal orientation on work engagement. Work engagement represents a positive work-related state of fulfilment that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Work engagement is considered as one of the key indicators of the healthy organization as it is related to many benefits, such as higher well-being (Malinowski & Lim, 2015), job satisfaction (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014), job performance (Rich et al., 2010) and organizational commitment (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Although the work engagement is related to increased performance (Rich et al., 2010), closer observation of its three aspects indicates that its driving

force is rather learning. In more detail, “vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working and by the willingness and ability to invest effort in one’s work. Dedication is characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. The final dimension of engagement, absorption, is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one’s work, whereby time passes quickly and one feels carried away by one’s job” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 465).

All three sub-concepts of work-engagement are related to the pleasure of doing work and facing its challenges that are typical for learning goal orientation rather than the tendency to prove one’s ability that is typical for performance goal orientation (Button et al., 1996). In fact, it seems likely that individuals who are so much driven by the need to perform might lose the contact with the simple pleasure of doing an activity (Pink, 2011). Few previous studies showed pioneering findings on the positive impact of learning goal orientation on work engagement (Adriaenssens et al., 2015; Bakker et al., 2020; Matsuo, 2019; Zhang et al., 2017) and two of them also showed the negative impact of performance goal orientation on work engagement (Adriaenssens et al., 2015; Bakker et al., 2020). However, all those studies with exception of Zhang et al. (2017) did not provide a deeper examination of work engagement, because they examined the total construct only, but did not examine the effect on three sub-components of vigor, dedication and absorption. Therefore, I examine the impact of performance and learning goal orientation on vigor, dedication and absorption based on the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a. Learning goal orientation is positively related to vigor.

Hypothesis 3b. Learning goal orientation is positively related to dedication.

Hypothesis 3c. Learning goal orientation is positively related to absorption

Hypothesis 4a. Performance goal orientation is positively related to vigor.

Hypothesis 4b. Performance goal orientation is positively related to dedication.

Hypothesis 4c. Performance goal orientation is positively related to absorption

2. Methodology

Participants

The sample of this study included 155 working adults located in the Czech Republic. Participants were recruited via e-mail and the survey was conducted through the google forms platform. Initially, 192 participants filled the survey. To be included in our study, the participants had to 1) correctly fill all items of the questionnaire, 2) be full-time or part-time employees, 3) have minimal age of 18 and maximum age of 65, 4) have Czech or Slovak nationalities (both neighbor nationalities have almost identical language and culture) and 5) work in at least one of the 8 service or industry sectors (IT services, Advisory & Financial Services, Retail & Logistics, Hospitality & Food production, Automobile Industry, Research & Laboratory Works, Social Care & Education, Construction Industry & Materials). Based on these criteria, 37 participants were excluded from the initial sample. More specifically, 22 participants were excluded because of the missing data, 6 participants were excluded because they filled items incorrectly, 5 participants were excluded because they were not full-time or

part-time employees and 4 participants were excluded because their affiliation did not match with 8 industry and service sectors stated above. Participants (M age = 28.98, SD = 10.54) were 66.5 % female, 42.3 % reported having previous managerial or entrepreneurial experience and 29.7 had previous experience with mindfulness meditation or psychotherapy.

Measures

All questionnaires used in this study were translated from the original English version to the Czech language and translated back to English by an independent translator to access high-quality translation. Final versions of questionnaires were then created with help of one independent researcher and one translator.

Learning goal orientation and performance goal orientation. Learning and performance goal orientation were examined by the 8-item Goal orientation measure-learning (GOM-L) and 8-item Goal orientation measure-performance (GOM-P) developed by Button et al. (1996). Participants indicated how much they agree with the presented statements by choosing on the 1-5 Likert scale (from 1[strongly disagree] to 5[strongly agree]). The GOM-L contains items like: "The opportunity to do challenging work is important to me." The example of the item of GOM-P is "I'm happiest at work when I perform tasks on which I know that I won't make errors."

Work engagement. The level of work engagement and its subscales vigor (UWES-V), dedication (UWES-D) and absorption (UWES-A) was measured by a 9-item version Utrecht Work and Well-Being Survey (UWES; Schaufeli et al. 2006). The participants indicated how often they experience feelings and situations described in the scale by choosing on 7-item Likert scale, ranging from 1 [Never] to 7 [Always / Every day]. The examples of the particular subscales are "At my work, I feel bursting with energy." (UWES-V), "My job inspires me." (UWES-D), "I am immersed in my work." (UWES-A).

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy was examined by the 10-item General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). Participants indicated how much they agree with the presented statements by choosing on the 1-4 Likert scale (from 1[not at all true] to 5[exactly true]). The item example of the GSE is: "Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations."

All measures proved to be reliable with Cronbach alphas ranging from .77 for the GOM-P to .93 for the UWES (see Table 1 for scale reliabilities and correlations). Apart from hypothesized relationships, the correlation analysis showed that there was no significant effect between performance goal orientation and any of the other examined variables. Therefore, performance goal orientation was not included in the main analysis.

3. Results

Data were analyzed using RStudio (version 1.2.5033). Series of linear regressions were used to examine the effect of learning goal orientation on self-efficacy and work engagement, including its sub-qualities vigor, dedication and absorption. Results showed highly significant relationship between learning goal orientation and self-efficacy ($\beta = .51$, $p < .001$),

work engagement ($\beta = .21, p < .001$), vigor ($\beta = .21, p < .001$), dedication ($\beta = .16, p < .001$) and absorption ($\beta = .18, p < .001$). For more detailed data see Table 2.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviation, Bivariate Correlations and Scale Reliabilities (N = 155)

Scale ¹	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
GSE	3.03	.49	(.87)						
GOM-L	3.97	.58	.43**	(.85)					
GOM-P	4.18	.52	.01	.21**	(.77)				
UWES	4.86	1.18	.28**	.43	.02	(.93)			
UWES-A	4.84	1.27	.22**	.45**	.04	.91**	(.78)		
UWES-D	4.97	1.38	.23**	.37**	.28	.95**	.82**	(.89)	
UWES-V	4.76	1.19	.33**	.38**	-.00	.89**	.72**	.79**	(.80)

Note. GSE = General Self-Efficacy Scale; GOM-L = Goal orientation measure-Learning; GOM-P = Goal orientation measure-Performance; UWES = Work and Well-Being Survey; UWES-A = Work and Well-Being Survey-Absorption; UWES-D = Work and Well-Being Survey-Dedication; UWES-V = Work and Well-Being Survey-Vigor; * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 2. Standardized Regression Coefficients per relationship between Learning Goal orientation and Self-efficacy and Work engagement qualities (N = 155)

	GOM-L	
	β	R ²
GSE	.51***	.19***
UWES	.21***	.19***
UWES-A	.21***	.21***
UWES-D	.16***	.14***
UWES-V	.18***	.14***

Note. GSE = General Self-Efficacy Scale; GOM-L = Goal orientation measure-Learning; UWES = Work and Well-Being Survey; UWES-A = Work and Well-Being Survey-Absorption; UWES-D = Work and Well-Being Survey-Dedication; UWES-V = Work and Well-Being Survey-Vigor; * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Interpretation of the results

This study was conducted to examine the effect of performance and learning goal orientation on self-efficacy and three domains of work engagement: vigor, dedication and absorption. The study hypothesized that learning goal orientation is positively related to self-efficacy (Hypothesis 1), vigor (Hypothesis 3a), dedication (Hypothesis 3b) and absorption (Hypothesis 3c). It was also expected that performance goal orientation is negatively related to self-efficacy (Hypothesis 2), vigor (Hypothesis 4a), dedication (Hypothesis 4b) and absorption (Hypothesis 4c). Results showed highly significant support for all effects related to learning goal orientation and did not support the effects related to performance goal orientation.

Firstly, the significant relationship between learning goal orientation and self-efficacy supports the suggestion that learning orientation fosters one's confidence in his/her abilities.

Learning goal orientation is characterized by the ability to face failures and mistakes and use them for one's growth and learning (Button et al. 1996). Results indicate that individuals which are oriented in this way gain their confidence from "living through experiences" - no matter whether they are marked with success or with failure (Hajloo, 2014). On the contrary, results did not show support for the negative relationship between performance goal orientation and self-efficacy. Previous studies showed that performance goal orientation is less beneficial and, in some cases, even detrimental to individual well-being and performance (Gong et al., 2014; Vandewalle et al., 2019). Yet, my results indicate that performance goal orientation is not harmful in terms of self-efficacy, but also not beneficial. Those findings are similar to the findings of previous studies (Al-Harthy & Was, 2013; Chen et al., 2000; Donovan & Hafsteinsson, 2006; Dull et al., 2015; Fan et al., 2008; Ford et al., 1998; Heidemeier & Staudinger, 2015). Those studies confirmed the positive significant effect of learning goal orientation on self-efficacy as well, but their support of negative effects of performance goal orientation was weaker. Contrary to those studies, this study was both conducted on working adults and used validated self-efficacy measure and thus extends the current state of the art.

Secondly, there was a significant relationship between learning goal orientation and vigor, dedication and absorption. This result extends current evidence of learning goal orientation and work engagement (Adriaenssens et al., 2015; Bakker et al., 2020; Matsuo, 2019; Zhang et al., 2017) because it confirmed (with exception of Zhang et al., 2017) highly significant effects on all three aspects - the vigor, dedication and absorption. Significant effect on vigor indicates that individuals oriented on learning tend to feel more vitality and excitement at work. Effect on dedication implies that individuals oriented on learning have can keep focus and determination on tasks. The significant effect on absorption indicates that learning goal orientation helps individuals enjoy their tasks and to be more frequently in the state of flow while working (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Effects for the performance goal orientation were not significant. Similarly to self-efficacy, these results suggest that performance goal orientation is not beneficial but also not harmful for domains of work engagement. Those results are not consistent with the results of Adriaenssens et al. (2015) and Bakker et al. (2020) that showed the negative impact of performance goal orientation on total work engagement. Therefore, more studies on the relationship between performance goal orientation and domains of work-engagement are needed to further clarify this point.

Limitations of the study and Recommendations for Future Studies

This study has three limitations. Firstly, the sample of this study was limited to 155 participants. Although other correlation studies cited in this paper had an even smaller samples (Al-Harthy & Was, 2013; Bakker et al., 2020; Donovan & Hafsteinsson, 2006; Ford et al., 1998), I recommend future studies to include a higher sample. Study with higher samples may benefit from a comparison between particular business sectors. For example, it can compare results between the IT sector and hospitality. This measure would be particularly fruitful in the face of the current Covid-19 crisis, which seems to deepen differences between business sectors even more than it was before.

Secondly, this study was exclusively based on self-report measures that are limited for organizational research, especially in terms of possible self-report biases (Podsakoff & Organ 1986). I recommend future studies to include other methods as well, such as peer-report measures or qualitative analyses (Medhurst et al., 2016).

Thirdly, I observe another limitation in the fact that the study was based on data that was obtained at one time. This fact is limiting because it does not allow to observe any kind of development in time (Bakker et al., 2020). Therefore, I recommend future studies to either obtain data two or three times.

Implications for Organizational Practice

Results of this study indicate that individuals oriented to learning are more engaged and self-efficient at work. Therefore, my suggestion for organizations is to take learning seriously. Learning is not only about the increased ability of workers to absorb new knowledge and increase cognitive flexibility. It is also a capacity that helps organizations to have more self-sustainable and self-organized members. This is possible because it allows workers to experience new things and mistakes more often as well as share what they have learned openly, with dignity and without fear (Laloux, 2014). There are companies, such as Google when even million-dollar mistakes are welcomed and cherished because they bring important lessons learned (Birkinshaw, 2012).

The first step to encourage learning is to give members more freedom from delivering results (Pink, 2011). Sometimes it is even beneficial for the whole organization as a whole to give itself more freedom. One of the benefits of this measure is expressed by the principle of indirect attainment of goals called obliquity. Many companies that do not directly strive to achieve financial or other performance results are highly profitable and performing (Birkinshaw, 2012). The second step is represented by supporting workers in the development of their orientation on learning. Learning might require a lot of courage because experiencing mistakes tends to be painful. Therefore, the establishment of group sessions where members can share their experiences, appreciate and support each other can be very empowering (Vich & Kim, 2016). Some portion of those circles can be also included in the regular meetings, because it actually makes them more vivid and interesting (Laloux, 2014). Organizations should also help members to further develop their socio-emotional skills, though learning mindfulness and compassion (Good et al. 2016; Vich & Lukeš, 2020).

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