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New Directions in Organizational Psychology and Behavioral Medicine

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BEHAVIOURAL ASPECTS OF RISK

New Directions in Organizational Psychology and Behavioral Medicine

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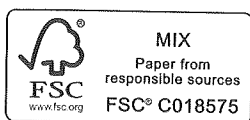
Self-Efficacy as a Central Psychological Capacity within the Construct of Positive Organizational Behavior: Its Impact on Work

Magdalini Koutsoumari and
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Positivity as a Focus Area in Psychology and Organizational Behavior

THE GROWTH OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND ITS RELATION WITH WORK

Positive psychology began as a new field of psychology in 1998, with Martin Seligman being the father of the modern positive psychology movement. The value of the term "positive psychology" lies in its uniting of what had previously been scattered lines of theory and research regarding what makes life most worth living (Peterson and Park, 2003). With its focus on optimal functioning and broadly on factors that add value in life, positive psychology offers a considerable additional prospect concerning the efforts for progress in the fields of leadership and human resources, recruiting and selection. The above is mainly achieved in terms of a better understanding of the critical role that peoples' strengths and positive emotions play in terms of performance in the workplace. Moreover, the way employees feel about themselves, their

work, and the people in their environment proves of great importance for their performance (Cartwright and Holmes, 2006). Psychology has focused primarily on negative aspects of human behavior, such as dysfunctions, weaknesses, and pathology (Schaufeli and Salanova, 2007). On the contrary, the increasing interest in positive psychology is related to a focus on personal strengths, optimal functioning, and well-being (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The goal of this new field of study is to investigate and understand the positive aspects of life and human disposition. At the mental process level, it is concerned with subjective experiences such as well-being, pleasure, and satisfaction (in relation to the past), hope and optimism (in relation to the future), and flow and happiness (in relation to the present) (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Seligman pointed out the importance of a meaningful life which provides the highest level of attainment, since happiness originates from utilization of strengths, with the aim of serving a target that exceeds and goes beyond the individual (Seligman, Parks, and Steen, 2004). In their literature review, Seligman, Parks, and Stern (2004) investigated happiness components, and concluded that included among these were elements of pleasure (or positive emotion), engagement, and meaning, with meaning considered to be the most fulfilling path towards happiness.

It can be said that positive psychology offers a perspective that supplements the traditional focus of psychology on psychopathology, illness, and dysfunction. Thanks to the development of this new concept, more and more studies in the field of occupational health psychology (OHP) include positive aspects of health and well-being. The concept of work engagement is an example, as it forms the theoretical antipode of the extensively studied concept of "burnout." Empirical evidence shows that employees who display the syndrome of burnout feel exhausted and cynical, while their engaged co-workers feel vigorous and enthusiastic about their work (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003).

Positive psychology is, in short, the scientific study of normal human capacities and virtues. It is about a revision or re-examination of the "average person" with interest in what is functional, right, and improving (Sheldon and King, 2001). It is an investigation of the nature of the individual who functions effectively, adapts successfully in an advanced way, and applies accustomed skills. Additionally, it attempts to explain the way in which most people manage to preserve their sense of dignity and purpose, despite any difficulties they meet in life. Sheldon and King (2001), have suggested that positive psychology simply describes the common structure and normal function of human behavior

and personality. In other words, it is an attempt to adopt a broader view of human potential, motives, and capacities.

In their book *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*, Peterson and Seligman (2004) proceeded to a description and classification of the 24 strengths and virtues which allow human development and progress. Strengths theory application has been expanded to the organizational field, and strengths-based development consists of one of these applications. In particular, it focuses on human strengths' development through talent identification and talent improvement via knowledge and skills (Hodges and Clifton, 2000). At the individual level, strengths-based development involves three stages: identification of talent, qualification of the way one views himself or herself, and behavioral change (Clifton and Harter, 2003). Traces of talent can be identified in several ways, including spontaneous reactions, yearnings, rapid learning, and satisfaction (Buckingham and Clifton, 2001). Another classification system is offered by Snyder and Lopez (2002), who categorize positive psychological approaches as emotion focused (e.g., well being, flow), cognitive focused (e.g., self-efficacy, goal-setting), self based (e.g., authenticity, humility), interpersonal (e.g., forgiveness, empathy), biological (e.g., toughness), and coping approaches (e.g., humor, spirituality).

Research shows that the use of strengths can facilitate goal attainment, develop employee engagement, increase overall well-being and vitality, and determine competitive advantages (Stefanyszyn, 2007). Strengths-based development has been linked to an increase in employee engagement, which is related to business outcomes such as profitability, turnover, safety, and customer satisfaction (Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes, 2002). Other studies have demonstrated increases in positive organizational capacities, such as hope, subjective well-being, and confidence (a construct that draws heavily from Bandura's [1982] work with self-efficacy).

POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR (POB)

The interest in optimal function has also been increased in the field of organizational psychology, as studies of positive organizational behavior (POB) demonstrate. POB is actually an application of positive psychology in the workplace among other concepts, namely positive organizational scholarship (POS) and psychological capital (Luthans and Youssef, 2007). According to Luthans, POB is defined as "the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities

that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace" (2002: 59).

POB acknowledges the existence of many positive theoretical concepts in organizational research today. Such positive concepts include those of positive affectivity, positive reinforcement, procedural justice, job satisfaction, job commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors, core self-evaluations (Youssef and Luthans, 2007). Therefore, POB attempts to offer a renewed emphasis on the importance of a positive approach. It is the added value of the positive over the negative that must be demonstrated, in order for POB's contribution to be substantive. Tetrick (2002) argued that it is very unlikely that the same mechanisms that underlie employee illness and malfunctioning constitute the opposite states of employee health and optimal functioning. It seems that POB best contributes by supplementing the traditional negative model, adopting a comprehensive perspective of the positive as well as of the negative aspects, so that criticisms of POB's one-sided positivity bias can be counteracted (Fineman, 2006).

In order for a positive psychological capacity to be included in POB, some criteria must be met, and more specifically the capacity must be characterized as positive, should hold profound theoretical foundations, extensive research basis and valid measurement tools. Additionally, the capacity must be "state-like," as in open to change and development, and have a proven effect on employees' performance. A "state-like" capacity is opposed to what is called "trait-like" capacity or characteristic, as the latter is mainly based on dispositional and relatively stable attributes. In this case, any development usually occurs a) over time, across one's life span, b) through the presence of the appropriate enabling factors and the absence of inhibiting factors, or c) through long-term professional interventions and intensive treatments (Linley and Joseph, 2004). Concerning inclusion criteria, Wright (2003) added that the mission of POB must also include the pursuit of employee happiness and health as viable goals themselves. Employee health and well-being is becoming a business value of strategic importance (Zwetsloot and Pot, 2004). Furthermore, as far as other positive approaches are concerned, we should mention that "state-like" POB is differentiated from positive emotions coming from evolutionary and neuropsychology (see Nicholsen, 1998) and the strength-based approach resulting from Gallup's concern for natural talent (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999).

Research data indicates that traits related to the character (e.g., intelligence, personality) demonstrate almost perfect test–retest correlations. On the other

hand, former studies show that positive "state-like" capacities demonstrate lower, although significant, test–retest correlations than "trait-like" dimensions of personality and core self-evaluations (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, and Norman, 2007). Aside from the above available data concerning test–retest correlations, there is also evidence regarding the development of positive organizational behavior capacities through short comprehensive educational interventions.

Empirical evidence at the current time supports the claim of positive situations, like positive emotions, and "state-like" concepts such as a certain kind of self-efficacy, being related to organizational behaviors and organizational effects, and moreover having an effect on them (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998). The main reason that the above variables may often be altered due to the influence of occasional factors is the tendency these situations have to develop independently and autonomously. The fact is that humans' positive traits, as well as "state-like" characteristics, may predict more temporary positive situations. However, those characteristics affect organizational behaviors and performance in an indirect way through interaction with the direct impact that positive situations have. Based on related empirical findings, Wright (1997; 2007) focuses on time as a main effect variable in organizational behavior research, and proposes stability over six months as an operationalization of the temporal demarcation between traits and states.

Beyond the contribution of positive characteristics theory to recruitment, strengths or POB characteristics have a further impact on today's workplace. As Luthans (2002) states, POB capacities are situations and can be changed through learning, development, change, and management in the workplace, and can also evolve through educational programs. Such capacities, considered as meeting the criteria for inclusion in POB, are namely the "state-like" capacities of self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resiliency. These capacities, when combined, form the wider concept of psychological capital or PsyCap. PsyCap is a better indicator of performance and satisfaction than any of the individual factors alone. The critical difference of PsyCap from most other positive approaches is the "state-like," open to development criterion and until today there is both conceptual (e.g., Luthans, Avey, Avolio, Norman, and Combs, 2006) and early empirical evidence that PsyCap can be developed in short training interventions (Avey, Luthans, and Mhatre, 2008). According to Luthans et al. (2007), published research regarding PsyCap demonstrate its relation with performance in the workplace, with fewer absences, lower employee cynicism and turnover, higher job satisfaction, commitment, and citizenship behaviors.

Self-Efficacy as an Important "State-Like" Capacity

The positive concept of self-efficacy is placed among some of the best known theoretical concepts, followed by an extensive theoretical background and empirical support, however, it is not often included in positive psychology reports. This is mostly attributed to the fact that many studies of positive psychology are related to the individuals' personality characteristics, meaning "trait-like" characteristics, or personal resources connected with evolution and genetic factors such as positive emotions. However, as described above, states and not traits suit best the concept of positivity in organizations and work in general. It is exactly this "state-like" nature of self-efficacy that defines it as a concept totally induced in POB.

When we refer to self-efficacy, we mainly look up to Bandura's definition and social cognitive theory. A broad definition applicable to POB is that of Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) (in Luthans, 2002), according to which "Self-efficacy refers to an individual's conviction (or confidence) about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context." Therefore, a self-efficacy belief is not independent of the environment, on the contrary it is determined by the given context and task. This is why as a concept it is applicable to many different specified situations and activities and can be measured and developed accordingly.

SELF-EFFICACY AS A POB CAPACITY

Self-efficacy meets the criteria for inclusion in POB in a very satisfying way. Specifically the crucial factors that are unique for the concept of self-efficacy and make it particularly relevant to POB according to Luthans and Youssef (2007) are:

1. It has the best established theoretical foundation and the most extensive research support compared to the other concepts.

2. Self-efficacy has been supported and measured only as a state, unlike hope, optimism, and resilience that have been studied, measured, and tested both as traits as well as states. Self-efficacy is "state-like" in nature not only because it can be increased and developed, but also because it is specified in certain domains. High self-efficacy in one domain doesn't necessarily lead to high self-efficacy in other domains nor is its absence in one field of activity transferred to other fields.

3.   There is an established correlation between self-efficacy and various job performance dimensions. These desirable consequences have been accumulated by Luthans and Youssef (2007) in a review of relevant studies and include work behaviors across cultures, leadership effectiveness, moral or ethical decision making, creativity, participation, career decision making, learning, entrepreneurship, and work-related performance as well.

THE CONSTRUCT OF SELF-EFFICACY

Due to the significance of control in people's lives, many theories have been developed regarding this issue. Motives, emotional states, and the actions of people are mostly based on what they believe is true, rather on how things are objectively. Therefore, it is a person's belief in his/her own abilities which is the main issue to be studied (Bandura, 1995). The concept of self-efficacy has received wide and constant empirical support as a cognitive factor motivating human behavior. Fitzgerald and Harmon, in the symposium of the American Psychology Association in 1998, described self-efficacy as the most important new concept in consulting psychology in the past 25 years (Betz, 2000).

Knowledge, transformative functions, and skills are necessary, but in themselves inadequate for the complete execution of tasks. It is a fact that individuals often do not behave effectively, although they know very well what to do. This happens because self-referential thoughts intervene in the relationship between knowledge and action (Bandura, 1982). In the past few years, there has been a growing convergence between theory and research in what concerns the role of self-referential thoughts in the psychological function. Although research is conducted according to a series of various aspects with various names, the basic phenomenon examined by these studies focuses on the individuals' perception of their personal efficacy to produce and regulate events in their life.

Self-efficacy is a concept developed by Albert Bandura within the framework of social cognitive theory and was published as a theory for the first time in 1977. Bandura himself defines self-efficacy as "the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1995), or as a concept which refers to a person's "capabilities to produce designated levels of performance" (Bandura, 1997). It is a concept referring to a person's expectations in relation to his or her ability to activate the necessary resources for managing the requirements of a

situation and not the differentiations regarding the anticipated results. Efficacy expectations determine whether an individual is going to initialize a behavior, how much effort he or she will contribute to the accomplishment of the task, and how long he or she will persist in this effort despite any evidence of disproof. Individuals who have a high sense of efficacy make a sufficient effort which, if executed well, produces successful results, while individuals with a low sense of efficacy, are more likely to stop trying and thus fail in executing a task (Bandura, 1997).

Often connected with self-confidence (Luthans and Youssef, 2007), self-efficacy is the variable manipulated in terms of assigning competitive goals to oneself, motivating oneself, generously investing in an effort, mobilizing towards achieving and completing the goal, and persevering when facing obstacles (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998). Such initiatives driven by the individual reflect the pro-active creation of difference or opposition, despite the responsive reduction of difference or opposition, which less confident people can demonstrate passively, as they respond to challenges of their external environment. Therefore, less efficient people are those that are more prone to failures, desperation, and loss of self-confidence when facing negative feedback, social deprecation, obstacles, and setbacks or even difficulties that a person creates alone, such as self-doubt, skepticism, or negative perceptions and attributions (Bandura and Locke, 2003).

The concept of self-efficacy has been examined in various fields of study and has been found to be related with clinical problems such as fear, addiction, depression, and also with social skills as well as dogmatism. Moreover, it is related to stress in various contexts, smoking, pain control, health, and sports performance. Although research often does not differentiate between generalized and specific efficacy beliefs, previous available evidence supports the use of specific measures of efficacy beliefs in specific domains since this way, the produced results are more robust (Llorens, Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova, 2007). As argued by Betz (2000), self-efficacy beliefs are mainly behaviorally specified and not generalized. This means that we can refer to self-efficacy beliefs regarding mathematics, the initiation of social interactions, financial investments, or the repair of a machine. Therefore, the types of self-efficacy expectations are as many as the possible areas of behavior that can be determined.

OCCUPATIONAL SELF-EFFICACY

Self-efficacy has been conceptualized and measured as a personality concept, generalized for various domains, as a specific variable (e.g., expectations for dangerous behavior), and as a task specific variable (e.g., managing a certain fear or solving mathematical problems). Occupational self-efficacy focuses on the work sector and is defined by Schyns and von Collani (2002) as "one's belief in one's own ability and competence to perform successfully and effectively in different situations and across different tasks in a job." This is a rather wide perception of self-efficacy, so that other types of professions can also be compared. On the other hand, it is specific enough to become a solid antecedent in the occupational domain (Schyns, Torka, and Gossling, 2007).

Schyns and von Collani (2002) have created a measurement tool for occupational self-efficacy (Occupational Self-efficacy Scale—OCCSEFF) aiming to create a general scale of self-efficacy which relates to the occupational domain. Contrary to other measurements of self-efficacy, such as those focused on the task (e.g., the professional career self-efficacy developed by Betz and Hackett in 1981), this measurement concerns work more widely, so that a greater range of workers from various professions can be compared. This way it is possible to investigate personal differences in self-efficacy between various occupations (Schyns and von Collani, 2002).

Self-Efficacy's Motivational and Behavioral Outcomes

Empirical research has generated a great number of studies that demonstrate the positive relationship between self-efficacy and different motivational and behavioral outcomes in clinical, educational, and organizational settings. A strong self-efficacy belief reinforces human achievement and capabilities as well as personal well-being in many ways. People who believe in their potential and abilities approach difficult tasks as challenges that should be arranged or attained and not as threats needed to be avoided (Bandura, 1994). Betz (2000) summarizes the effects of self-efficacy beliefs on behavior as follows: a) approach behaviors opposed to avoidance behaviors, b) quality performance behaviors aimed at the target field, and c) persistence in cases where obstacles or frustrating experiences occur.

Accordingly, low self-efficacy expectations in relation to a certain behavior or domain of activity will inevitably lead to the avoidance of these behaviors,

lower performance, and to a tendency for resignation when the individual is confronted with discouragement or failure. On the other hand, a sense of personal efficacy in mastering challenges can generate greater interest in the activity than self-perceived inefficacy in producing competent performances (Bandura and Schunk, 1981). The notional dipole of approach opposed to avoidance is one of the simplest, referring to the whole study spectrum of psychology; however, its impact is one of the most crucial.

Human action in general is affected by self-efficacy perceptions in various ways, all related to the above broader effects. According to Bandura (1986) some of these can be categorized as follows:

1. Decision making: people have a tendency to avoid tasks for which they believe their efficacy is low while they undertake those for which they believe their efficacy is good. It is also important that people make accurate estimations regarding self-efficacy. For the condition high perceived efficacy/low ability, the consequences are negative leading to irreparable damage. On the other hand, for the condition low perceived self-efficacy/high ability, the effect is restriction, meaning no development. There is evidence that eventually the most functional efficacy judgments are those which exceed slightly what someone can achieve at a given moment.

2. Effort and persistence: high self-efficacy also relates to stronger and more persistent effort. Additionally, as far as learning is concerned, self-doubt is followed by an urge for a learning process; however the use of already acquired skills is prohibited. In other words, high self-efficacy can be an advantage as well as a disadvantage, since individuals with high self-efficacy may not feel the need for high preparatory effort investment.

3. Thought patterns and emotional reactions: individuals with low self-efficacy tend to believe that conditions are more difficult than they really are. Consequently, they feel stressed and adopt a superficial view of reality. On the contrary, high self-efficacy leads to attention and action depending on the requirements of any given situation, while obstacles produce the required motivation so that more effort is made. Self-efficacy beliefs also relate to causal attribution thought. In the case of high self-efficacy, failure is attributed to inadequate effort, while in the case of low self-efficacy, failure is attributed to lack of ability.

4.   Although originally conceived as a task-specific variable, general self-efficacy as a dispositional characteristic has also been supported as a factor predicting individual behavior across situations (Lennings, 1994). Schunk (1983) noted that self-efficacy is salient in a crisis situation. For example, in the context of fire rescue operations, we expect that under those critical and unique situations expectancies created by past experiences will influence the individual's expectations of mastery in the new situations (Sherer et al., 1982).

IMPACT OF SELF-EFFICACY WITHIN WORK AND ORGANIZATIONAL SETTINGS

According to Luthans (2002) Bandura's theory on self-efficacy is a positive approach as is the one by Seligman, and other researchers also believe that self-efficacy is a POB skill. Luthans claims that Bandura's rich theory and considerable research support clearly indicates that a confident individual:

- is more likely to make a choice to really get into the task and welcome the challenge;

- will give more effort and will be motivated to successfully accomplish the task;

- will persist for a longer time when obstacles are encountered or even when there is initial failure.

During the first years of study of self-efficacy in relation to organizational settings, only a few studies were conducted, which demonstrated self-efficacy's low correlation with job search and research productivity of university faculty members (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998). Following studies demonstrated a correlation between self-efficacy and a number of other measures related to job performance, such as adaptability to advanced technology (Hill, Smith, and Mann, 1987), coping with career related events (Stumpf, Brief, and Hartman, 1987), managerial idea generating (Gist, 1987), managerial performance (Wood, Bandura, and Bailey, 1990), skill acquisition (Mitchell, Hopper, Daniels, George-Falvy, and James, 1994), and newcomer adjustment to an organizational setting (Saks, 1995) (in Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998).

Especially in relation to job performance, self-efficacy has been proven to have a strong connection. In fact, the correlation is generally stronger than that of self-efficacy with other organizational behavior concepts such as goal setting, feedback, job satisfaction, and personality characteristics based on the Big Five personality theory (Luthans, 2002). In addition, the correlation of self-efficacy with job performance has been supported through studies concerning core self-evaluations, a theory in which the concept of generalized self-efficacy is contained, along with self-esteem, locus of control, and emotional stability. Judge and Bono (2001), in their meta-analysis based on 274 correlations, concluded that these four personality characteristics constituting core self-evaluations are placed among the strongest dispositional antecedents of job satisfaction and job performance.

Furthermore, leaders use self-efficacy in order to influence their followers and increase their performance. Studies have shown that transformational and charismatic leaders primarily use the motivational mechanism of enhancing their follower's self-efficacy and self-worth in order to influence them, and once self-efficacy is established, followers will begin to trust the leader, a situation which, in turn, increases their commitment to the leader and organization (see Pillai and Williams, 20003). Eden (1992) argued that leadership is the mechanism through which self-efficacy can be enhanced, which, in turn, increases performance.

Self-efficacy is also positively linked with initiative taking. In the framework of organizational change, the relationship between taking initiatives and self-efficacy is confirmed by Morrison and Brantner (1992), who focused on the study of factors that enhance or hinder learning when in a new job position. Self-efficacy was found to be a favorable factor; therefore it possibly influences the processes prior to organizational change. Heuven et al. (2006), studied the role of self-efficacy in performing emotion work, and concluded that self-efficacy buffers the relationship between emotional job demands and emotional dissonance, as well as the relationship between emotional dissonance and work engagement, having a moderating influence on these relationships.

Noe and Wilk (1993) included self-efficacy in their study on developmental activities, and identified a positive correlation. Thus, it seems that employees with a high sense of self-efficacy are more likely to invest in their career, pursuing projects with high requirements. There is also a positive effect on what concerns processes of organizational change, as people with high self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to be stable and persistent in the face of setbacks or new

data brought about by change, while their performance remains stable even after change in the content of their job (Schyns, Torka, and Gossling, 2007).

McDonald and Siegall (1992) have investigated the effect of self-efficacy on attitudes towards work, by studying the behavior and performance of employees in technical agricultural tasks whose occupation had undergone significant changes. Their self-efficacy (in particular, their technological self-efficacy) was found to be positively related to satisfaction, commitment, and work quality, while it was negatively related to delays and absences.

SELF-EFFICACY'S IMPACT ON WORK ENGAGEMENT: A RELATED CONDUCTED RESEARCH

Work engagement has been conceptualized as the positive antipode of burnout (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Many researchers have claimed that work engagement is an antecedent of employee's outcomes, organizational success, and financial performance (Saks, 2006). It is a concept that has been defined in many ways, for example, as an emotional and intellectual commitment to the organization (Baumruk, 2004), or as the amount of effort that an employee chooses to put into his or her work (Frank, Finnegan, and Taylor, 2004).

One of the main approaches for work engagement is that of Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker (2002), who define engagement as a construct independent to burnout (although negatively related), namely as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind, that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Engaged employees demonstrate high levels of energy, are enthusiastic about their work, and are often fully immersed in their work so that time passes quickly (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008).

Related studies investigating the role of self-efficacy as a factor that determines engagement lead to the conclusion that a mutual dependence circle exists. Self-efficacy may precede or follow engagement, meaning that the dependence circle is ascending, since self-efficacy reinforces engagement which reinforces self-efficacy and so on (Schaufeli and Salanova, 2007). Additionally, self-efficacy beliefs have been observed to mediate the relationship between positive emotions (e.g., excitement, satisfaction, relief) and work engagement (Salanova, Agut, and Peiro, 2005). Xanthopoulou et al. (2007), in their study on a sample of German technicians, investigated the role of personal resources (self-efficacy, self-confidence, and optimism) in work engagement prediction.

Results showed that engaged employees attain high levels of self-efficacy and are able to cope with the demands occurring in a wide range of contexts.

Our study investigates the impact of occupational self-efficacy and job resources-demands on work engagement. The sample consisted of 120 employees from a wide range of positions in 18 organizations of the private sector in Greece. These organizations were from a broad range of industries that included advertising, publishing, manufacturing, consulting, and other services. The organizations varied widely in size.

Work engagement was measured using the Utrecht Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002), and more specifically the 17-item standardized Greek version (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003). The scale measures separately the three dimensions of work engagement: Vigor, Dedication, and Absorption. Occupational self-efficacy was assessed with the 20-item Occupational Self-efficacy Scale (OCCSEFF) developed by Schyns and von Collani (2002) which was translated into the Greek language for the purpose of this study. Finally, job characteristics (job resources-demands) were assessed by the Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ) (Karasek et al., 1998). The version used had been translated and standardized in the Greek language, and we chose to utilize the main scales of Decision Latitude (Skill Discretion + Decision Authority), Psychological Job Demands, and Social Support (Supervisor Support + Co-worker Support) which measure the high-demand/low control/low-support model of job strain development, along with the Job Insecurity Scale.

Participants were 26.7 percent male and 73.3 percent female and their ages ranged from 22 to 53 years (M = 31.8, SD = 5.96). 14.2 percent were high school graduates, 29.2 percent had a technical education, 25.8 percent had a university degree, 27.5 percent had a master's or PhD degree, and 3.3 percent were of another education level. The majority of the sample had been working in the given position for 1–5 years (51.7 percent), 24.2 percent were working less than a year in the given position, 15.8 percent for 5–10 years, 5 percent for 10–15 years, 2.5 percent for 15–20 years and 0.8 percent for over 20 years.

The sample consisted of employees working in positions related to accounting (N = 37), office work/client service (N = 33), the editing/creative field (N = 15), sales/marketing (N = 15), administration (N = 12), information engineering (N = 5), and technical/manual work (N = 3). Regarding turnover, 49.2 percent of the sample reported intention to remain in the current job, 28.3 percent were undecided, and 22.5 percent reported intention to leave.

Theoretical foundation and prior empirical results drove the below-stated hypotheses concerning the construct of occupational self-efficacy:

- Hypothesis 1: occupational self-efficacy will be positively related to work engagement and more specifically self-efficacy will function as an antecedent of work engagement.

- Hypothesis 2: job resources (decision latitude, co-worker support, supervisor support) will be positively related to occupational self-efficacy.

- Hypothesis 3: each one of the job resources (decision latitude, co-worker support, supervisor support) will contribute additional unique variance in relation to occupational self-efficacy.

- Hypothesis 4: occupational self-efficacy will correlate stronger with two of the three dimensions contributing to work engagement, namely Vigor and Absorption.

As shown at the intercorrelations tables (Tables 9.1 and 9.2), positive correlations between study variables provided initial support for hypothesis 1 and support for hypothesis 4. Occupational self-efficacy and work engagement were significantly positively correlated ($r = 0.20$, $p = 0.026$) as expected. Occupational self-efficacy was related with only two of the three engagement dimensions, and was particularly strongly related to vigor ($r = 0.30$, $p = 0.001$) with a moderate relationship to absorption ($r = 0.20$, $p = 0.032$). The above supported our fourth hypothesis, which was based on the notion that self-efficacy is mainly related to action, as indicated by its definition, rather than to affective states. Vigor is the work engagement dimension most connected to action, while absorption mainly consists of both active and cognitive aspects.[1]

Stepwise multiple regression analysis provided additional support for the second scale of hypothesis 1, since occupational self-efficacy made a significant unique contribution (20.3 percent) to the prediction of work engagement ($B = 0.34$, $\beta = 0.203$, $p = 0.026$). Hypothesis 3 was not supported since no

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1   *Vigor* refers to high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, the ability to not be easily fatigued, and persistence in the face of difficulties. *Dedication* refers to a strong involvement in one's work, accompanied by feelings of enthusiasm and significance, and by a sense of pride and inspiration. *Absorption* refers to a state in which individuals are fully concentrated on and engrossed in their activities, whereby time passes quickly and they have difficulties in detaching themselves from work (Llorens at al., 2007).

Table 9.1   Intercorrelations among study variables

Variable	Occupational self-efficacy	Decision latitude	Job demands	Co-worker support	Supervisor support	Job insecurity
Work engagement	0.20*	0.66**	0.08	0.32**	0.53**	-0.34**
Occupational self-efficacy		0.18	0.15	0.02	0.07	-0.35**

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01.

Table 9.2   Intercorrelations among occupational self-efficacy and work engagement dimensions

Variable	Vigor	Dedication	Absorption
Occupational self-efficacy	0.30**	0.09	0.20*

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01.

significant contribution of any of the job resources variables (decision latitude, co-worker support, supervisor support) to occupational self-efficacy was observed. Consequently, the research results did not support the existence of the positive gain spiral of resources, efficacy beliefs, and engagement,[2] as one term of this relationship (high job resources enhance self-efficacy beliefs) was not confirmed. These results are shown in Table 9.3.

It is possible that this specific result could be attributed to the type or quality of the resources provided, which may not have been sufficient enough to affect a personal resource such as occupational self-efficacy. Considering that the sample mean for occupational self-efficacy was high, we can assume that employees' occupational efficacy beliefs are more or less formed independently of organizational variables (e.g., by previous work experience, work outcomes, etc.), due to the prevalent conditions of the given labor market, where work benefits provision is inflexible and most organizations, that are small or medium sized, lack motivational strategies and methods.

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2   Initially the theory was supported by Bandura (1977), who claimed that job resources lead indirectly to engagement through enhancing employees' self-efficacy. The mediating role of self-efficacy among job resources and engagement has been investigated in many recent studies.

Table 9.3   Summary of stepwise regression analyses for variables
                 predicting work engagement and occupational self-efficacy

Variable	B	b	95% Confidence Interval for B	
			Lower bound	Upper bound
Work engagement				
Occupational self-efficacy	0.34	0.20*	-0.64	0.04
Occupational self-efficacy				
Decision latitude	0.00	0.21	-0.19	0.00
Co-worker support	0.02	0.07	-0.05	0.08
Supervisor support	0.00	0.00	-0.05	0.05

Conclusions and Implications

The role of self-efficacy in the workplace is that of a concept whose nature is "state-like," and can therefore be developed and effectively trained. Empirical evidence demonstrates the value of such an effort, namely to develop beliefs of high self-efficacy, or specifically occupational self-efficacy, for individuals in working environments. We have already examined some of its most important effects on organizational behavior and job performance, consequently any variables predicting occupational self-efficacy need to be specified. Bandura (1997) has introduced four ways through which the positive concept of self-efficacy can be developed. In order of importance these are: a) mastery experiences or performance attainments, b) vicarious learning or modeling, c) positively oriented persuasion or feedback, and d) physiological or psychological arousal.

Crucial, however, are some of the remarks Bandura makes regarding the above statements. For example, the way an individual interprets a previous success may alter its impact on self-efficacy since it can be attributed either to hard work or to factors related to chance and external aid. In the case of modeling (the observation of others succeeding in similar tasks or activities), positive effects on self-efficacy can only be achieved if the other person is someone that the observer can relate to and/or identify with. In other cases positive situations or conditions may have a moderate effect, while negative ones may cause great damage to self-efficacy beliefs (e.g., positive feedback opposed to negative feedback or psychological health opposed to a psychological disorder or

burnout). As an overall presumption, the point of interest is concerned with the processes influencing self-efficacy, its task-specific or generalized impacts, its relation with other constructs and measures, and the applicable interventions in the workplace context enhancing it. In a modern working environment, oriented towards positivity and human virtues and strengths, the role of self-efficacy or confidence is proven to be multiple in nature.

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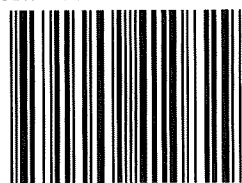
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