Social cognitive theory and self-efficacy: going beyond traditional motivational and behavioral approaches.

by Alexander D. Stajkovic and Fred Luthans

Business enterprises are challenged with containing costs while at the same time increasing organizational effectiveness. Common solutions employed among corporate entities have included restructuring, retrenching, re-engineering, the adoption of total quality notions and greater use of information technology. Strategies that would elicit solutions from the substantial potential of human resources and would enhance the part people can play in addressing competitive forces have been generally ignored and even denigrated. The potential benefits of real, human intelligence are therefore consistently avoided despite the fact that artificial intelligence has become so valuable to organizational success. Corporate entities could go beyond conventional behavioral and motivational approaches in managing human performance to draw the resources they desire for success.

Research in the field of social cognition and self-efficacy can expand our knowledge of organizational behavior. We can no longer ignore this body of knowledge as too theoretical or difficult to apply.

Editor’s Note: Our Field Report series, a new feature to be presented periodically in this journal, reports on important theoretical breakthroughs and empirical research findings that are important to our readership and to the mission of Organizational Dynamics. Field Reports are more theoretical than our feature articles. We hope that these reports will provide a basis for a more complete understanding of organizational behavior and more effective management of human resources.

Organizations face the dilemma of becoming more effective without increasing costs. Typical responses in recent years have included downsizing, reengineering, total quality, and the more extensive use of information technology. Largely overlooked (and even degraded by the champions of these techniques) are tactics that would draw deeper from the potential of human resources and upgrade the role they can play in meeting competitive demands.

There is a strange paradox here. As Jeffrey Pfeffer of Stanford University points out, if intelligence is so helpful to organizational success in its artificial form, then why are the potential benefits of real, human intelligence constantly being so neglected?

One possible answer to this paradox is that the tired, old approaches to understanding and managing human performance in organizational settings have come up short - or outright failed to provide viable practical solutions. One largely overlooked exception to this high failure rate comes from the field of behavioral management. About 25 years ago, we (Luthans and Kreitner) proposed organizational behavior modification (O.B. Mod.) as a systematic way to improve human performance in organizations. To investigate the legacy this proposal created, we recently completed and published a meta-analysis of O.B. Mod. studies in all types of organizations over the past 20 years and found that on average performance increased by 17 percent. Despite these impressive results, this behavioral approach has not received nearly as much attention as the motivational approaches to managing human performance, mainly because it was considered to be too narrow and simplistic.

Almost 15 years ago, in our (Luthans and Kreitner) article in Organizational Dynamics titled "A Social Learning Approach to Behavioral Management: Radical Behaviorists Mellowing Out," we attempted to expand the scope of the operant, reinforcement-theory-based O.B. Mod. approach to include social learning theory and its applications. Now, as we move into the new millennium, an era likely to increase demands on performance, there seems to be a need for expanding and extending this behavioral approach once again. Thus, the purpose of this report is to offer social cognitive theory and its derivative construct of self-efficacy as an extension that, we believe, will lead to both a better understanding of the complexities of human resources in the modern workplace and more effective management of human performance.

SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY (SCT)
Social cognitive theory and self-efficacy: going beyond traditional motivational and behavioral approaches.

About a decade ago, the prominent Stanford psychologist Albert Bandura translated his years of basic research using a behaviorist and social learning framework into what he called social cognitive theory (SCT). This new theory offered several major advances for the field of psychology and, we would suggest, organizational behavior. First, the scope of SCT is much broader and more comprehensive than behaviorism and social learning, the foundations on which we have been basing our approach to behavioral management. SCT includes cognitive constructs such as self-regulatory mechanisms, which extend beyond issues of learning and/or modifying behavior.

Moreover, in SCT, learning is viewed as knowledge acquisition through cognitive processing of information. In other words, the social part acknowledges the social origins of much of human thought and action (what individuals learn by being part of a society), whereas the cognitive portion recognizes the influential contribution of thought processes to human motivation, attitudes, and action. Much of the knowledge and behaviors of organizational participants is generated from the organizational environment in which they operate; on the other hand, individual employees still process, and act upon, available information differently depending on their unique personal characteristics.

Drawing from SCT and a considerable stream of basic research, Bandura and others have advanced the concept of self-efficacy. This increasingly recognized psychological construct deals specifically with how people's beliefs in their capabilities to affect the environment control their actions in ways that produce desired outcomes. Unless employees believe that they can gather up necessary behavioral, cognitive, and motivational resources to successfully execute the task in question (whether working on a product/service or developing a strategic plan), they will most likely dwell on the formidable aspects of the project, exert insufficient effort, and, as a result, fail.

This aspect of self-efficacy plays a pivotal role in SCT. In his latest book, Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control (Freeman, 1997), Bandura provides a detailed conceptual analysis and empirical overview of how self-efficacy operates in concert with sociocognitive determinants represented by SCT in influencing human action, adaptation, and change.

We believe that the conceptual richness of SCT and the implications that self-efficacy may have for human performance in organizations can no longer be ignored by practicing managers as being too theoretical or difficult to apply. However, it is also important to note that in advocating this perspective, we are not suggesting the abandonment of the easier-to-understand and use reinforcement theory and organizational behavior modification (O.B. Mod.). Rather, it is our contention that expanding the behavioral management approach with SCT and self-efficacy will lead to the more comprehensive understanding and effective management of human resources. The following summary of SCT and self-efficacy can be used as a point of departure for achieving these objectives.

THE POWER OF SCT TO EXPLAIN

It is often difficult to understand the differences in individual behavior in a work setting. The widely recognized cognitively-based work motivation theories closely associated with equity or expectancies do not provide a completely satisfying explanation, in that they often fail to specify a process-oriented analysis of the factors influencing the relationship between human action and environmental outcomes. True, these theories functionally relate several psychological factors to action (e.g., needs, expectancies, perceived inequities), but they fail to specify the underlying mechanisms that can affect the strength of the proposed relationships.

SCT addresses this problem in two ways: first, by clearly specifying factors with which human action is determined; second, by defining several basic human capabilities through which those processes operate to initiate, execute, and maintain organizational behavior.

Drawing from social learning, SCT explains organizational behavior in terms of the reciprocal causation among the employee (unique personality characteristics such as need for achievement), the environment (perceived consequences from the organizational environment, such as pay for performance), and the behavior itself (previous successful or unsuccessful performances). Because of these combined reciprocal influences, employees are at the same time both products and producers of their personality, their behaviors, and their respective environments, a relationship shown in Exhibit 1.

In SCT, these triangular relationships do not necessarily imply symmetry in the strength of bidirectional influences.

- Reprinted with permission. Additional copying is prohibited. -
Social cognitive theory and self-efficacy: going beyond traditional motivational and behavioral approaches.

between points on the triangle. Although all three factors may be present at a particular time in a particular environment, that does not mean that they all exert equal and simultaneous influence on the employee. This implies that the strength of mutual influences between any of the two factors is not fixed in reciprocal causation. Thus, it is critically important to recognize that the relative influences exerted by one, two, or all of the three interacting factors on human behavior will vary depending on different activities, different individuals, and different circumstances.

The Basic Human Capabilities

SCT explains the nature of bidirectional reciprocal influences through five basic human capabilities: (1) symbolizing, (2) forethought, (3) vicarious learning, (4) self-regulation, and (5) self-reflection. Employees use these basic capabilities to self-influence themselves in order to initiate, regulate, and sustain their own behavior. Exhibit 2 provides a summary. These five capabilities have strong explanatory power, particularly in helping us understand why employees may behave differently in the same organizational circumstances.

Symbolizing Capability. SCT suggests that humans have an extraordinary symbolizing capability that allows them to successfully react and then change and adapt to their respective environments. By using symbols, people process and transform immediate visual experiences into internal cognitive models that in turn serve as guides for their actions. Through symbolizing, people also ascribe meaning, form, and duration to their past experiences. Thus, rather than learning proper behavioral responses only by enacting behaviors (as reinforcement theory would suggest) and possibly suffering painful mis-steps, a manager faced with a difficult decision may test possible solutions symbolically first, and then eliminate or accept them on the basis of these thought processes.

Forethought Capability. Bandura argues that people not only react immediately to their environments through a symbolic process, but also self-regulate their future behaviors by forethought. In particular, people plan courses of action for the near future, anticipate the likely consequences of their future actions, and set goals for themselves. Through forethought, employees initiate and guide their actions in an anticipatory fashion. Interestingly, the future acquires causal properties by being represented cognitively by forethought exercised in the present.

Vicarious Learning Capability. According to SCT, almost all forms of learning can occur vicariously by observing the behavior of others and the subsequent consequences of their behaviors. Employees’ capacity to learn by observation enables them to obtain and accumulate rules for initiating and controlling different behavioral patterns without having to acquire these behaviors gradually by risky trial and error. The acquisition of knowledge vicariously is critical for both learning and human performance. For example, video self-help tapes depend on vicarious learning.

Since behavioral trials and errors can (and often do) result in costly consequences, chances for effective performance would be seriously diminished if employees learned only from the consequences of their actions. The more complex the action, and the more costly and hazardous the possible mistakes (in both the safety and political sense), the stronger must be the reliance on vicarious learning from competent models.

Self-Regulatory Capability. Human self-regulatory capability plays the central role in SCT. Accordingly, people do not behave to suit the preferences or demands of others. Much of organizational behavior is initiated and regulated by internal self-set standards, and by self-evaluative reactions to exerted behaviors. After a person sets specific standards, any perceived incongruity between a behavior and the standard activates self-evaluative reactions. These, in turn, serve to further influence subsequent action. Even if there is no incongruity between self-standards and present performance, employees may set higher standards for themselves and activate future behaviors to satisfy the new standards. The success of empowerment strategies depends on such self-regulatory capabilities.

Self-Reflective Capability. The self-reflective capability, also called self-reflective consciousness, enables people to think and analyze their experiences and thought processes. By reflecting on their different personal experiences, employees can generate a specific knowledge about their environment and about themselves. Among the types of knowledge that employees can, derive from self-reflection, none is more central than employees’ judgment of their capabilities to deal effectively with different environmental realities.

These types of perceptions are referred to as self-efficacy beliefs. These beliefs have formidable predictive powers and
Social cognitive theory and self-efficacy: going beyond traditional motivational and behavioral approaches.

thus carry a number of important implications for more effective management of human performance.

SELF-EFFICACY

Self-efficacy refers to an individual’s convictions (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. Specifically, this psychological process operates as follows.

Before they select their choices and initiate their effort, employees tend to weigh, evaluate, and integrate information about their perceived capabilities. Expectations of personal efficacy determine whether an employee’s coping behavior will be initiated, how much task-related effort will be expended, and how long that effort will be sustained despite disconfirming evidence.

Especially relevant to human performance in organizations is that employees who perceive themselves as highly efficacious will activate sufficient effort which, if well executed, produces successful outcomes. On the other hand, employees who perceive low self-efficacy are likely to cease their efforts prematurely and fail at the task.

The Predictive Power of Self-Efficacy

SCT suggests that besides basing their behavior on the effects of contingent reinforcement, employees also act on their self-efficacy judgments of how well they can perform the behaviors necessary to receive the consequences. Thus, employee behavior can be predicted not only on the basis of contingent consequences, but also on the basis of personal self-efficacy.

For example, a person with low self-efficacy doubts that he or she can do what is necessary to succeed. By the same token, the sense of high personal efficacy may help sustain efforts even in light of adverse conditions and uncertain outcomes (e.g., deficient equipment or an unappealing product). At the same time, however, it is unlikely that employees would act based on high self-efficacy beliefs if they did not expect certain benefits, such as recognition or extra pay, from those behaviors.

In other words, employee self-efficacy can be predictive, but it does not negate the importance of the behaviorist assumption of a functional link between behavior and its consequences.

Self-Efficacy Dimensions

As shown in Exhibit 3, three dimensions of self-efficacy seem to have particular importance for performance. First is the magnitude of efficacy expectations. This refers to the level of task difficulty that a person believes he or she is capable of executing. Second is the strength of efficacy expectations, which refers to whether the judgment about magnitude is strong (likely to produce perseverance in coping efforts despite disconfirming experiences), or weak (easily questioned in the face of difficulty).

[TABULAR DATA FOR EXHIBIT 3 OMITTED]

Third, self-efficacy may vary in generality. Some experiences create specific efficacy beliefs referring to a particular task (e.g., computer programming or selling). Other experiences may influence more generalized personal efficacy beliefs, such as being able to get things organized across tasks and situations. Although the generality dimension was introduced by Bandura at the same time as self-efficacy strength and magnitude, to date it has not generated as much empirical research.

How Self-Efficacy Differs from Traditional Personality and Motivational Concepts

Viewed superficially, self-efficacy appears very similar to self-esteem, expectancy, and locus of control/attribution concepts of personality and motivation. To understand and apply self-efficacy effectively, we need to understand the sometimes subtle, but important, differences.
Social cognitive theory and self-efficacy: going beyond traditional motivational and behavioral approaches.

Self-Esteem. Although conceptually similar, self-esteem and self-efficacy are quite different. The first difference is in the domains that self-esteem and self-efficacy cover. Self-esteem is often portrayed as a global construct that represents a person’s self-evaluations across a wide variety of different situations. In contrast, self-efficacy is the individual’s conviction about a task- and context-specific capability.

Second, self-esteem tends to be more stable, an almost trait-like variable, whereas self-efficacy is a dynamic construct that changes over time as new information and task experiences are obtained.

Finally, self-esteem is based on a reflective evaluation of the self (e.g., feelings of self-worth) that is usually derived from perceptions about several personal characteristics (intelligence, integrity, and the like). By contrast, some people might have high self-efficacy for some tasks (e.g., technically-based problem solving) and, at the same time, very low self-efficacy about other tasks (e.g., writing technical reports). However, neither of these results in an increase or a decrease in their overall self-esteem.

Expectancy Concepts. Self-efficacy is often wrongly equated with the dimensions of expectancy motivation theory. Those who study organizational behavior are familiar with the cognitively-based motivational model that contains both the effort-performance (commonly referred to as E1) and the behavior-outcome (called E2) expectancies. These E1 and E2 expectancies are not the same as self-efficacy.

Although both the E1 and self-efficacy concepts would agree that successful performance depends on employee effort, self-efficacy beliefs involve much more than would be associated with the employee’s E1 perception of the relationship between the degree of effort put forth and the level of performance. In particular, estimates of self-efficacy are based on a much larger domain of perceptions such as personal ability, skills, knowledge, previous task experience, and complexity of the task to be performed, as well as on the states of affective and psycho-motor reactions (e.g., positive or negative emotions, stress, fatigue). In addition, self-efficacy beliefs also involve a generative capability (i.e., generalizing to other, similar areas of functioning, as when, for example, a salesperson’s feelings of self-efficacy in selling generalize to include customer service). E1 does not include this capability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SELF-EFFICACY SCALE</th>
<th>Column A</th>
<th>Column B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of tasks in a fixed amount of time.</td>
<td>CAN DO</td>
<td>CERTAINTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example</td>
<td>(Y = yes)</td>
<td>(0-100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = no)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The difference between E2 and self-efficacy is even more pronounced. Very simply, self-efficacy and E2 (the behavior-outcome expectancy) are concerned with different parts and sequencing of a motivational model’s continuum. For example, Bandura distinguished between self-efficacy and E2 by arguing that an efficacy expectation is a judgment of one’s ability to execute a certain behavior pattern (e.g., ”I believe I can perform this task successfully”), whereas an outcome expectation (E2) is a judgment of the likely consequence such behavior will produce (e.g., ”I believe that what I do will/will not produce desired outcomes”). Thus, the employee’s assessment of self-efficacy usually comes before any behavior outcome expectations (E2) are even made.

Locus of Control. Locus of control, as a widely recognized variable in the theory of personality and motivation proposed by Julian Rotter and others, is also often wrongly treated as analogous to self-efficacy. People with an internal locus of control believe they are in control of their own fate, feel that their actions have an impact on the environment, and assign
Social cognitive theory and self-efficacy: going beyond traditional motivational and behavioral approaches.

Personal responsibility for the consequences of their own behavior. In contrast, individuals with an external locus of control take the consequences of their lives as the result of destiny, luck, chance, or any other random factor.

Bandura has strongly argued that Rotter's conceptual scheme is primarily concerned with causal beliefs about action-outcome contingencies. Personal efficacy, on the other hand, refers to an individual's convictions about his or her abilities to successfully execute a specific task.

Measuring Self-Efficacy

As with any behavioral science construct, we must be able to reliably and validly measure self-efficacy in order to use the concept to make a contribution to organizational behavior and human resource management. In this regard, Bandura's conceptualizations of the magnitude and strength of perceived self-efficacy provide a psychometrically sound yardstick.

The design of the self-efficacy scale usually consists of two columns, as shown in Exhibit 4. Column A measures the magnitude of self-efficacy by totaling the number of Yes's, each corresponding to the particular level of task difficulty. Column B measures self-efficacy strength, the total summary of certainty ratings for each magnitude level indicated by Yes. Empirical research has generally validated these simple measures of efficacy and demonstrated them to be more reliable than other approaches.

DETERMINANTS OF SELF-EFFICACY

Besides the theoretical underpinnings and measurement of self-efficacy, Bandura has identified four major categories of experiences that determine efficacy beliefs, as shown in Exhibit 5. Although all of these antecedents may influence efficacy expectations, it is critically important to recognize that the actual impact of any relevant information on a person's feeling of self-efficacy will depend on how he or she cognitively evaluates the information. Subjective perceptions of personal and situational factors, rather than on the direct impact of "objective" reality, are the stronger influence.

Enactive Mastery Experience

Research has indicated that succeeding in a challenging task (termed an "enactive mastery experience") provides the strongest information for changing efficacy beliefs. This is because enactive mastery is the only antecedent of self-efficacy that provides direct performance information for the formation of more stable and accurate efficacy judgments.

This does not mean, however, that changes in self-efficacy occur as a direct result of performance accomplishment. Rather, change will depend on how employees process the information that the previous performance generated. In other words, it is not performance per se that causes changes in self-efficacy, but rather what the individual personally makes of diagnostic information resulting from that performance.

For example, even a small performance improvement in a taxing organizational context (high task complexity, limited resources, short time span, etc.) can produce a large increase in an employee's self-efficacy if the individual evaluates personal and situational factors in a way that confirms the feeling, "I have what it takes to succeed." In contrast, consider an employee working in a nondenhandling environment (low task complexity, low skill utilization requirements, low memory processing demands). In this case, the individual may weigh even a substantial increase in performance as "what the boss expected." The level of self-efficacy may be unaffected. Moreover, if the employee finds out that his or her improved performance was actually below average standards for that particular task, the experience may lower self-efficacy.

Clearly, the level of performance does not equate with the level of self-efficacy, since estimation of personal efficacy is a cognitive process that involves more factors than just executed action. These other factors fall into two categories, the first related to the environment, the second to the person's perceptions of ability.

Situational Factors. A number of environmental factors play into the evaluation: (a) the amount of available resources...
Social cognitive theory and self-efficacy: going beyond traditional motivational and behavioral approaches.

Studies have shown that if employees conceive of ability as an incremental skill, they tend to spend more time diagnosing the task, are less prone to the negative impact of failures (e.g., stress, anxiety), and ultimately maintain higher levels of personal efficacy. However, when the employee perceives ability as a given entity, he or she will likely see mistakes as indicative of intellectual (in)capacity, which may imply lack of personal control. The perceived lack of control leads to anxiety which, in turn, diminishes learning.

The final result is a lowering of the employee’s estimate of his or her efficaciousness, a tendency to set lower goals in the future, development of ineffective task strategies, and ultimately lower overall performance. Accordingly, managers should consider helping their people to establish a conception of ability as an incremental skill.

Vicarious Learning

Since much of employees’ knowledge about their capabilities is also generated from the social environment in which they work, to rely solely on enactive experiences would limit the sources for accurate efficacy appraisals. Given the amount of diagnostic information available in an organizational context, personal efficacy appraisals are also influenced by vicarious learning, which occurs by observing competent individuals perform a similar task and be reinforced for it.

The greater the perceived similarity between the model and the observer in terms of personal characteristics that are assumed to be relevant to performance accomplishment, the greater the model’s influence on observers’ learning. Employees may turn to competent colleagues or mentors for knowledge of the task, needed skills, or development of effective strategies for successful performance. Learning from modeled accomplishments becomes especially important when employees have little prior enactive experiences (e.g., undertaking a new assignment) on which to base their assessments of personal efficacy.

Modeling can also be used as a structured training program to enhance employees’ self-efficacy. In this mode of influence, managers can develop effective strategies for coping with cognitive and behavioral intricacies of a particular job, then convey these strategies to employees in a skill- and (ultimately) efficacy-enhancing training program.

These strategies would include clear specification of the following components:

1. The task product (what is expected as a result of this task).
2. Number and nature of behavioral activities (what activities are involved; how many different activities are needed).
3. Sources of information cues (where necessary information for the performance of the task could be found, e.g., a price list for labeling products).
4. Optimal sequencing requirements among behavioral activities (e.g., greeting the customer first and then asking what the customer needs).
5. Nature and frequency of temporal changes in the sequencing requirements among behavioral activities (determining whether the sequence among activities changes, and if it does, how it changes for different circumstances).
6. Necessary performance means (e.g., what technology is necessary for successful performance).
Social cognitive theory and self-efficacy: going beyond traditional motivational and behavioral approaches.

7. Applicable utility of the available performance means (determining whether available means are appropriate for successful performance).

8. Developing and evaluating alternative courses of action and information processing.

The instructor/model first explains and enacts the steps, and the trainees then replicate the instructor’s performance in a gradual, step-by-step manner. The instructor closely monitors the trainees’ performance and provides feedback. Mastering a modeled performance in terms of skills and strategies enhances employees’ beliefs about their capabilities to successfully execute that job in the future. In essence, the training provides an enacted mastery experience.

Verbal Persuasion

Verbal persuasion by someone the employee trusts and sees as competent (as it relates to the job to be performed) serves as another means of strengthening personal self-efficacy. The purpose of verbal persuasion is not necessarily to increase the level of skill and ability, but rather to focus on the individual’s appraisal of self-efficacy so as to enhance the person’s beliefs that he or she “has what it takes.”

However, for this mode of enhancing self-efficacy to be effective, employees should already have some reason to believe that they have (or can develop) the ability to accomplish the task. Expressing a faith in one’s ability is particularly relevant in times when employees have performance difficulties and may be questioning their personal efficaciousness.

Psychological Arousal

The fourth major source of self-efficacy is the state of psychological and emotional arousal. This source of efficacy information is important because people tend to perceive psychological and/or emotional activations as signs of vulnerability and dysfunction. Since high levels of stress at work are likely to debilitate performance, employees may be more inclined to feel efficacious for successful performance when not preoccupied by emotional agitation.

However, employees differ in their proneness to become inhibited by emotional distractions. For example, the more one is involved in a certain activity, the less he or she focuses on and notices aversive stressful distractions. In contrast, self-directed rather than task-directed attention brings to the fore psychological agitation. Finally, employees with already high efficacy beliefs may view psychological arousal as an energizing factor, whereas low efficacy employees tend to view it as a performance debilitator.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN PERFORMANCE

There is now both theory and research to postulate that individuals who perceive themselves as highly efficacious will activate sufficient effort which, if well executed, will produce successful outcomes. These successful performance outcomes will further reinforce expectations of self-competency. However, those who perceive low levels of self-efficacy are more likely to cease their efforts prematurely, fail at the task, and retain self-debilitating expectations about their personal competence.

In contrast to the traditional work motivation theories, the effects of self-efficacy on work-related performance is well documented. In his 1997 book Self-Efficacy, Bandura summarizes numerous studies that reported a significant relationship between self-efficacy and work-related performance. Specifically, self-efficacy has been found to be positively related to areas of job search, sales, research productivity, learning and task-related achievement, adaptability to advanced technology, career choice, coping with career-related events, skill acquisition, adjustment to a new organizational setting, simulated managerial performance, naval performance at sea, and more.

In our own recent meta-analysis, we quantitatively synthesized the results of 114 empirical studies conducted over the past 20 years that examined the relationship between self-efficacy and work-related performance. Overall, we found a strong positive correlation between the two. This highly significant relationship can be statistically transformed into an impressive 28 percent gain in performance. Importantly, for managing today’s human resources, this gain in performance improvement is relatively much stronger than has been to date demonstrated by popular intervention techniques such as...
Social cognitive theory and self-efficacy: going beyond traditional motivational and behavioral approaches.

goal setting, or even organizational behavior modification.

CONCLUSION

We suggest that traditional motivational and behavioral management approaches are still relevant, but social cognitive theory (SCT) and its derivative of self-efficacy are now needed to extend our understanding and help improve the performance of today’s human resources. Certainly, the traditional motivation theories and their applications, such as goal setting and job design, have made valuable contributions to our understanding of organizational behavior. However, so does the often overlooked reinforcement theory-based O.B. Mod. approach. Now, however, after about 25 years of both approaches, it is time to explore newly emerging psychological processes and constructs.

Social cognitive theory and self-efficacy provide an eclectic extension of the traditional motivational and behavioral approaches. They have been shown to have both explanatory and predictive powers and to be quite different from related psychological constructs such as self-esteem, expectancy, and locus of control. Most importantly, not only can SCT provide a more comprehensive understanding of organizational behavior than either motivation or reinforcement theories, but self-efficacy, with its clearly demonstrated strong relationship with work-related performance, seems to have considerable implications for improving employee performance.

The theoretical foundation and basic research findings as summarized in this report are indeed sound, and practicing managers can be confident that employees with high self-efficacy will perform well. The challenge for both research and practice will be to further build on this foundation and select and/or develop high self-efficacy in today’s and tomorrow’s human resources.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


Our meta-analysis regarding the effects of self-efficacy on work-related performance is in press in Psychological Bulletin.
Social cognitive theory and self-efficacy: going beyond traditional motivational and behavioral approaches.

Alex Stajkovic is a visiting assistant professor of organizational behavior at the University of California, Irvine. He received his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in organizational behavior from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Prior to joining UCI, he taught for a year at Washington State University. His latest publications include a social cognitive model of business ethics across cultures published in Journal of World Business and a meta-analysis of the effectiveness of organizational behavior modification published in the Academy of Management Journal. A meta-analysis of the relationship between self-efficacy and work-related performance will be forthcoming in Psychological Bulletin. His research interests include these areas as well as the psychological dimensions of entrepreneurial behaviors and international management.

Fred Luthans is the George Holmes Distinguished Professor of Management at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, and editor of Organizational Dynamics. He has published a number of major books, including Organizational Behavior Modification (with Robert Kreitner), winner of the American Society of Personnel Administration award for outstanding contribution to human resources management, and Real Managers (with Richard Hodgetts and Stuart Rosenkrantz), based on a four-year study that observed managers in action. His latest book is International Management (with Richard Hodgetts), published by Irwin/McGraw-Hill. Professor Luthans has been very active in the Academy of Management, having served as president of the Midwest region and (in 1986) as president of the National Academy of Management. In 1997, he received the Academy’s Distinguished Management Educator Award. He is an active consultant and trainer in both private- and public-sector organizations.