SELF EFFICACY: A REVIEW

Isaac G. Mathews

Abstract

This article gives a review of a core concept of the Social Cognitive Theory: self efficacy, its development, its determinants and its influence on human functioning. Self efficacy is the belief in one's abilities to perform well on the task that one undertakes and is considered the corner stone of achievement, accomplishment and motivation. The motivation to accomplish and achieve in spite of difficulties lies in the belief about the productivity of one's actions. Empirically proven, self-efficacy can be attributed to various aspects of people's lives such as susceptibility to stress and depression, optimistic or pessimistic thought patterns, life choices, and the like.

1. INTRODUCTION

Given the different tasks that people undertake in various situations, the nature of the outcome is multifactorial. There is a triadic reciprocal interplay of environmental factors, personal factors like skill and knowledge and behavior as explained by the Social Cognitive Theory. In other words, an individual is both a producer and a product of their environment, personality and behavior. This reciprocal triadic influence can be seen through the five basic human capabilities: a) symbolizing, b) forethought, c) vicarious learning, d) self regulation, and e) self reflection. The capability of self reflection gives rise to the perception of one's abilities to deal with various situations which is known as self efficacy beliefs [1].

2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF EFFICACY, MOTIVATION, PERFORMANCE AND ACHIEVEMENT

Bandura stated, "*People's level of motivation, affective states, and actions are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively true*". This means that one's self-

---

* The author is currently studying for a Masters degree in Counselling Psychology at Assumption University of Thailand.

efficacy perceptions determine the levels of achievements and accomplishments that one can scale given their skills and knowledge. Thus a person's motivation, achievements and accomplishments are better predicted by their self-efficacy beliefs than by their skills and knowledge alone. Self-efficacy beliefs further determine the level of knowledge and skill acquisition. Pajares states that competence in tasks requires the correct balance of self-efficacy and knowledge and skill [2].

Self efficacy influences the choices one makes, the effort one puts into the task, one's perseverance towards the goal and the resilience to failure to achieve the desired goal [2]. This in turn influences the level of performance and achievement [3]. One would undertake tasks or actions in which they felt competent or confident and avoid those that they felt otherwise and the self efficacy present in this choice leads to more effort, more perseverance and more resilience. In other words, people would tentatively match their choices and actions with the self-efficacy beliefs attached to them. Simply stated, factors influencing behavior have a foundation in self-efficacy. Self-efficacy also charts the magnitude of effort invested into an activity, the level of perseverance in obtaining a goal and the quantity of resilience displayed in the face of challenges. High level of self-efficacy is translated into deep interests in activities, strong commitment and motivation towards challenging goals, and quick recovery after failures or setbacks. Furthermore self-efficacy influences thought patterns and emotional reaction as seen in those with high self-efficacy approaching difficult tasks with calmness instead of anxiety and stress. This in turn helps influence the level of achievement one achieves creating a self fulfilling prophecy of one's accomplishments matching one's beliefs about what one can achieve. In other words, high self efficacy leads to higher motivation and

perseverance leading to higher achievement and performance which in turn increases one's sense of efficacy and confidence towards future tasks and challenges [2]. This is because past successes affect future successes through its effects on perceptions of self efficacy [4]. Bandura argued that a strong sense of self-efficacy being the product of time and experience is highly predictable of a person's motivation, performance and achievement [2].

3. DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF SELF EFFICACY

Self efficacy develops in stages as an individual moves ahead through life's various stages. In the beginning of infancy, newborns lack a sense of self. In time one begins to realize that actions bring about outcomes and a sense of self develops when one realizes that their actions can make things happen. Initially self efficacy experiences are obtained from family and social comparison plays an important role. Association with others having similar attributes occurs as the child's social circle widens and enters school. Peers and peer groups carry an impressionable impact on the self efficacy beliefs of the individual. Adolescence brings about various challenges in self efficacy issues especially in sexuality, high risk behaviors, and the like, which in turn affects vocational paths and career options considered. Self efficacy perceptions in adulthood decide the occupational, parental and familial roles of the individual; a higher self efficacy leads to fulfillment in these roles [5].

4. SOURCES OF SELF EFFICACY

Self-Efficacy is formulated and determined by assessing and interpreting the information derived from four primary sources: a) Mastery performance, b) Vicarious experience, c) Social persuasions, and d) Somatic and emotional states. Bandura believed that mastery experience is the

most influential formulator of self-efficacy as they provide the most realistic evidence of one's ability. Repetitive successes instill a strong sense of self efficacy which becomes quite resistant to occasional failures [3].One engages in a task and interprets and uses the outcome of their actions on that task to develop beliefs about their capabilities to perform and achieve in subsequent tasks. Successful outcomes on the task raise self-efficacy associated with it and vice versa [2]. However, easy and early successes cause a tendency to be easily discouraged by failure caused by a lack of resilience [5].

Vicarious experience or modeling occurs when one performs tasks by observing others, that is, social comparisons. Though weaker than mastery experience, it helps creating self-efficacy beliefs when the outcome on a task is uncertain or when one has limited previous experience. It becomes a powerful formulator of self-efficacy when the observer can link a common attribute to the model and then presumes that the model's performance is indicative of his or her own capabilities. If the attributes between the model and the observer are highly divergent, vicarious experience loses the ability to formulate self efficacy [2]. Greater the similarity of attributes between the model and the observer, greater will be the persuasiveness of the model's performance [5]. Attributes considered include age, sex, educational levels, socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, and the like. Multiple skilled and diverse models are superior in creating higher levels of self efficacy [3]. This is the reason why people seek out models that have qualities they admire, the strong influence that peers and peer groups have on an individual, and also why an accepted role model has a deep impact in an individual's life.

Social persuasions, the third source of self-efficacy formulation, are verbal judgments or feedback from significant others [2]. Persuaders must not only be able to nurture belief but also be credible, knowledgeable, and portray that the desired success is achievable [3]. Positive persuasion increases self-efficacy and vice versa. However, it is easier to lower self-efficacy through negative persuasion than increase self-efficacy through positive persuasion [2].

Somatic states like sweating, tremors, and the like, and emotional states such as anxiety or depression, while contemplating or undertaking action on a task, form the fourth source of self-efficacy formulation. Negative states lower one's perception of self-efficacy and helps create added stress guaranteeing failure in the task. Improving physical and emotional well-being and reducing the frequency of negative emotional states can lead to higher self efficacy, which in turn influence the emotional and somatic states [2]. At times the perception of the experience determines self efficacy, not the intensity or the nature of the experience. For example the self efficacy levels one derives when one regards anxiety before public speaking as a sign of being inept, and when one regards it as a commonly occurring phenomenon. Moods can affect derived self efficacy from experiences. Successful performance under positive moods generates higher levels of self efficacy while failures under negative moods generate lower sense of self efficacy. Individuals that fail under positive moods overestimate their capabilities or have a better sense of self efficacy from the experience that those that succeed under negative moods who underestimate their abilities[3]. Bandura observed that, "people live in psychic environments that are primarily of their own making". The choice of information, the assimilated meanings of this information, their understanding, and their recollection influence the person's perception of self-efficacy [2].

5. SELF EFFICACY AND HUMAN FUNCTIONING

Self-efficacy affects human functioning through four psychological processes, which are

cognitive, motivational, affective and selection processes [5]. Also known as the Mediating Processes, they act interdependently rather than independently [3]. Since thought is the forerunner of action, high self-efficacy cognitively translates to goal setting, success orientation, optimism and resilience to failures. This effectively contributes to prediction of success, perseverance and performance on subsequent tasks, thus creating stronger motivation [5]. This higher motivation caused can be explained by the Attribution theory, the Expectancy-Value theory and the Goal theory [3]. This leads to lower levels of negative emotional states like depression or anxiety, during subsequent tasks, thereby creating a positive affect even in the presence of temporary setbacks. Such positive affective states create a positive somatic state as well, especially when stress is concerned. The exposure to stress with the belief of being in control provides no negative effects on the individual. In such cases, perceived self efficacy promotes health and the maintenance of healthy lifestyle habits like avoiding smoking, alcohol, drugs, proper sleep, proper diet, and the like. With higher self-efficacy, one can be more comfortable over a broader environment, thus can indulge in a larger scope of selection especially in the areas of education and occupation. It is clear that there is optimistic strength in having high levels of self-efficacy; this is clear in the level of resilience displayed in the face of challenges or failures. It is this optimism that causes high efficacy individuals to surpass the ordinary [5].

6. CONCLUSION

Self efficacy is a core concept in Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. It is the belief in one's ability to exercise control over their functioning and the various life events. Self efficacy beliefs gradually develop over one's lifespan and it influences the choices one makes, the level of motivation involved, the amount of effort expended, the perseverance towards the attainment of one's goal and the resilience to temporary setbacks. An individual's perception of self efficacy is influenced by four sources: a) mastery experiences, b) vicarious learning c) social persuasion, and d) somatic and emotional states. Self efficacy influences human functioning via four processes: a) cognitive, b) motivational, c) affective, and d) selection. There is growing empirical research on the positive benefits of self efficacy in performance and achievement.

REFERENCES

1. Stajkovic, A. D., Luthans, F. (1998). "Social Cognitive Theory and Self Efficacy: Going beyond traditional motivational and behavioral approaches". *Organizational Dynamics:* v26 no4 (Spring 1998): p 62-74

2. Pajares, F. (2002). Overview of Social Cognitive Theory and of Self Efficacy. Retrieved on 15th November 2004 from http://www.emory.edu/EDUCATION/mfp/eff.html

3. Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. New York: Freeman. Retrieved on 18th November 2004 from http://www.emory.edu/EDUCATION/mfp/effbook1.html

4. Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. Retrieved on 16th November 2004 from http://www.emory.edu/EDUCATION/mfp/effpassages.html

5. Bandura, A. (1994). Self Efficacy. Encyclopedia of human behavior: v4, pp. 71-81. New York: Academic Press. Retrieved on 18th November 2004 from http://www.emory.edu/EDUCATION/mfp/BanEncy.html#sources