

The Connection between Job-Seeking Behavior and Flourishing: A Positive Psychology Perspective

1 Debesh Dutta, 2 Kalpana Sahoo, and 3 Abhishek Gupta *

1 PhD Scholar, C. V. Raman College of Engineering, C. V. Raman Global University,
Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India.

2 Associate Professor, School of Human Resource Management, XIM University,
Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India.

3 PhD Scholar, School of Human Resource Management, XIM University, Bhubaneswar,
Odisha, India. * Corresponding author

Abstract

Recent research on flourishing and psychological well-being has identified the psychosocial dynamics of human happiness. The advancement in the area of positive psychology has greatly facilitated this research. Drawing on these contemporary developments, it is asserted that job-seeking and happiness need not be viewed as separated, often incompatible processes. Positive psychological concepts such as self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, goal-setting, emotional intelligence, and growth mindset are well incorporated into happiness. These positive attributes are also needed for successful job-seeking behavior. Self-efficacy offers the confidence to execute a function competently. Optimism provides a supportive cognitive style to pursue both the job and happiness. Resilience builds the capacity to deal with adversity. Emotional intelligence furnishes the human factors of empathy and compassion. The growth mindset leverages the abundance of energy. An integrative approach to blend job seeking with happiness fulfills the objective of innovation and flourishing. The explication of empirical research attests to the assertion that job-seeking and happiness constitute a unitary process.

Keywords

work as a calling, sustainable happiness, self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, emotional intelligence, growth mind-set

The traditional approach to job-seeking and happiness views these phenomena as the pole-points of a continuum of human motivation. The process of job-seeking is considered as the preliminary step towards attainment of happiness at the apex. However, the recent developments in behavioral science, particularly in the area of *positive psychology*, reorient our out-look on the matter. This *New Look Approach* treats job-seeking and happiness as a unitary process. This assertion is strengthened when job-seeking and sustainable happiness are regarded as continuous strivings towards meaning making.

Job as a Calling

One point that comes across loud and clear is that a young person need not be gainfully employed in a high-paying, high-status position to gain enormous satisfaction. Positive psychology pioneer Martin Seligman (2002) describes positive persons differently. According to him, such job seekers do not see themselves as just having jobs, instead, they have callings.

Amy Wrzesniewski of New York University explicates the notion of calling. Adults with a calling see their jobs as contributing to greater good, as something larger than they are, hence the meaning making is entirely appropriate. The job is fulfilling in its own rights, without regard for money or for advancement. An important discovery in the field denotes: Any job can become a calling, and any calling can become a job.

Viewed from this broad perspective, there are common drivers for the dual success of job seeking and happiness. These include self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, emotional intelligence and growth mind-set. A brief discussion on each of these parameters would attest to the unifying process of job seeking and happiness.

The Dynamics of the Dual Process

As outlined earlier, the vision of positive person is based on the quality of performance. Although a number of stable predictors such as intelligence and self-esteem have been identified in the past, the growth of positive psychology and its emphasis on psychological capital have demanded our attention to examine some of the factors that remain under-utilized. Those factors

are highly pertinent in the context of competence and motivation. One such robust construct is the integrative framework of self-efficacy.

The Construct of Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy denotes one's capability belief. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. Bandura (1977) articulated a robust theory of social learning to explain the process of observational learning. Later he advanced the construct of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) within the framework of social learning.

It is important to distinguish skill execution from skill acquisition. Skill is acquired when one goes through educational and training settings. For skill execution to occur, one needs a belief system that he or she can execute the function. Thus, self-efficacy refers to the extent of belief that he or she can execute the function competently.

Self-efficacy can take *three* different forms: generalized self-efficacy, domain-specific efficacy and collective efficacy. Generalized self-efficacy is a trait; an individual may believe in his or her overall capability. However, such an individual may not be willing to save a drowning child because he/she does not have swimming capability. Thus, what is important is the domain-specific self-efficacy. This is a state-like concept which is developable in an individual. A driver may be having driving efficacy and a teacher need to have teaching efficacy. Job-seekers are expected to have job efficacy. The domain-specific efficacy can be measured by presenting a number of odds and asking the target population to indicate the level of confidence with which he/she can overcome. Sahoo and his associates (Sahoo & Batra, 1997) have used domain-specific self-efficacy measures in a variety of contexts (academic, work, home management). Exhibit 1 shows a representative sample of items.

Exhibit 1

An Illustration of Academic Efficacy Measure (*From Test Developed and Validated by F.M. Sahoo*)

Encircle the number which is applicable for you.

"I can complete my job assignment even if - - - - -"

	1 Do not agree	2 Slightly agree	3 Moderatel y agree	4 Fully agree
1. I am tired	1	2	3	4
2. I am distracted	1	2	3	4
3. Relatives come to our house	1	2	3	4
4. I am worried	1	2	3	4
5. Manager is angry with me	1	2	3	4
6. Situations are difficult	1	2	3	4
7. There are disturbances outside	1	2	3	4
8. I am not fed enough	1	2	3	4
9. Friends irritate me	1	2	3	4
10. There is sickness in my family	1	2	3	4
11. There is an interesting television show	1	2	3	4
12. There is continual power failure	1	2	3	4

Drawing on Bandura's concept of self-efficacy, a number of researchers have developed measuring instruments. Since Bandura emphasizes context-specific measurements, the investigators have developed area-specific scales. For example, Skill Confidence Inventory Scale (SCIS) measures self-efficacy in vocation and careers. It consists of 10 items relating to self-confidence in career making (Betz, Borgen & Harmon, 1996). Another example of a domain-specific scale is the mathematics self-efficacy (Betz & Hackett, 1983). In addition to domain-specific self-efficacy, there is a third form of self-efficacy termed *collective efficacy*. It refers to the extent of group belief that group members collectively can successfully execute a function. Collective efficacy is a stable predictor of many organizational, social and cultural change.

Since self-efficacy is a state-like construct (developable through learning and training), the antecedents to the development of self-efficacy have been delineated (Bandura, 1997).

A very powerful antecedent to efficacy formation involves the exposure to mastery experiences. Individuals need to broaden the range of their experiences. Individuals who expose themselves to new kinds of experiential exercises expand their self-efficacy. Those who participate in extra-institutional seminars, workshops and conferences build strong self-efficacy. In general, they tend to go out of their comfort zones. In a recent study, Kumpikaite and Duoba

(2013) have shown that students being abroad more than 3 months develop some core competencies.

Second, an intelligent structuring of initial experiences is needed. Many people seek easy tasks and assured success. However, easy successes in the beginning may make it difficult to bear with failures when encountered. If people take very difficult tasks in the beginning, repeated failures may induce a sense of helplessness (Sahoo, 2002). Hence an intelligent strategy is to structure initial experiences with tasks of moderate difficulty level. It is always better to start with tasks of moderate difficulty level and then systematically increase the level of difficulty in subsequent undertakings.

Third, the impact of modelling on personal self-efficacy is well-documented. One precaution is necessary. When people adopt a very distant role model, they may adore the role model, but rarely imitate. The dissimilarity between the role model and the target reduces the possibility of imitation. Hence, it is suggested that role models be adopted from the immediate surroundings. The element of similarity between the role model and the target with respect to some characteristics such as age, gender and background motivates the target to follow. The role model functions as a source of information and inspiration.

Finally, social persuasion is also impactful. For building self-efficacy, people ought to engage in self-talks: I can do it. For building efficacy for others, they need to offer encouragement: You can do it. Parents and teachers must keep saying: you can do, you can do.

In the context of positive training, adults need supportive interventions and/or counselling. A schematic representation of such tips has been depicted in Exhibit 2.

Exhibit 2

Efficacy-based Counselling / Intervention Components

Components	Specific steps to be arranged
Exposure to mastery experience	1. A great deal of practice 2. Breaking learning goals into proximal,

	tangible and attainable sub-goals 3. Offering feedback on each step
Use of role models	1. Drawing individuals' attention to role models in the immediate surrounding 2. Indicating similarity (age, sex, and other socioeconomic factors) between role models and individuals 3. Demonstrating as to how the selected role models can function as sources of information and inspiration
Social persuasion	1. Keep saying "You can do it" 2. Offer positive comments

Optimistic Explanatory Styles

Optimism is one of the most talked about positive psychological resource. In everyday language, an optimist is one who expects positive and desirable events in the future, while a pessimist is one who constantly has negative thoughts (Sahoo, Sarangi & Sahoo, 2017). Optimism is not just a dispositional tendency to expect good things to happen in the future. Optimistic expectations depend on the reasons and attributions one uses to explain why specific events, both positive and negative, occur in the past, present and future (Seligman, 1998). More recently, Davidson and Begley (2012) have identified the neurological correlates of optimism. It has been shown that the interplay of the left frontal cortex and the nucleus accumbens, our pleasure centre, is in focus here. The more signals go from the prefrontal cortex to the nucleus accumbens, gearing it towards increased activity, the more we are on the positive extreme. Elaine Fox (2013) speaks of rainy brain versus sunny brain.

Seligman (1998) interprets optimism as an explanatory style that attributes positive events to personal, permanent and pervasive causes and interprets negative events in terms of external, temporary, and situation-specific factors. On the other hand, a pessimistic explanatory style would interpret positive events with external, temporary and situation-specific attributes and explain negative events in terms of personal, permanent, and pervasive causes.

The optimistic explanatory styles do have great relevance in the context of individuals' success and failure. For better achievements, individuals need to explain their success in terms of personal, permanent and pervasive factors. They need to explain failure in terms of external temporary and situation-specific factors. The socialization plays its role in fostering or hindering the adaptive optimistic style. Research has shown that teachers use double standard while dealing with boys vis-à-vis girls. When boys fail teachers tend to use effort-attribution. "You did not work hard, so you failed" – they tell boys. In contrast, teachers offer ability-attribution, when girls fail. They declare: "you have no ability, so you failed". It is not difficult to surmise that the former is an adaptive attribution, because effort is relatively a controllable factor. Similarly, appreciation in terms of intelligence versus hard work makes difference in the context of success and achievement.

The intervention / counselling tips may schematically be presented in Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3

Intervention / Counselling Tips in the Context of Dealing with Positive and Negative Events Encountered by Individuals

Nature of Events	Components	Specific Socialistic Tips
Positive Events (For example, success)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Who is responsible? How long would the effects stay? How many domains of your life would be influenced? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Think of your positive role in causing the event Try to stretch the effect over time; Talk about it today, tomorrow and afterwards Spill over good home-related messages to job and job-related messages to home
Negative Events (For example, Failure)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Who is responsible? How long would the effect stay? How pervasive is its impact? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the role of external conditions; do not blame yourself totally Consider it very temporary Very specific; do not spill it over to other areas of life

Resilience

Perhaps the most parsimonious definition of resilience is “bouncing back”. The process refers to the phenomenon of preventing or minimizing the adverse effects of negative environment.

This broad definition is widely accepted. Dr Emmy Werner sometimes called the “mother of resilience” is a person-focused resilience researcher. She identifies resilient people. However, resilience is manifest in any stage of human development. All resilient people have three attributes: I am, I can and I have. The first attribute refers to the property of self-confidence. Resilient individuals feel that they are capable of completing the job competently. The second attribute (“I can”) denotes problem-solving capability. The third attribute (I have) is indicative of a special relationship. Resilient individuals do have protective factors. Even if the family life is negative, they have some kind of oasis elsewhere in their social lives. This protective factor insulates them from external adversity.

From a different stand-point, resilient individuals have three characteristics. First, there is always a blending of optimism and realism. Although they are optimistic, it is not unbounded optimism. It is realistic optimism (functional) optimism. Second, they have the tendency of reinventing the process. They try to renew the process. Baba Amte, the former great social worker of India, used to say that he attempted to renew his life almost every-day. Third, resilient individuals do have a sense of meaning attached to atleast one aspect of their lives. The Auschwitz concentration camp survivor Viktor Frankl spoke of the great *mantra* of search for meaning.

Ann Masten has worked to devise strategies for promoting resilience in young people (see Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4

Strategies for Promoting Resilience in Young People

<p>Risk-focused Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Prevent faulty prenatal careScreen for and treat depression in mothersReduce environmental crimes
<p>Asset-focused strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Provide basic necessitiesEducate parentsProvide good educationRestore community serviceEducate teachers
<p>Process-focused Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Foster secure attachmentParental-sensitivity trainingNurture healthy brain developmentProvide quality experienceProvide positive role models

It is important to note that resilience is very important in the course of dealing with the negative. This special adaptational skill is required in the context of successful job-seeking behaviour and happiness pursuits.

Emotional Intelligence

In recent decades psychologists and behavioural scientists have emphasized the role of emotional intelligence. Goleman (1970) stresses that emotional intelligence contributes ninety percent of our success while rational intelligence contributes only ten percent of our success in life.

Emotional intelligence includes self-awareness, self-skills (tolerance & motivation), interpersonal sensitivity, and social skills. Optimism and positive moods are also its components. Special mention includes empathy and compassion. It needs no argument to convince one that emotional intelligence is an essential skill for the attainment of job and happiness.

Supportive Cognitive Styles

In addition to the seminal role of self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 1995), resilience, emotional intelligence, and positive explanatory styles (Seligman, 1998), a couple of cognitive style constructs offer significant contributions.

In this context, Carol Dweck (Stanford University) makes a significant contribution. Her early research focused helpless and mastery-oriented behaviours. She noted that some individuals persist in the face of failure while others quit as soon as they encounter difficulties. She started investigating the cognitive beliefs, particularly beliefs about ability that lie behind behaviours. She discovered that individuals' implicit beliefs about the nature of intelligence has a significant effect on the way they approach challenging intellectual tasks. Individuals who view that their intelligence is an unchangeable and fixed internal characteristic tend to shy away from academic challenges. In contrast, individuals who believe that their intelligence can be increased through effort and persistence seek them out.

According to Dweck (1999), individuals who hold an *entity theory* give up when encountering challenges while individuals who hold an *incremental theory* persist. Dweck's theory has implications for how the praise of mentors may lead individual to accept an entity view of a resource. Praising an individual for his or her intelligence may reinforce the notion that success and failure depend on something beyond the individual's control (Example: I am so happy you got an A⁺ because you are intelligent). In contrast, individuals who are admired for their effort are much more likely to view resource as changeable. Individuals with an incremental view are more likely to work through frustrations and setbacks and reach their full academic potential. Dweck (1999) experimented the impact of fixed entity versus incremental belief systems and found clear supportive evidence.

Psychologist Tory Higgins (1996) has also developed a motivational theory concerning goal. His theory maintains that people regulate their goal-directed behaviours in two distinct ways. One focus of regulation is *promotion focus* while the other is *prevention focus*. Individuals with promotion focus are concerned with advancement, growth and accomplishment. Behaviours with promotion focus are characterized by eagerness, approach, and “going for the best”. The prevention focus is concerned with protection, safety and the prevention of negative outcomes and failures. Behaviour with a prevention focus are characterized by vigilance, caution and attempts to prevent negative outcomes.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussions posit and defend the assertion that the processes of job-seeking and sustainable happiness are not only complementary phenomena, these constitute a unifying process of making meaning in lives. The parameters that facilitate the process of job-seeking also leverage the pursuit of happiness. This unification process is clearly visible when job is viewed not as a means of survival, but as an effective instrument of fulfilling larger objective of our lives and society.

Implications for social policy and action

This paper has immense significance in academic and social domain. It is more useful in educational setting how to prepare students for job. It is more from placement and employment opportunities. But from social and community point of view, the policy makers can give a look into it and incorporate these behavioural skills in assessing the holistic person. Job or work is not a single criterion to evaluate the student.

References

- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of self-control*. New York: Freeman.
- Betz, N.E., Borgen, F.H., & Harmon, L.W. (1996). *Skill Confidence Inventory (SCI)*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.
- Betz, N.E., & Hackett, G. (1983). The relationship of mathematics self-efficacy expectations to the selection of science-based college majors. *Journal of Vocational Psychology*, 23(3), 329-345.
- Davidson, R.J., & Begley, S. (2012). *The emotional life of your brain*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Dweck, C.S. (1999). *Self-theories: Their role in motivation, personality, and development*. Philadelphia: The Psychology Press.
- Fox, E. (2013). *Rainy brain, sunny brain*. London: Arrow Books.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Higgins, E.T. (1996). The self-digest. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 1062-1083.
- Luthans, F., Youssef-Morgan, C.M., & Avolio, B.J. (2015). *Psychological capital and beyond*. New York: Oxford University.
- Masten, A.S. (2001). Ordinary magic: resilience process in development. *American Psychologist*, 56, 227-239.
- Sahoo, F.M. (2002). *Dynamics of human helplessness*. New Delhi: Concept.
- Sahoo, F.M., & Batra, G. (1997). Self-efficacy and attributional styles in mastery-oriented and learned-helpless students. *Indian Educational Review*, 32(2), 92-103.
- Sahoo, F.M., Sarangi, A., & Sahoo, K. (2017). Emotional styles in potential managers. *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8(3), 382-385.
- Seligman, M.E.P. (1998). *Learned optimism*. New York: Pocket Books.
- Seligman, M.E.P. (2002). *Authentic happiness*. New York: Free Press.
- Wrzesniewski, A., McCauley, C.R., Rozin, P. & Schwartz, B. (1997). Jobs, career, and callings. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 31, 21-33.
- Zimmerman, B.J. (1995). Self-efficacy and educational development. In A. Bandura (Ed), *Self-efficacy in changing societies* (Pp 202-231). New York: Cambridge University Press.