

Motivational persistence, optimism and neuroticism as dispositional determinants for self-concordance of goals and psychological well-being

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to highlight the impact of dispositional variables, such as motivational persistence, optimism and neuroticism on goals' self - concordance and psychological well-being. The study was performed on a sample of 74 participants. The multiple regression analysis has shown the predictive role of motivational persistence, optimism and neuroticism for goals' self - concordance and psychological well-being. The study highlighted the predictive role of motivational persistence, dispositional optimism and neuroticism in goals self - concordance as well as in psychological well-being. High levels of motivational persistence and dispositional optimism along with low levels of neuroticism predict altogether a high level of psychological well-being. Motivational persistence and optimism are independent predictors of goals' self – concordance. The high levels of motivational persistence and those of optimism independently predicted goals' self – concordance.

Key words: goals' self - concordance, psychological well-being, motivational persistence, optimism, neuroticism

Introduction

Goal establishment ensures the need to accomplish current or performance related activities, offering a life meaning, as well as the manifestation and maintenance of feelings of personal accomplishment. Goals can be ranked based on individual needs: primary, secondary and tertiary. In order to have the capacity to elaborate and maintain goals, the individual needs to have cognitive abilities, emotional states, motivations as well as dispositional features. Context plays an important role in these processes, modulating volunteer actions (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999).

Individual *self-determination* depends on goal establishment and accomplishment but also on motivational and dispositional mechanisms. According to the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) people experience the fundamental need of autonomy, competence and psychological relatedness. Autonomy is accomplished when the individual enjoys freedom of choice. The *need to enter into relations* is accomplished

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through interacting and communicating with others, belonging to a group as well as through experiencing the feeling of belonging. The *need for competence* is satisfied when the person feels capable; for instance, when receiving positive feedback. The satisfaction of these three needs depends on the extent in which they have been active in day-to-day activities, freely prioritized and equally distributed in time (Chin et al., 2012). The satisfaction of these needs creates a positive disposition, vitality, psychological health and well-being, and has contributed to an increase in motivation, efficiency and self-determination (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Moreover, the satisfaction of these needs is functionally related with intrinsic motivation (Ryan, 1995, apud. Reis et al., 2000).

Psychological well-being has been associated with satisfying the needs of competence, autonomy and psychological relatedness (Reis, 1994; Ryan, 1995; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995, apud. Reis et al., 2000). The *psychological well-being state* can be conceptualized as a hedonistic, subjective state equal to happiness (Kahneman et al., 1999, apud. Ryan & Deci, 2004), or as an eudemonistic state equal to the full functioning of the individual (Ryff & Singer, 1998, apud. Ryan & Deci, 2004). In addition to this, well-being is associated with several personality features, such as optimism, self-esteem, extroversion, self-control and neuroticism.

Goals are central elements when it comes to the functioning of motivation, although not all goals are *psychologically adaptive*. *The theory of goal content*, subordinated by the self-determination theory, claims that goals are adaptive to the individual to the extent in which they satisfy needs of autonomy, competence and the need to enter into relations (Sebire et al., 2013).

Behavioral adjustment with an adaptive goal varies to the extent in which the latter is *autonomous* or *controlled* (*The self-determination theory*). Autonomous behavior implies an internal perception of causality, a locus of internal control and is often experimented as being freely and voluntarily chosen. Controlled behavior implies a locus of external control, a perception of external causality and is experienced as a form of pressure from external demands and circumstances (Deci & Ryan, 1985, apud Williams & Deci, 1996). *Goals self - concordance* is an important factor contributing to the establishment and accomplishment of goals. Goal self - concordance is defined as a measure in which a goal reflects personal interests and values versus the feeling that a goal needs to be accomplished on account of external pressure and the “must” imperative! (Williams & Deci, 1996). *The model of goals self – concordance* has been elaborated by Sheldon (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999, apud. Judge et al., 2005) and is a development of the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, apud Williams & Deci, 1996). *This model* analyzes and explains the evolution of the process from the

establishment of the goal to its accomplishment, highlighting the effects of goal accomplishment on the satisfaction of needs and psychological well-being (Sheldon and Elliot, 1999, apud Bruke & Linley, 2007).

The main thesis of the model can be summed-up as follows. The *self-concordant goals* are those goals which resonate with our interests and values. When pursuing such goals, success is achieved based on a great effort made in order to achieve the respective goal (Bruke & Linley, 2007). Goals self-concordance leads to psychological well-being and the latter resorts to feedback in order to stimulate the effort to achieve goals. The lack of concordance between one's goals and his/her self contributes to the manifestation of cognitive dissonance, frustration and interior conflicts (Judge et al., 2005). Goals self-concordance is a factor indicating mental health, progress and the individual's personal growth. People are happier when pursuing goals which are in concordance with their interests and values. Additionally, people manifest a predisposition for accomplishing those goals which would make them happy, as intrinsic and self-agreeing goals better contribute to the fulfillment of one's needs, values and interests (Judge et al., 2005). People pursue goals out of various reasons, such as external, introverted, identified and/or intrinsic ones. However, these types of goals are not exclusive. Intrinsic goals can have as motivation the following: affiliation and personal development, while extrinsic goals could be motivated by material welfare, fame, appeal, etc. While *intrinsic goals* have an autonomous motivation, *extrinsic ones* have a controlled one (Sheldon and Elliot, 1998, apud Judge et al., 2005). *Proximity goals* are ruled by autonomous motivation, while *avoidance goals* are ruled by a controlled motivation (Elliot et al., 1997, apud Judge et al., 2005). Focusing on intrinsic goals is associated with a state of well-being, good health and a high level of perseverance towards goal and performance (Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004, apud Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Self-concordance determinants in the establishment of goals and well-being

Motivation implies the selection, energizing and guidance of behavior (McClelland, 1988, apud Koestner et al., 2002). Establishing goals is a common means of self-motivation (ibidem.) Contemporary motivational theories refer to the role of cognition in motivational adjustment through: positive expectations, cognitive abilities, the nature of the perspective in which the goal can be framed, the nature of implementation intentions, etc. (Shah, Kruglanski, & Friedman, 2003, apud Sheldon, 2008). Motivational persistence is defined as a voluntary continuation of the goal-oriented action, despite any obstacles, difficulties or discouragement. The terms of perseverance and persistence can be interchangeable, although the concept of perseverance implies a more positive content than that of persistence. Persevering individuals expect in general to be repaid for the result they

seek. Persistence is often associated with the internal control, a high level of self-perceived competence, self-efficiency and positive expectations (Seligman et al., 2004).

Motivational persistence refers to the individual's capacity to persevere from behavioral and motivational aspects in an effort to achieve ambitious objectives as well as to the tendency to persist in actions directed towards achieving intended purposes, to invest time, effort and energy to achieve the established goal and not to abandon it (Constantin, 2008). It can be noticed in behaviors emphasizing the individual's prolonged effort, especially when tasks become difficult (Meier and Albrecht, 2003, apud. Constantin et al., 2007).

Optimism is defined as the extent in which an individual manifests a stable tendency for positive expectations as far as the results of various life events are concerned (McIntosh et al., 2004). Optimists usually categorize problems as being temporary, external and specific, while pessimists evaluate them as being internal, persistent and long-term ones (Buchanan and Seligman, 1995, apud Fotiadou et al., 2008). Moreover, optimism is correlated with motivational persistence (Peterson, 2000, apud. Seligman et al., 2004), as optimists make more efforts to achieve their goals, and when they are confronted with difficulties they have adaptive coping mechanisms (Buchanan and Seligman, 1995). Self-agreeing goals are partial mediators of the relationship between optimism and one's psychological well-being (Fotidaou et al., 2008). Neuroticism is a personality factor associated with negative emotionality and emotional instability. Other authors have defined neuroticism as follows: the tendency to react strongly in potentially tense or ambiguous situations, the tendency to have unrealistic ideas, the incapacity to control negative events, the tendency to be in a negative mood, anxiety, inefficient coping mechanisms and the tendency to evaluate events as being stressful (Costa and McCrae, 1992, apud Ormel et al., 2004; Widger et al., 1984, apud Ormel et al., 2004). Neuroticism was associated with a low perception of autonomy, competence and relation-entering (Judge et al., 2005), with coping reactions based on avoidance (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999, apud Judge et al., 2005).

The present study

Applied psychology takes an interest in selecting those people who have the capacity to elaborate goals and follow them. The goals established in one's work, educational and clinical fields have a special adaptive or performance-related value. The evaluation of goals self-concordance predictors in the establishment of goals and well-being helps a person to understand the individual and make decisions during selection and psychological counselling. Moreover, the identification of the determinant

factors of goals' self-concordance and well-being offers a series of landmarks regarding the means of building on and maintaining the individual's mental health. This present study shall identify the role that motivational persistence, optimism and neuroticism have on goals' self-concordance and on one's psychological well-being. The research variables consist the following: goals' self-concordance, psychological well-being (criterion variables), motivational persistence, optimism and neuroticism (predictor variables).

We assume that motivational persistence, optimism and neuroticism are predictors of psychological well-being. We expect that a high level of optimism and motivational persistence and a low level of neuroticism will be associated with an increase in psychological well-being. Moreover, we assume that motivational persistence, optimism and neuroticism are predictors of goals' self – concordance. We expect that a high level of optimism and motivational persistence and a low level of neuroticism will be associated with an increase in goals' self – concordance.

Method

Participants

This study was conducted on 74 participants, 30 men and 44 women (Mage=31.90, SD=10.90). The sample has a relatively equal distribution of gender: 40.58% of the participants being male and 59.5% female. The participants were asked to fill in the scales using pen and paper and return them to the evaluator in a week's time.

Instruments

In order to evaluate the dispositional optimism we used the *Life Orientation Test* (Scheier and Carver, 1985). This scale is comprised of 10 items and has good internal consistency; the Cronbach alfa is .72.

In order to evaluate neuroticism we resorted to the *Neuroticism Scale of the Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire* (ZKPQ, Zuckerman et al., 1993). This scale has 19 items and an internal consistency Cronbach alfa of .83.

Goals self - concordance was evaluated through the *Striving Assessment Scale*, comprised of 12 items (Constantin et al., 2013). On this present study group we obtained a Cronbach alpha of .72

Motivational persistence was measured using the *Motivational Persistence Scale* (Constantin et al.,2008). This scale has 15 items and an internal consistency Cronbach alfa of .79.

In order to evaluate the psychological well-being we used the *Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale* (WEMWBS) (Tennant et al., 2007). This scale is comprised of 14 items and an internal consistency Cronbach alfa of .89.

Results

Table 1 presents descriptive data, means, standard deviations of the investigated variables and correlations among the investigated variables in the study.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1.Goals self - concordance	47.02	4.99	-				
2.Psychological well-being	57.09	7.32	.16	-			
3.Motivational persistence	51.50	5.96	.33**	.35**	-		
4.Neuroticism	37.13	11.92	.09	-.64**	-.15	-	
5.Dispositional optimism	36.71	5.82	.25*	.62**	.23*	-.44**	-

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and correlations among the investigated variables in the study; *Note:* * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Throughout the multiple linear regression analysis, the study highlighted several types of results.

Motivational persistence ($\beta = .19$, $p < .013$), neuroticism ($\beta = -.44$, $p < .000$) and dispositional optimism ($\beta = .38$, $p < .000$) altogether are predictors of psychological well-being and explain 59% of the variance of the criterion variable ($R^2 = .59$). A high level of motivational persistence and dispositional optimism, as well as a low level of neuroticism are predictors of high levels of psychological well-being.

Predictor variable	B	SE(B)	β	t	Sig. (p)
1.Motivational persistence	.24	.09	.19	2.547	.013
2.Nuroticism	-.27	.05	-.44	-5.226	<.001
3.Dispositional Optimism	.48	.10	.38	4.452	<.001
R square = .59					

Table 2. Results of the multiple hierarchic linear regression analysis for the psychological well-being state; *Criterion variable: psychological well-being.*

Motivational persistence ($\beta = .33$, $p = .004$, $R^2 = .11$) and dispositional optimism ($\beta = .254$, $p = .026$, $R^2 = .06$) are independent predictors of goal self - concordance. Motivational persistence explains 11% of the variance in the criterion variable ($R^2 = .11$) and dispositional optimism explains 6% of the variance in the criterion variable ($R^2 = .06$). Thus, it appears that a high level of motivational persistence and dispositional optimism predict independently high levels of goals' self – concordance.

Predictor variable	B	SE(B)	β	t	Sig.(p)
1.Motivational persistence	.27	.09	.33	2.988	.004
2.Dispositional optimism	.22	.09	.25	2.280	.026

Table 3. Results of the simple hierarchic linear regression analysis for the predictors of goals' self – concordance; *Criterion variable: goals' self – concordance.*

Discussion

Dispositional variables, such as motivational persistence, optimism and neuroticism are predictive factors of goals' self - concordance and psychological well-being. This study shows that those persons having the capacity to establish self - concordant goals are characterized through motivational persistence and optimism. Motivational persistence and optimism are independent predictors of goals' self – concordance. Psychological well-being is a health indicator and is present in the personality profile of those having a high level of optimism and motivational persistence. Those having an above-average level of neuroticism have a low psychological well being. Motivational persistence, optimism and neuroticism altogether are predictors of psychological well-being. According to other studies, optimistic people manifest a larger degree of predisposition for persistence when it comes to following their aims; thus, they enjoy greater chances of success and an increased feeling of psychological well-being (Peterson, 2000). The presence of optimism increases the chances for the individual to establish self - concordant goals, to persist in accomplishing them and to overcome their occurred difficulties. Neuroticism has an unfavorable impact on the establishment of self-agreeing goals (Judge et al., 2005), over psychological well-being (Sheldon et al., 2008).

Research limitations

The results of this present study are to be confirmed by future research that shall be applied on more extended samples of subjects. In order to have a general view over the population it is necessary to use a larger sample and a random/aleatory selection. Another limitation to this present study is the absence of control groups. Thus, future research could highlight the role and significant impact that predictive dispositional factors and other covaried variables have on goals' self - concordance and psychological well-being. Such covaried variables could be represented by deep self-structures, cognitive and affective variables, as well as contextual variables.

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