

Learning material on Self-Efficacy, assertiveness and successful negotiation

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1. Self-efficacy

The construct of self-efficacy introduced by Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997), refers to a person's conviction in his or her own capacity to perform successfully a behavior leading to a specific outcome.

He differentiated between self-efficacy and outcome expectancy, defining the last as a person's belief (estimation) about the likelihood of a given behavior leading to a specific outcome. He stated that self-efficacy is independent of outcome expectancy. Self-efficacy is considered the crucial precondition for behavioral change, since it determines the initiation of coping behavior.

Self-efficacy makes a difference in how people feel, think and act (Schwarzer et al. 1999). In terms of feeling, low sense of self-efficacy is associated with helplessness, depression, anxiety. Yet, it reflects low self-esteem and pessimistic thoughts about personal accomplishments and development. In terms of thinking, a strong sense of self-efficacy facilitates cognitive processes and performance in various setting, such as quality of decision making. Moreover different levels of self-efficacy can enhance or hamper the motivation to act. As matter of fact, individuals with high self-efficacy choose to perform more challenging tasks, set themselves higher goals and remain highly committed to them. In terms of act, actions are anticipated in thoughts related to either optimistic or pessimistic scenarios in line with high or low levels of self-efficacy. Once an action has been taken, high self-efficacious persons invest more effort and persist longer than those with low self-efficacy. Moreover self-efficacy also allows people to select challenging settings, and

create new situations. According to Bandura a sense of competence (self-efficacy) can be acquired by mastery experience, it is based on experience, and on realistic sense of personal strengths. Therefore it is different from positive illusions or unrealistic optimism, as it does not lead to unreasonable risk taking; instead it leads to daring behaviours that is within reach of people's capabilities. Interestingly, it has been found that self-efficacy is related to social skills (Moe & Zeiss, 1982), and assertiveness (Lee, 1983, 1984), thus within the ENACT project we would like to explore if there is any relations between self-efficacy and assertiveness, and related positive effect on negotiation processes. To this extent the ENACT users will be asked to complete the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE).

2. General Self-Efficacy Scale

Perceived self-efficacy is the belief that one can perform a novel or difficult task, or cope with adversity -- in various domains of human functioning. The GSE is a one-dimensional self-report questionnaire comprising of 10 items which assesses optimistic self-beliefs of an individual to cope with a variety of difficult demands in life. In contrast to other scales designed to assess optimism, the GSE explicitly refers to "personal agency" or "personal action control" that is the belief that one's actions are responsible for successful outcomes. The scale was originally developed in German by Jerusalem and Schwarzer in 1981, and since then used in many studies with hundred thousands of participants aged more than twelve years. It has been demonstrated that the GSE is reliable and unidimensional across cultures (samples from 23 nations). The scale is currently available in 31 languages, including Italian, Spanish and Turkish.

2.1. Scoring procedure and interpretation for the GSE

For each of the 10 items the response options are presented along a 4-point Likert scale, and accordingly it can be calculated a theoretical total score of 10 to 40, or a mean scale score of 1 to 4. The total and mean GSE scores found in different populations are 29 or 2.9 respectively. Higher scores indicate higher perceived general self-efficacy and lower scores indicate lower perceived general self-efficacy. After completion of the questionnaire add up all responses to a sum score. In general a score can be calculated as long as no more than three items on the 10-item scale are missing. The authors do not endorse the view that people can be categorize persons as being high or low self-efficacious, according to specific score range. There is no cut-off score that is the minimum acceptable score for being considered as self-competent.

However, it could be possible to establish groups on the basis of the empirical distributions of a particular reference population. For example could be used a median split in order to dichotomize the sample at the cut-off point of 30 whether this is near the median in our sample.

The General Self-Efficacy Scale is available in the four languages of the partners: English, Italian, Spanish and Turkish.

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