

Self-Efficacy and Competition
Not Everybody Can Learn Everything

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A colleague's presentation describes mastery experiences in the light of self-efficacy. A self-reinforcing circle of mastery experiences on motivation is presented. I want to discuss this principle in the light of competition.

Introduction

Next to intelligence, conscientiousness has been reported as a strong predictor of success. Conscientiousness may be thought to include resilience, as the actions one conscientiously executes are done without regard to their outcome or its affective connotation. Likewise, high neuroticism has been reported as an inhibitor of success (Higgins et al., 2007). Anxiety and negative affect were found to negatively correlate with resilience in a sample of 64 national-level judo athletes (Çutuk et al., 2017). One proposition of Dweck was to shift the focus from results to the process. Whereas focus on the path is a long propagated ideal of Eastern philosophies, its motivational component deserves further elaboration.

Ego Orientation

In the case of vicarious experiences, when one sees somebody else succeed, motivation may instead arise from own failure. Rooted in state thinking (desiring to have the

same skill level as the person observed), motivation to continue to practice may arise from own failure. This motivation has been described as ego orientation (Hays, 2012). This interpretation also follows from Higgins' (1987) self-discrepancy theory, particularly as a discrepancy between own ideals and factual observation. The discrepancy motivates to pursue goals. Following Frankl (1946/2006), the presence of a goal the motivation and positive affect arises from working towards a goal rather than from achieving it. However, the initial motivation to set goals (here) arises from failure as a discrepancy (competition), under the absence of anxiety inducing external expectations. From this perspective, Dweck's recommendation to avoid result evaluation to avoid pressures of imposed expectations appears sound. A goal may be given up if no obvious progress happens after a certain number of attempts, introducing a concept of resilience.

Task Orientation

A different approach claims that those people succeed who engage in the practice, rather than get their motivation from winning. Task orientation is usually framed to focus on mastery (Hays, 2012; Beauchamp, Jackson, & Morton, 2012). Those who practice more, and never appear to run out of motivation, with practice achieve a higher level of proficiency. Following constructivism, progress comes faster when this engagement is accompanied by a process of self-observation and self-reflection. In addition to beliefs in self-efficacy, superior performance may arise from superior performance intelligence, that enables better execution over a multitude of attempts (Jones, 2012). However, positive affect from mastery experience may also blind people from areas of improvement.

Conclusion

In competitive settings, many people put in a considerable amount of effort. Nevertheless, there are significant differences in performance, time and exhaustion limits,

thus not everybody is able to learn anything at any level. Considering sports games, people appear to enjoy the practice at all levels of mastery, independent from progress. Talent may bring people to an activity they would not practice otherwise, and be an important prerequisite for speed and limits of mastery. For resilience, the important question for instructors may be how to avoid demotivation. For competitive performance athletes as well as students, high task and high ego orientation in balance appear to be key to successful performance, while external factors may still substantially modulate individual performance.

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