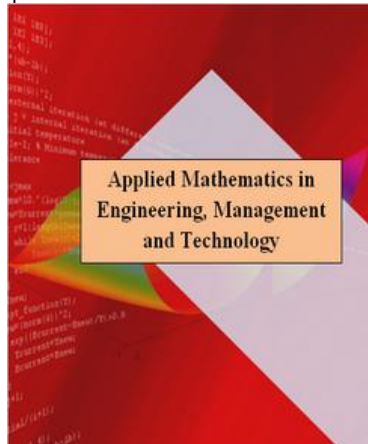


Improving Achievement Motivation:By Diminish Negative Perfectionism

Malikeh Beheshtifar

Management Department, Rafsanjan Branch, Islamic AZAD University, Iran



ABSTRACT

Individuals with a high need for achievement is very sensitive to the opportunity to do something better than before or than others and to improve skills. These conditions are related to healthy individuals with positive perfectionism. Studies show that negative perfectionism was generally found to be associated with negative personality factors and the use of dysfunctional coping strategies. The negative perfectionism is associated with low self-esteem, depression and illogical beliefs. So, it is not associated with achievement motivation.

Keywords: achievement, achievement motivation, perfectionism, negative perfectionism

1. Introduction

The burgeoning importance of incorporating positive psychology in workplace is recognized by researchers, lately (Ismail, et al. 2011), and among numerous personal characteristics, achievement motivation usually concerns with individual job performance and job attitude (Robbins, 2001). Individuals with a high need for achievement is very sensitive to the opportunity to do something better than before or than others and to improve skills (Brunstein&Heckhausen, 2008). These conditions are related to healthy individuals with positive perfectionism.

In the professional and corporate world, perfectionism is regularly thought of by recruiters, employers, managers, and employees alike as a positive trait which enables an employee to strive toward a perfect performance/product. However, there is a “dark side” of perfectionism, typically explored in and attributed to clinical populations. The “dark side” could lead to behaviors typically associated with clinical disorders, such as depression, health problems and severe stress. The “darkside” observed with clinical populations should be examined to determine if it applies to more normal populations, and specifically to the working professional (Bousman, 2007).

Usually, the concept of perfectionism has been receiving attention in personality psychology for many years, but only a handful of studies have investigated the effects of perfectionism in the normal workplace (Nekoie-Moghadam, et al., 2012). Perfectionism is considered a stable pattern of thinking and behavior that changes relatively little over time, as opposed to a variable measure of a person’s state at any particular moment (Anshel, et al, 2009).

Some theorists have argued that there are two dimensions of perfectionism: maladaptive perfectionism and adaptive perfectionism (Slaney, et al., 1995). Theoretically, the characteristics of maladaptive perfectionism include having unrealistically high standards, striving for excellent performances motivated by avoiding negative evaluations from others, and being unable to obtain satisfaction from one’s own performances (Enns&Cox, 2002).

Recently, a cognitive-behavioral construct of “clinical perfectionism” has been proposed. It is suggested that the core feature of clinical perfectionism is the “over dependence of self-evaluation on the determined pursuit and achievement of personally demanding standards” (Riley &Shafran, 2005: 369). However, negative perfectionism could be an important obstacle to achievement.

Perfectionism has been recognized to have a positive effect on adjustment or achievement (Onwuegbuzie et al. 1999). In the other word, only a handful of studies have investigated the effects of perfectionism in normal populations in the workplace (Benson, 2003), and there are few research about negative perfectionism in organizations.

2. Achievement Motivation

Atkinson (1950) supported the need for an objective self-report device, and suggested that such a measure be based on the empirical findings of previous research that identifies causal factors influencing people to score high or low on need for achievement.

Following the work of McClelland (1965), most researchers defined achievement in terms of competition and individual success. Personal desires, independent decisions, personal accomplishments, and self-actualization were stressed. The motive to achieve was thought to reflect a motive to achieve for the “self,” and, as such, achievement was defined as individual accomplishment for one’s own sake.

Based on McClelland’s theory, individuals with a high need for achievement like situations in which they take personal responsibility for finding solutions to problems. They set moderate achievement goals and take calculated risks. People with high need for achievement strive to make things better. They are more willing to compete with a personal standard of excellence as a guideline to evaluate performance (McClelland, 1987)

The theory of achievement motivation describes performance as multidimensional and as influenced by many different factors. The main personal factor is the achievement motive; the main task-specific factor is the motivating potential of the situation. For diagnostic information about mode and strength of the achievement motive there are three different sources (Schneider & Schmalz, 2000):

- 1 Self-judgement
- 2 Judgement by others
- 3 Behavioral indices

So, many organizations are seeking the employees who have high achievement motivation to better performance and success.

3. Nature of Negative Perfectionism

One of the first theorists to mention perfectionism was Adler (1956). He claimed that we all strive to reach a goal that makes us feel strong, superior, and complete. As a result, striving for perfection is a normal phenomenon for most individuals, and the urge to live is tied to this striving (Saya, 2006). Perfectionism has been conceptualized both as a stable personality trait that results in individuals’ engaging habitually in the same patterns of behavior and thinking styles or as the ways in which individuals think about such behaviors (Melrose, 2011).

Perfectionism is a personality trait characterized by striving for setting excessively high standards for performance accompanied by tendencies towards overly critical evaluations of one’s behavior (Besharat, et al. 2010). Perfectionism is a trait thought to encompass positive (e.g., lofty performance) and negative tendencies (e.g., excessive stress self-criticism) depending upon the individual and the context. Individuals with maladaptive expressions of perfectionism have been described as “unable to feel satisfaction because in their own eyes they never seem to do things good enough to warrant that feeling,” and this, along with a pervasive fear of failure, could lead to a variety of negative emotions (Hamachek, 1978, pp. 27).

In other word, Hamachek (1978) argued that perfectionism can be normal and that the striving associated with it may lead to positive adjustment. He described “normal perfectionism” as striving for realistic standards from which a sense of pleasure is derived when results are achieved and self-esteem is enhanced. In contrast, Hamachek also described “neurotic perfectionism”. This is when an individual strives for excessive and unrealistically high standards, and is overly critical and evaluative of their own behavior. They are motivated by a fear of failure and are unable to feel satisfaction if even the tiniest flaw occurs. They also experience uncertainty and anxiety about their own capabilities. Hamachek distinguished between normal and neurotic perfectionism proposing that normal perfectionists enjoy their arduous pursuit of their goals while neurotic perfectionists continually strive for achievement of their unrealistic high standards without ever gaining a sense of satisfaction from their accomplishment. Summarily, perfectionism has been described as a form of overconscientiousness or hyper conscientiousness (Beheshtifar, et al., 2011). Some theorists suggest that

perfectionism self-criticism involves the tendency to overgeneralize the implications of failures such that judgments about oneself are often negative (Burns, 1980).

Negative (unhealthy) perfectionism is defined as a function of the avoidance of negative consequences and the motivation to achieve a certain goal in order to avoid adverse consequences (Haase and Prapavessis, 2004). Shafran et al. (2003) suggest that clinical perfectionism entails excessive striving for high standards combined with critical self-evaluation.

Hamachek (1978) also described "neurotic perfectionism". This is when an individual strives for excessive and unrealistically high standards, and is overly critical and evaluative of their own behavior (Frost et al. 1990). They are motivated by a fear of failure and are unable to feel satisfaction if even the tiniest flaw occurs. They also experience uncertainty and anxiety about their own capabilities. This is in contrast with normal perfectionists who allow minor flaws in their performance while still accepting it as successful (Flett & Hewitt, 2002). They are motivated by a fear of failure, and often social criticism. This form of perfectionism is self-defeating, as fear of failure and worrying still occurs even when standards have been met (Blackburn, 2003).

Unhealthy perfectionists are those who have high levels of perfectionistic strivings and high levels of perfectionistic concerns. Studies of perfectionists that fit these criteria have shown evidence for attitudinal inflexibility, higher levels of stress, a tendency for persistent worry and fear of failure, slow decision making, and low interpersonal sensitivity (Ellam-Dyson & Palmer, 2010).

Frost et al. (1990) identified perfectionism as having five dimensions. The first dimension, which is considered the major dimension, is concern over mistakes. This reflects a tendency to interpret mistakes as equivalent to failure, and the belief that one will lose the respect of others following failure. The second dimension is the setting of excessively high personal standards, which often cannot be met satisfactorily. The third dimension is parental expectations, which involves the extent to which the parents of the individual are perceived as setting high expectations. The fourth dimension is parental criticism, which involves the extent to which parents are perceived as being overly critical. The fifth dimension is doubts about actions, which is the tendency to doubt the quality of one's performance. Additionally, a sixth dimension has been identified. This is organization, which reflects a tendency to be orderly and organized (Alden, Ryder & Mellings, 2002).

4. Outcomes of Negative Perfectionism

Perfectionism has been reported to be related to academic achievement, so that college students with higher levels of positive perfectionism received higher scores in a mid-term exam than those with lower levels of positive perfectionism (Bieling, et al., 2003). Roohafza et al. (2010) found that negative and positive perfectionisms were found to be positive and negative predictors, respectively, for depression and anxiety and conversely, negative and positive predictors for academic achievement, respectively.

Another study showed that negative perfectionism was generally found to be associated with negative personality factors and the use of dysfunctional coping strategies. It was not associated with academic achievement or achievement motivation (Ram, 2005). Some studies conducted within organizations (Stoeberl and Eysenck, 2008) have shown that perfectionist standards are associated with reduced efficiency, demonstrating the importance of considering invested time, errors, and response bias when investigating the relationship between perfectionism and performance.

Burns (1980) demonstrated the link between perfectionistic beliefs and mental health problems, physical health problems, and poorer performance. He discussed a number of negative outcomes associated with perfectionism including: depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, decreased productivity, writer's block, problems with self-control, low self-esteem, troubled personal relationships, and even increased coronary disease. A study in Iran by Niknam, Hosseini and Yazdi (2010) showed that negative perfectionism is associated with low self-esteem, depression and illogical beliefs.

A study on school students found that perfectionistic concerns which are the core facet of negative perfectionism were related to higher depression, while perfectionistic strivings which are the main aspect of positive perfectionism were related to a preference for challenging tasks, and higher grade point average (Fedewa, et al., 2005). Besser, Flett, and Hewitt (2004) found that those higher in adaptive perfectionism responded to negative feedback with greater negative affect, anxiety, and hostility than did those lower in adaptive perfectionism. These participants were also more disappointed with their performance, showed more

rumination, believed that doing well on the task was highly important, and believed that others had done better than they had.

Neumeister (2004) examined the relationship between perfectionism and achievement motivation by interviewing gifted college students. Two very different patterns of motivation separated maladaptive and adaptive perfectionists. Maladaptive perfectionists were characterized by a fear of failure motivation or concern about what other people would think of them if they fell short of their expectations. Maladaptive perfectionists demonstrated approach behaviors (e.g., signing up for the most difficult classes), but their reasons for doing so were driven by their fear of failure (e.g., looking unintelligent if they avoided these classes). These individuals also demonstrated avoidance behaviors such as a refusal to speak in class unless they were 100% sure of the answer. Maladaptive perfectionists also engaged in a significant amount of procrastination. The explanation they provided was that procrastination provided them with an excuse for not doing well.

The findings of Khzaei, Esmailpoor and Eslami (2012) showed that among three dimensions of perfectionism, two dimensions of self-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism have a significant relationship with achievement motivation, while there is no relationship between other-oriented perfectionism and achievement motivation. Among three dimensions of perfectionism, only self-oriented perfectionism has the capability of predicting of achievement motivation. Also, there is no significant relationship between coping styles (problem-oriented and emotional-oriented) and achievement motivation, yet coping styles are not able to determine the achievement motivation.

From the perspective of objectives, Jagacinski and Nicholls indicate that achievement motivation is the action and behavior when a person expected to achieve a goal and people's action and behavior varied from the environment and personality (Kuo, 2006). Negative perfectionism is largely unregulated, and is associated with adverse and punishing outcomes (Blackburn, 2003). It has been suggested by Parker (2002) that "healthy and unhealthy perfectionism appear not to be poles of one continuum, but distinct, independent factors that are embedded in the personality in different ways" (Parker, 2002). As above mentioned, negative perfectionism could lead to undesirable results. Usually, a person with negative one has not any motivation to achievement and success.

5. Conclusion

Achievement motivation is a very influential factor on employee of work motivation and it is the power that drives a person to pursue success and an idea that makes a person want to overcome obstruction, complete difficult mission and surpass other people. Steers and Porter report that the workers who have high achievement motivation perform better on work than those who have low achievement motivation. Therefore, it is needed to identify the factors that affect on it. Studies show that negative behavior like negative perfectionism is an important one to decrease achievement motivation.

It is clear that that negative perfectionism is not significantly related to achievement.

Managers and employees beliefs play an important role for effective and productive employers need to have positive attitude about themselves and their abilities before they are able to reach. Consequently, positive perfectionism should be reinforced among employees to improve achievement motivation. It is hoped that the results of the research will enhance human resource management practices, such as assessing and placing personnel, redesigning jobs, and assisting employees. In addition, in order to obtain more succinct results, it is essential to perform an experimental study.

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