



Collective efficacy beliefs in student work teams: Relation to self-efficacy, cohesion, and performance

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Abstract

A measure of collective efficacy was developed and administered to undergraduates working in project teams in engineering courses. Findings in each of two samples revealed that the measure contained a single factor and was related to ratings of team cohesion and personal efficacy. Collective efficacy was also found to relate to indicators of team performance at both individual and group levels of analysis. Consistent with social cognitive theory, collective efficacy was a stronger predictor of team performance than team members' perceptions of their self-efficacy. We consider the implications of these findings for further research, theory, and practice on team functioning within occupational and educational settings.

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1. Introduction

Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1997) is an influential approach to understanding the psychological and social processes involved in human motivation, self-regulation, choice, and performance. A large body of research has accumulated

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relating social cognitive variables, especially self-efficacy, to various aspects of educational and career behavior (e.g., Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). The focus of this literature has been on the relation of social cognitive variables to outcomes achieved by students and workers as individuals. Such a focus is understandable given that vocational and educational psychologists have traditionally been concerned with maximizing the development and remediating the problems of individuals, and that prevalent reward mechanisms in educational and work settings (e.g., grades, salaries) tend to be linked to the quality of individuals' performance and achievement. However, group processes have been garnering increasing attention among educational and organizational scholars in recent years, reflecting the growing popularity of team approaches to learning and working (e.g., Stajkovic & Lee, 2001).

Although research on social cognitive theory has emphasized individual-level mechanisms (e.g., self-efficacy) and outcomes, the theory is also concerned with how people work together within teams and other social units. For instance, *collective efficacy*, the group counterpart to self-efficacy, is a key social cognitive element that may help to explain how groups function more or less well together. Bandura (1997) defined collective efficacy as a "group's shared beliefs in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments" (p. 477). In contrast to self-efficacy, which involves a person's beliefs about his or her ability to perform particular behaviors individually, collective efficacy refers to group members' aggregate beliefs about how they can perform *as a unit*. The literature on collective efficacy has grown much more slowly than that of self-efficacy, but its research base has expanded considerably in recent years and it has proven to be a very flexible group-level explanatory construct, finding application to groups of diverse size, function, and organizational context (Zaccaro, Blair, Peterson, & Zazanis, 1995).

While effect sizes vary from study to study and not all studies have demonstrated impressive collective efficacy-criterion relations (e.g., Lee, Tinsley, & Bobko, 2002; Riggs & Knight, 1994), collective efficacy has been reliably linked to (a) antecedent factors (e.g., prior group achievement, Goddard, 2001; training, Gibson, 2001; self-efficacy, Fernandez-Ballesteros, Diez-Nicolas, Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Bandura, 2002); (b) group process and environment factors (e.g., team cohesion, Paskevich, Brawley, Dorsch, & Widmeyer, 1999; leadership climate, Chen & Bliese, 2002); (c) affective outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, psychological strain, organizational commitment, Jex & Bliese, 1999); and (d) group performance (Gibson, 2001; Goddard, 2001; Parker, 1994).

Stajkovic and Lee (2001) recently reported a meta-analysis of collective efficacy-performance relations, involving data from 35 studies (including 67 correlation estimates and nearly 3000 groups with an average size of 3.8 members per group). They found an average correlation between collective efficacy and performance of .45. Thus, across the set of studies, collective efficacy accounts for roughly 20% of the variance in group performance, representing a moderately strong effect size. Consistent with expectations, task interdependence was found to moderate collective efficacy-group performance relations, with stronger relations under conditions where tasks require high versus low member coordination. Collective efficacy-performance

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