

Predicting the job and life satisfaction of Italian teachers: Test of a social cognitive model[☆]

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ABSTRACT

This study tested a social cognitive model of work and life satisfaction (Lent & Brown, 2006, 2008) in a sample of 235 Italian school teachers. The model offered good overall fit to the data, though not all individual path coefficients were significant. Three of five predictors (favorable work conditions, efficacy-relevant supports, and positive affectivity) produced significant, direct paths to job satisfaction. Job satisfaction, progress at personal work goals, and positive affectivity were predictive of teachers' life satisfaction. Task self-efficacy was related indirectly both to job satisfaction (via work conditions) and life satisfaction (via goal progress). Implications of the findings for future research and efforts to promote teachers' job satisfaction are discussed.

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Counseling and industrial/organizational psychologists have long been concerned with understanding the factors responsible for job satisfaction, which can be defined as the extent to which people like their jobs either on the whole or with respect to particular conditions or rewards (Spector, 1997). A number of theoretical models have been developed to explain job satisfaction (e.g., see Fritzsche & Parrish, 2005). Each of these models features a somewhat different set of predictors, such as job characteristics, affective dispositions, and person–environment fit. A more recent trend in this literature is the development of integrative models that are based on the assumption that job satisfaction is likely to be determined by the interplay among multiple factors (Lent, 2008).

Lent and Brown (2006, 2008) proposed one such integrative model that attempts to account for the joint operation of several classes of work (or job) satisfaction predictors. The model uses social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) as a unifying framework and focuses on the nature of the relations among work satisfaction and (a) personality/affective traits, (b) participation in/progress at goal-directed activities, (c) work-related self-efficacy, (d) perceived work conditions (including outcome expectations), (e) goal and efficacy relevant environmental supports or obstacles, and (f) overall life satisfaction. (Note that the Lent–Brown model views job satisfaction as a part of work domain satisfaction, where, for example, global satisfaction with one's job is a subset of satisfaction with work as a central life domain. In this article, we generally use the more specific term, job satisfaction, because we employed a measure of job satisfaction as the criterion variable in testing the model.)

As shown in Fig. 1, the model posits that people are likely to be generally satisfied with their jobs when they feel competent to perform their major work tasks or attain their work goals (self-efficacy), are exposed to (or expect to receive) favorable work conditions and reinforcers, perceive that they are making progress at personally-relevant work goals, receive support for their goals and self-efficacy, and possess traits that predispose them to experience positive affect in most life situations. Job satisfaction

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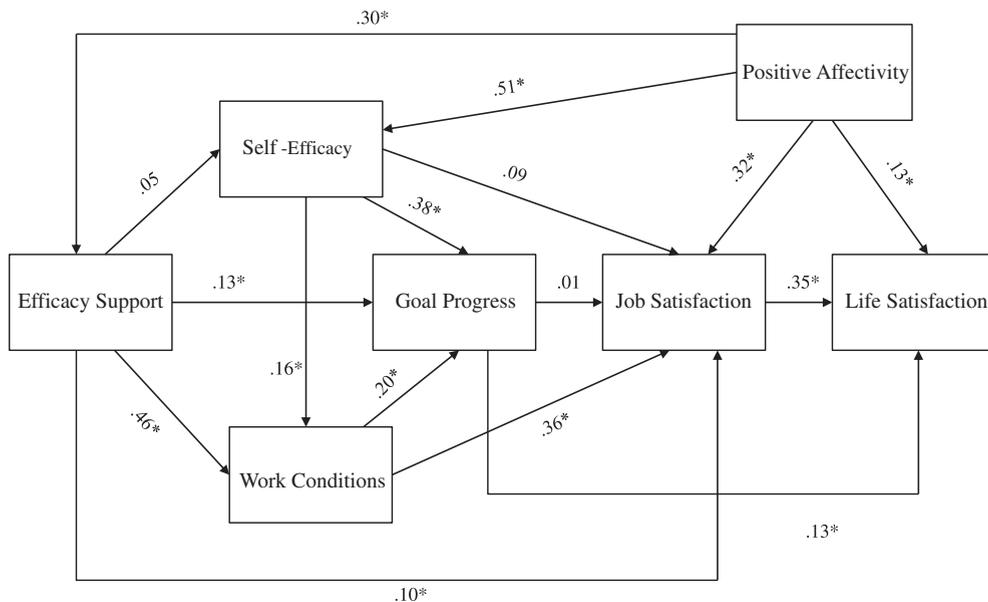


Fig. 1. Path analysis of the social cognitive model. * $p < .05$.

is also assumed to be reciprocally related to general life satisfaction. In addition to their direct links to job satisfaction, the model posits various paths among the precursors of job satisfaction. For example, people are likely to progress at their work goals to the extent that they have high levels of self-efficacy and environmental support in relation to their goals. Past research has found support for the relationship of job satisfaction to individual predictors in the model, for example, positive affectivity (Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2000), experienced work conditions (e.g., perceived organizational support, Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), self-efficacy (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Steca, 2003), goal progress (Maier & Brunstein, 2001), and life satisfaction (Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2004). However, there is as yet limited research testing the entire model or larger subsets of it.

Most tests of the integrative model of satisfaction to this point have focused on the academic and social satisfaction of college students. Lent et al. (2005) performed two cross-sectional studies, using nomothetic (Study 1) and idiographic (Study 2) approaches to assess the central predictors. Lent, Singley, Sheu, Schmidt, and Schmidt (2007) also tested the satisfaction model using nomothetic procedures (i.e., measures linked to common developmental tasks of college students rather than participant-specific goals or performance domains). All three studies found good overall model-data fit and explained substantial variation in domain-specific satisfaction indices, though not all individual paths were supported (e.g., outcome expectations did not yield significant paths either to goal progress or academic satisfaction).

In addition to these cross-sectional studies, there have thus far been two longitudinal tests of the satisfaction model with college students. Lent, Taveira, Sheu, and Singley (2009) had Portuguese students complete the set of measures at each of two assessments, during the 1st and 16th weeks of the same academic semester. Singley, Lent, and Sheu (2010) also collected data at two time points, eight weeks apart, during an academic semester. Both of these studies included a similar set of variables, but Lent et al. (2009) expanded the dependent variable to encompass perceived stress and adjustment as well as academic satisfaction. The model fit the data well overall in both longitudinal studies though, again, not all paths were consistent with expectations. For example, controlling for autoregressive paths, self-efficacy and environmental support at Time 1 were significant predictors of goal progress at Time 2 across both studies. However, the specific Time 1 predictors of Time 2 satisfaction or adjustment varied somewhat between the two studies (e.g., goal progress and support were the significant predictors in Singley et al., 2010, while self-efficacy and support were the significant predictors in Lent et al., 2009).

Although these initial findings are promising, they have mainly involved U.S. college students and focused on educational satisfaction outcomes. To gain a better sense of the model's generalizability, it is important to examine it in other cultural and developmental contexts, especially with working adults. Duffy and Lent (2009) conducted a cross-sectional test of the model in a sample of U.S. school teachers. They found that the model fit the data well overall and accounted for a large proportion of the variance in job satisfaction. However, only three of the five predictors (perceived organizational support, positive affectivity, and self-efficacy) produced direct paths to job satisfaction in their study. Verbruggen and Sels (2010) examined an abbreviated version of the model in a longitudinal study of adult career counseling clients in Belgium. They found that the model helped explain both career and life satisfaction six months after counseling.

The present study was intended to further assess the range of the model's cultural and developmental applicability by using it to examine the job satisfaction of a sample of teachers in Italy. We represented the model's central constructs with a set of measures that was similar to those used in the Duffy and Lent (2009) study with U.S. teachers. We also extended the latter study by focusing on life as well as job satisfaction. The primary goal of this study was to assess the fit to the data of the model outlined by Lent and Brown (2006, 2008), as well as to examine the tenability of particular model paths, within the Italian context.

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