



The role of trait core confidence higher-order construct in self-regulation of performance and attitudes: Evidence from four studies



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ABSTRACT

Self-regulation theories explain how psychological processes translate into action. We conceptualize the role of the trait core confidence higher-order construct in self-regulation processes and hypothesize its positive relationships with performance, satisfaction with life, and job satisfaction. On the basis of meta-analytic data (*studies* = 141, *k* = 226, *N* = 82,692), one student sample from the United States (*n* = 339), another student sample from Republic of Korea (*n* = 181), and field data from an auto group (20 car dealerships in 16 cities, *n* = 142 car sales associates), complementary analyses were conducted to examine convergent and predictive validities of the trait core confidence higher-order construct. Meta-analyses of the relationships among its four trait manifest variables (hope, general-efficacy, optimism, resilience) revealed that they are highly correlated. Confirmatory factor analyses in three studies indicated convergent validity. Predictive validity of the trait core confidence higher-order construct was supported in two studies.

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Introduction

Self-regulation, at the level of psychological abstraction, relates to processes that underlie behavior and attitudes – i.e., how behaviors and attitudes happen (Baumeister & Vohs, 2012; Carver & Scheier, 1998; Kahneman & Tversky, 2000). Through psychological (cf., mechanical, chemical) self-regulation processes, human psychosomatic resources are gauged, allocated, and recalibrated given the activity demands. From the vantage point of work motivation research, skill is a basic component of action, beyond which employees act in various ways because they are motivated to do so (Pinder, 2008; Porter & Lawler, 1968). Although this view has served the field well, it leaves a lot unsaid theoretically about the self-regulatory processes that enable or abandon action beyond motives (e.g., I am motivated to ... but *doubt* I can), especially during the current times of accelerated organizational changes that can tersely dislocate careers and livelihoods (Cappelli, 2006). As Carver and Scheier (1998, pp. 6–7) have long argued in this regard:

“Questions that surround persistence and abandonment of efforts are among the most fundamental to the psychology of human behavior ... where the issues of confidence versus doubt appear to play a very important (though often unrecognized) role.”

Fewer employers today and in the future are going to take on the responsibility for employee occupational development (Cappelli, 2012), making self-regulation important for successful work functioning going forward (Lord, Diefendorff, Schmidt, & Hall, 2010). Support for self-regulation in the contemporary workplace has been offered for self-regulation and technology tasks (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002), self-regulation in teams (DeShon, Kozlowski, Schmidt, Milner, & Wiechmann, 2004), and self-regulation of citizenship behaviors in organizations (Bolino, Harvey, & Bachrach, 2012). Building upon extant confidence research (Greenwald, 2010; Kay & Shipman, 2014; Slaughter, Cable, & Turban, 2014; Stajkovic, 2003, 2006; Wenzel, 2014), we contribute to the growing stream of research on self-regulation at work by examining the role of trait core confidence in self-regulation of performance, satisfaction with life, and job satisfaction.

Core confidence is a higher-order construct proposed by Stajkovic (2003, 2006). Trait core confidence is defined as a certainty can-do belief that spans across related domains of activity.

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Stajkovic (2003, 2006) conceptualized confidence as a higher-order construct representing a “latent commonality underlying the dimensions” (Law, Wong, & Mobley, 1998, p. 747). Core confidence higher-order construct is manifested by four variables: hope (Snyder, 2000), efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001), optimism (Peterson, 2000), and resilience (Coutu, 2002). They manifest core confidence in a person who knows what and how to do (agency and pathways of hope), believes that s/he can perform those tasks (efficacy), keeps positive outcome expectations (optimism), and feels that s/he can “bounce back” if failure occurs (resilience).

The hallmark of successful human functioning is adaptive self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1999; Higgins, 1997, 2000; Lord & Levy, 1994; Powers, 1973; Simon, 1967). Self-regulation is involved in various domains of human activities ranging from simple (e.g., getting out of bed) to complex (e.g., maintaining cognitive fortitude and emotional composure during the next round of lay-offs). Although self-regulation is involved in a multitude of tasks and domains of functioning, attempts to self-regulate often fail, typically because processes that were needed for success were not considered (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994; Damasion, 1994; DeShon, Brown, & Greenis, 1996; Heatherton & Baumeister, 1996).

We argue that core confidence’s role in adaptive self-regulation is that of psychologically enabling the potential that is already present (skill and motivation) to unfold, and its antonym, doubt, keeps such potential easily disengaged and unrealized. High core confidence makes it more likely that individuals will engage and regulate action as needed because they are certain that they can handle what needs to be done. Conversely, low core confidence makes it less likely that people will initiate action and more likely that they will disengage from it because they have doubt that they can handle what needs to be done. As stated by Carver and Scheier (1998, p. 174): “the linking of confidence to action is an especially important connection in its own right.”

Establishing this link is important and timely because contemporary organizations have gone through significant changes (Cappelli, 2006, 2012). The conglomeration of emerging workplace demands (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Early & Erez, 1997; Erez, Kleinbeck, & Thierry, 2001; Kanfer, Chen, & Pritchard, 2008; Natemeyer & Hersey, 2011; Pinder, 2008; Zedeck, 2010) may translate into employees’ concerns over their capacity to handle them. We argue that confidence is needed for effective self-regulation because employees riddled by doubt are unlikely to be effective. That is, without confidence, even skilled and motivated employees may doubt that they can effectively self-regulate performance and attitudes to handle the jobs they face.

We proceed as follows. We first discuss higher-order constructs in terms of the bandwidth prediction fit. Then, drawing from multiple theoretical viewpoints on self-regulatory processes (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Carver & Scheier, 1998; Higgins, 1997; Kahneman & Tversky, 2000; Karoly, 1993; Lord et al., 2010; Powers, 2005; Simon, 1967), we develop hypotheses of the positive relationships between trait core confidence and performance, satisfaction with life, and job satisfaction. Complementary analyses examined convergent and predictive validities of this higher-order construct. Study 1 provides evidence of convergence in meta-analyses of the relationships among the four manifest variables. Study 2 reports confirmatory evidence of convergence. Studies 3 and 4 replicate confirmatory evidence supporting the higher-order core confidence construct and provide predictive evidence of its role in self-regulation by testing our hypotheses. Supplemental analyses with data from all four studies provide additional answers.

Theoretical background

Higher-order constructs, prediction fit, and the hierarchy of inclusiveness

Higher-order and multidimensional constructs are being increasingly proposed and tested in organizational literature (e.g., Ang, Van Dyne, & Koh, 2006; Barrick & Mount, 2005; Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997; Marinova, Moon, & Van Dyne, 2010). When their existence is justified by theoretical rationale and methodological criteria (Law et al., 1998), multidimensional constructs can offer greater theoretical and empirical utility than their manifest variables because they can offer a more parsimonious explanation of outcomes. Parsimony is recognized as facilitative to the process of cumulative knowledge building and theory development (Edwards, 2001).

Specifically, “multidimensional constructs have been recommended for matching general predictors with general outcomes” (Edwards, 2001, p. 149), outcomes such as job performance (Schmidt, Viswesvaran, & Ones, 2005) and general attitudes (Hanisch & Hulin, 1991; Spearman, 1927; Titchener, 1910). Consequently, one of the initial questions in research based on higher-order constructs is which ones matter in what circumstances (Edwards, 2001; Johnson, Rosen, Chang, Djurdjevic, & Taing, 2012; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012).

Beliefs vary in specificity (Armor & Taylor, 1998; Ones & Viswesvaran, 1996), and psychology research has demonstrated that beliefs matching the outcomes in the level of specificity show the best prediction – broad beliefs best predict broad outcomes and specific beliefs best predict specific outcomes (Heberlein & Black, 1976; Weigel & Newman, 1976; Weigel, Vernon, & Tognacci, 1974). In organizational behavior research, similar arguments have been extended under the names of the bandwidth-fidelity paradox (John, Hampson, & Goldberg, 1991) or dilemma (Ones & Viswesvaran, 1996), and principle of compatibility (Ajzen, 2005). The underlying proposition that the broader constructs are better predictors of broader criteria such as job performances, and more specific constructs are better predictors of specific tasks has also generated substantial meta-analytic support (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002; Judge & Ilies, 2002; Stajkovic, Lee, & Nyberg, 2009; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Taken together, this research recommends matching the levels of specificity between predictors and outcomes where “specific criteria favor specific predictors, and general criteria favor general predictors” (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012, p. 168).

Broader appraisals tend to encompass the more specific ones, in what Carver and Scheier (1998) call, the hierarchy of inclusiveness. Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller (2012) provided a related discussion of broad and specific traits in the context of higher-order constructs in applied psychology. Core confidence higher-order construct is a broader trait than its four indicators which represent more specific traits. The theoretical view of confidence as a latent commonality, or core, is what causes variance overlap among its four proposed indicators. Consequently, trait core confidence higher order construct should relate to broader domains of activity and general criteria more than its specific indicators, which represent more narrow beliefs.

Theory determines when broad higher-order constructs versus more specific indicators should be examined. In the work context characterized by a plethora of job types, circumstances, and behaviors needed for success (Lord et al., 2010; Natemeyer & Hersey, 2011), context-general traits have demonstrated predictiveness of broad criteria (Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999; Schmidt et al., 2005; Zedeck, 2010). Trait core confidence is a context-general higher-order construct that is parsimonious for the

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