Self-Efficacy

Definition

The term self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to complete a task or achieve a goal. The concept was originally developed by Albert Bandura. Today, psychologists contend that our sense of self-efficacy can influence whether we *actually* succeed at a task.[1]

Self-efficacy is a self-sustaining trait; when a person is driven to work through their problems on their own terms, they gain positive experiences that in turn boost their self-efficacy even more.[2]

Self-efficacy can be defined as the belief that you can be successful when carrying out a certain task.[3]

Self-efficacy is related to self-confidence, focusing on a person's belief in their capacity to perform tasks and succeed. The self-efficacy theory's core concept is that people are more likely to engage in activities concerning which they have high self-efficacy, and they are less likely to engage for which they don't.[4]

How We Develop Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is informed by: personal experience, observation, persuasion, and emotion.

Personal Experience

When predicting their ability to succeed at a new task, individuals often look to their past experiences with similar tasks. This information generally has a strong effect on our feelings of self-efficacy, which is logical: if you've already done something many times, you're likely to believe that you can do it again.

The personal experience factor also explains why increasing one's self-efficacy can be difficult. When an individual has low levels of self-efficacy for a certain task, they typically avoid the task, which prevents them from accumulating positive experiences that might eventually build up their confidence. When an individual attempts a new task and succeeds, the experience can build up their confidence, thus producing greater levels of self-efficacy associated with similar tasks.

Observation

We also make judgments about our own capabilities by watching others. Imagine that you have a friend who is known for being a couch potato, and then that friend

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[1] What Is Self-Efficacy? Definition and Examples (thoughtco.com). Accessed 28 June 2022.
[2] What Is Self-Efficacy Theory? (Incl. 8 Examples & Scales) (positivepsychology.com). Accessed 28 June 2022.
[3] What Is Self-Efficacy? (webmd.com). Accessed 28 June 2022.
[4] Ibid. Accessed 28 June 2022.

successfully runs a marathon. This observation might lead you to believe that you can become a runner too.

Researchers have found that our self-efficacy for a given activity is more likely to increase when we see someone else succeed at that activity through hard work, rather than natural ability. For example, if you have low self-efficacy for public speaking, watching a timid person develop the skill may help increase your own confidence. Watching a naturally charismatic and outgoing person give a speech is less likely to have the same effect.

Observing others is more likely to affect our own self-efficacy when we feel that we are similar to the person we are observing. However, in general, watching other people doesn't affect our self-efficacy as much as our personal experience with the task.

Persuasion

Sometimes, other people may try to increase our self-efficacy by offering support and encouragement. However, this type of persuasion does not always have a strong effect on self-efficacy, particularly compared to the effect of personal experience.

Emotion

Emotions such as fear and anxiety can undermine our feelings of self-efficacy. For example, you can have high levels of self-efficacy for making small talk and socializing, but if you're really nervous about making a good impression at a particular event, your sense of self-efficacy may decrease. On the other hand, positive emotions can generate greater feelings of self-efficacy.[5]

Helping Students with Self-Efficacy

Researchers Margolis and McCabe (2006) recommend that teachers focus on boosting students' self-efficacy through three sources of self-efficacy:

1. Enactive mastery;
2. Vicarious experiences;
3. Verbal persuasion.

By giving students the opportunity to experience small wins, celebrating even the little successes, modelling motivation and hard work, and offering verbal encouragement, teachers can help their students build the self-efficacy that will serve them throughout their academic career and beyond.[6]

[5] What Is Self-Efficacy? Definition and Examples (thoughtco.com). Accessed 28 June 2022.
[6] What Is Self-Efficacy Theory? (Incl. 8 Examples & Scales) (positivepsychology.com). Accessed 28 June 2022.

Examples of High Self-Efficacy

1. A student who is not particularly gifted in a certain subject but believes in her own ability to learn it well;
2. A man who has had bad luck with relationships so far, but retains a positive outlook on his ability to connect with his upcoming date;
3. An expectant mother who is nervous about caring for a new baby, but believes that she has what it takes to succeed, no matter how difficult or scary it is;
4. A new graduate who takes a high-profile, high-status job that she has never done before, but that she feels she can succeed in;
5. An entrepreneur who pours his heart and soul into establishing his business, but quickly moves on to his next great idea when his business is hit with an insurmountable and unexpected challenge.[7]

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[7] What Is Self-Efficacy Theory? (Incl. 8 Examples & Scales) (positivepsychology.com). Accessed 28 June 2022.