

Subjective Well-Being of Achievement Oriented Individuals

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Abstract

The relationship between achievement motivation and subjective well-being has been explored. Achievement as a secondary, learned motive has been studied for decades now and is found to be integral when securing happiness. The high achievers are revealed to be more satisfied with their lives.

Keywords: Achievement; Subjective well-being; Satisfaction; Happiness

Introduction

Achievement Motivation

Motivation points towards the dynamics of human or animal behavior- the manner in which any action is activated, continued or directed [1], there are either primary motives i.e. biological needs that must be fulfilled for the sake of survival e.g. hunger, thirst, air, sex etc. or secondary motives that are initiated upon learned drives and goals e.g. affiliation, achievement, power etc. [2]. The need for achievement is defined as a wish to meet some intrinsic standard of excellence. A high achieving person always struggles to do well in any situation being evaluated [3]. It could be summarized into an instinct directed towards securing success and all the aspirations in one's life. The goals set for achievement influences the manner in which someone does a task and exposes a yearning to showcase competence [4]. The achievement motivation can be seen as a trait in the personality of any individual. Each individual exhibits different level of achievement. People with high achievement motivation are seen as very competitive, driven towards their goals, taking lead and striving for excellence. However, people with low tendency for achievement motivation are often viewed as losers, failures or non-participants. This learned tendency is molded by consequences for any action, play or experience and most specifically parental or teacher's influence on child's behavior [5].

A theory regarding achievement motivation was proposed by Atkinson and Feather [6]. According to them, the behavior of the people with achievement motivation is founded upon three factors:

1. An individual's inclination towards achievement
2. The chances of securing success
3. Individual's views regarding the value of the job/task

The formula presented as

Motivation= motive x expectancy x value

The strength of the motivation is the product of the strength of the motive, the level of certainty that the act shall secure the incentive and the evaluation of the value of the incentive. A high achiever, thus, has strong motivation towards the task and low fear of failure that compels him to engage in the activity to achieve excellence for the mere sake of it. For them the factors that might cause failure including insufficient expertise, lesser time, inability to perform the task and absence of skills to perform are always overshadowed by the need to

achieve. Such individual always works towards reducing these setbacks [7]. A study was carried out by Atkinson [8] which presented that a number of students worked hard to complete a task they didn't enjoy doing solely to sustain their high class rank [8]. When calculating the probability of success, Alderman [9] says: '*Personal experience is one of the most influential sources of efficacy information. It follows then that successes tend to raise efficacy expectations – whereas failures tend to lower them*'.

While Atkinson and Feather [6] postulate that: "*When the probability of success is high, as in confronting a very easy task, the sense of humiliation accompanying failure is also very great. However, when the probability for success is low, as in confronting a very difficult task, there is little embarrassment in failing*".

This implies that unable to perform the task that is easy to perform can bring shame. But if the task is difficult then there is no feeling of guilt accompanied with that of failure. However, successfully completing a difficult task brings happiness. A study conducted by Kaplan and Maehr (1999) concluded that emotions and cognitions are linked with achievement goals that not only facilitate learning process but also enhance well-being in general [10].

Subjective Well-being

This leads us to the phenomena of subjective well-being that understands the process through which people evaluate their lives. Evaluation could be predominantly cognitive i.e. how satisfied people are with respect to their lives or certain aspects of their lives. It also includes the frequency with which the emotions individuals feel pleasant emotions. An individual is said to have high SWB (Subjective Well-Being) if that individual experiences recurrent happiness in terms of his satisfaction with his life most of the time with lesser unpleasant emotions like depression [11]. According to Diener, *et al.* [12], the affective and cognitive part of subjective well-being are strongly interrelated. Subjective well-being according to Deiner [13] is an umbrella term for different kinds of evaluations, both positive and negative, that an individual has that includes affect, life satisfaction and engagement. One of the models of SWB called Liking, Needing and Wanting categorizes the types of happiness into three groups. First, the Liking theory focuses upon maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain [14]. The Needing theory, which is of main concern, proposes that there is a group of elements of human necessities that despite of his values, is important in securing SWB [15]. Maslow [16] presented a hierarchy of needs encompassing basic needs to the highest level of self-actualization which comes after the achievement motivation along with others like esteem, self-confidence etc. Mental health or well-being can only be achieved through the fulfillment of all levels. In terms of relationship between achievement and SWB, it could be of two types: performance focused or mastery oriented. And pursuit of mastery according to Kaplan and Maehr [10] is positively linked with general indices of well-being in contrast to performance focused achievement motivation in individuals. Likewise, Dykman [17] presented a goal oriented model which predicted that compared to mastery seeking individual, validation seeking i.e. performance focused individuals showed substantial loss of self-esteem, greater anxiety in expectancy of a traumatic event, depression and task disengagement after the occurrence of a negative event. The study conducted by Tuominen-Soini [18] concluded that struggling to improve and nourish one's self is linked with adaptive patterns of SWB. Moreover, mastery oriented students had higher academic achievements. Thus, when achievement motivation is intrinsic, then the chances of higher SWB are more probable.

According to Haasen and Shea [19] "*If we accept the notion of intrinsic motivation, it implies that there is a powerful potential for self-actualization within each of us*".

The potential of self-actualization is thus based upon our strength of the need to achieve accompanied with the enjoyment of achievement. If individuals are intrinsically motivated, they take part in the activity for the sake of mastery or improving their ability at the activity. When they are extrinsically motivated, they complete a task in expectation of a reward [20].

Conclusion

Higher achievement motivation has been found related to the high levels of subjective well-being or happiness of the individuals. Furthermore, if that instinct is intrinsic then it is far better, long lasting and effective when compared to extrinsic achievement motivation.

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