

The Symphony of OAM (Optimism Attitude Model) Impacting Performance and Mental Health

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Abstract

Various concepts of optimism and employee engagement have been discussed in the area of management. The studies may be limited but more people are now taking interest in the area of optimism. Since 2000 onwards, more work is being done related to employee engagement as a means of improving the welfare of the employees in general and enhancing productivity in particular. This concept has generated lot of interest among the researchers, organizations and corporate whose thinking hats keep on working overtime to find more innovative measures to enhance the incomes / output magically and in a shorter span of time. This paper talks about the concept of OAM - Optimistic Attitude Model in bringing about a change in the perception of the employees/ individuals regarding their task, developing a sense of ownership with the task and ultimately achieving success. This model was examined with senior secondary students in the academic setting and the results have been encouraging. Results indicate that when students work as per the counseling interventions done as per OAM – Optimistic Attitude Model, the overall academic performance of the students improve significantly. The future implications of OAM are enumerated in detail in the present paper.

Keywords: *Optimism; Engagement; Student Performance; OAM - Optimistic Attitude Model*

Introduction

"I will say this is about being an optimist, even when things don't turn out well, you are certain they will get better."

-Frank Hughes

Optimism is the elixir of human life. This attitude helps us to feel the warmth of the sun's rays even when the sky is overcast with dark gloomy clouds and the sun is nowhere to be seen.

'Optimism' signifies the driving force to move towards the achievement of other elements. It acts as a tool, as a construct and theory to comprehend and advance the factors affecting well-being of the individual. The concept is also used in several connotations in the areas of Management and Psychology. It has its implications at the industry at large and towards the development of well-being, hope and resilience at an individual level. Overall, Optimism enhances the mental health of institutions and individuals alike and ultimately leads to success.

Martin Seligman – who has done lots of work in the area, and father of Positive Psychology, defines Optimism as reacting to problems with a sense of confidence and high personal ability.

Optimistic people believe that negative events/ setbacks are in fact temporary, limited in scope and can be dealt with efficiently. Situations do not necessarily have to be seen as pervading every aspect of the individual's life. And it needs to be remembered that Optimism, much like any other state or characteristic, exists on a continuum. It is possible for people to change their level of Optimism depending upon the situation they are in. It is just a perspective and with conscious shift of perspective, one can invite more happiness and sense of well-being in one's life.

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Researches have shown that Pessimist people tend to view problems as internal, unchangeable and pervasive and hence are more prone to develop depression, stress and anxiety.

Optimism, on the other hand, has been supported by empirical evidence that this attitude serves as a protective factor against depression and other severe medical ailments as Coronary heart Disease, high blood pressure, diabetes (Tindler, 2009).

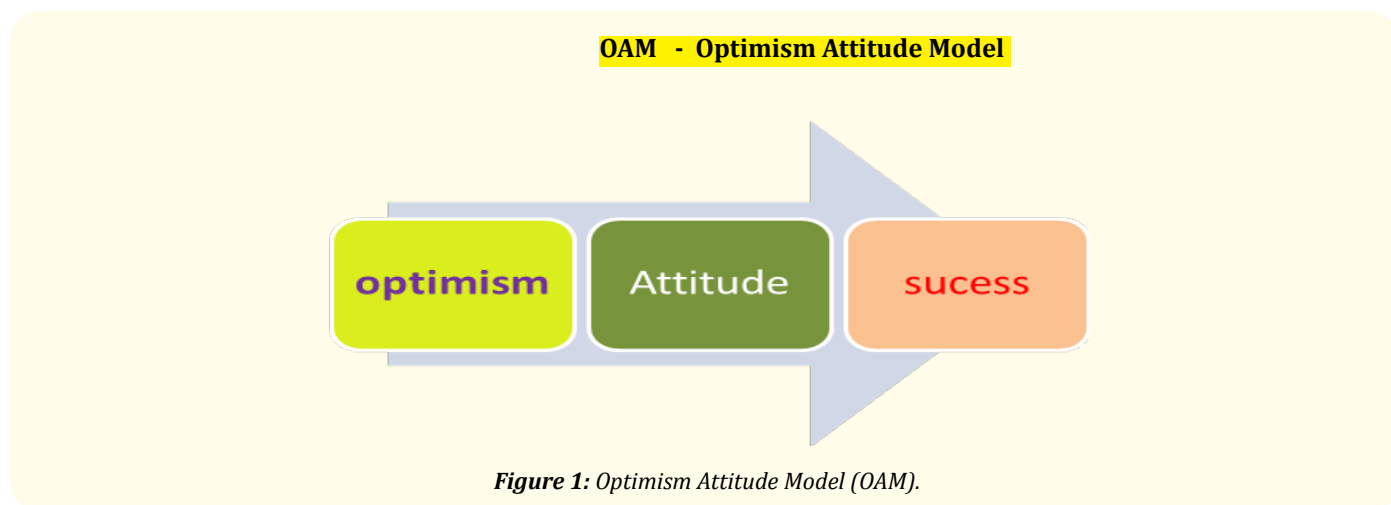


Figure 1: Optimism Attitude Model (OAM).

Optimism Attitude Model (OAM)

After working in the field for more than a decade, Banerjee (2016) [1] has developed Optimism Index (Oi - A predictor tool for success) based on the model for success which she has named as OAM - Optimism Attitude Model.

Banerjee (2016) [1] opines that the development of the attitude of Optimism needs to be instilled at the school level by the teachers and parents so that the same attitude becomes a natural trait as the child grows into a confident and mature adult. Thus, the endeavor at the childhood stage should be to let this attitude develop as a natural instinct/ trait and becomes a part of the child’s unconscious personality. The degree to which a person is able to develop this attitude will determine his future altitude at personal and professional levels in terms of future success.

Initially, it’s a conscious effort on the part of the individual to develop this attitude. Later on it becomes an unconscious and natural part of his personality. This transition happens in such a way that this confident person will be able to say with nonchalance;

*“Be still, sad heart and cease repining
Behind the clouds is sun still shining.”*

Who can stop the success of such an optimistic individual?

Based on this model, Banerjee (2016) has developed Optimism index (Oi – A predictor tool for success). Some of the salient features of this measure are:

- The test is simple, easy to administer and scoring along with interpretation is fairly simple too and reveals exciting inner X ray picture of oneself in a comprehensible manner which will benefit both the individuals and organizations immensely.
- It covers all age groups - adolescents, young adults, middle aged and geriatrics, all occupations as Oi presents a X ray picture of the individual in terms of present level of psychological sturdiness and mental make-up.

- Scoring and interpretation of result along with implications are given in a very simple, colorful and lucid manner which will develop confidence in the readers as they will be able to have a connect with the test and will be able to use it for enhancing their personal and professional growth.
- The unique feature of Oi is that the individual is able to easily comprehend the strengths and weaknesses in his persona and can work on the same to develop a more harmonious aspects of his personality
- It has sturdy psychometric properties and gives one global optimism index along with scores on five other dimensions, namely Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaningfulness and Accomplishment.

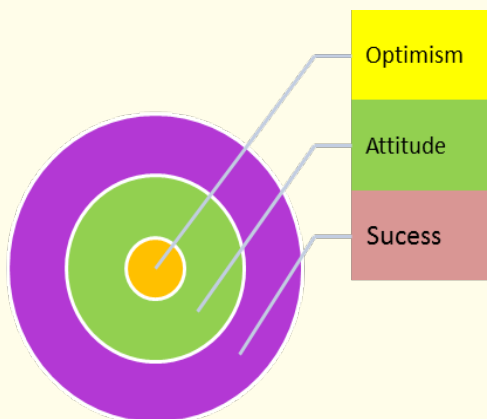


Figure 2: OAM – Optimism Attitude Model.

This index will rate the 'Optimism' factor of the organization, group or an individual and which will facilitate to know how focused and well directed the approach is to bring well-being and happiness to life. The model will indicate how 'Optimism' can enhance the other variables of Oi which is. Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaningfulness and Accomplishment thereby building resilience and inviting success in one's life.

Thus, Oi acts as an ENABLER to enhance one's self-worth with a scientific way to train one's mind. It's a proactive tool to help become the individual more resilient to handle any stressful situation with enhanced cognitive functioning and accomplishing his tasks to perfection.

Is it possible?

Yes its possible with Oi

Usage of Oi - A Predictor Tool For Success

(Who benefits from this measure)

The range of this test is quite wide. This test can be used with children above 12 years of age, to young adults, middle aged persons and even reaching the geriatric populace.

It's a developmental and screening tool which identifies the areas which need to be worked upon, at the same time providing the areas of strength which may be tapped still further for incessant, continuous success of the individual and the organizations alike.

This test has utility in various areas of one's life cutting across the barriers of age, gender, culture and occupations.

Lets have a look at some of its usages in different dimensions of life.

- There is a felt need by the Organizations' - Companies for recruitment of those employees who will prove to be an asset and enhance the profits considerably, in a shorter span. Thus, for recruitment, performance appraisal and retention of employees, the employers realize the need for a good measure which can assess with least degree of error.

But it is not readily available in the market.

- It is now widely recognized more than ever that Quality teachers will lead to good quality in education. Thus, for in service and pre-service teachers, selection of teachers and teacher educators, their performance appraisal and evaluation of incremental increase after FDP's (Faculty Development Programs) is being seen as an important need of the hour.
- For assessing adolescents' mental health status in terms of student engagement, identifying and screening children at risk for suicidal ideation, developing their self-esteem, enhancing their overall happiness and well-being is being recognized as a very significant aspect of education which deals with harmonious development of the individual child.
- A test which counselors can use - whether in school or in private practice, which has sturdy psychometric properties, which can screen individuals for working on various dimensions of Optimism as well as to enhance their mental health status and also even to understand their present levels of engagement and resilience, is in fact, an important need today.
- In health sector, working with terminally ill patients, the doctors are often in a dilemma about the prognosis of an individual patient as the quality of life and prognosis also depends
- on the patient's compliance and resilience power. The doctors too require a measuring instrument which can quickly and reliably assess the patient's optimistic inner levels which will define success in drug therapy.
- In Psychotherapy too, the doctors see plenty of cases on ADHD, ADD, parenting concerns, anorexia nervosa, bulimia, under achievement, over achievers, learning disabilities, stress, anxiety and depression along with severe psychiatric issues. Many researches also share concerns on the success of therapy which depends on the level of optimism shown by patients along with their caregivers/ significant others.
- In defense, there is an important issue of recruiting good officers who display strong leadership qualities, can motivate others and remain optimistic at all times. Even during training of soldiers who work under extreme conditions for months altogether, away from their families, individuals who are more optimistic are likely to face extreme terrains with remarkable resilience than some others who give way to momentary surge of heroism and strong emotions resulting in many unfortunate casualties.
- In Higher Education at IIT's, IIM's, NIT's and IIIT's , Medical Institutions etc, for selection of PhD scholars MD students et al, a test which can measure their mental sturdiness and resilience - to be able to work for long hours in a sustained manner for some years, despite setbacks , has been recognized as an important need by various Heads of such institutions.

Oi: A predictor for future success assesses all this and more in a shorter span with sturdy psychometric properties.

- For Corporate - This test is of immense value to corporate whether its the employer or the employee. KR (Knowledge of results) on this test help them to develop effective PB (positive organisational behaviour).

Employees are able to comprehend to an extent;

- why their stamina is going down,
- why they do not feel like coming to work;
- why do they lose their temper more often,
- Why their motivation to work is slipping'
- Why their need for achievement is going down
- Why do they get bored so easily
- Why there is lack of concentration in doing work..... etc

This is the time for them to introspect in retrospect the things/ issues which are pulling them down. It also makes them sit up as they realise that something drastic needs to be done up fast so that they are able to reach to their optimum levels of work life balance.

This test is also useful for employers in terms of recruitment and incremental purposes.

Every employer wants an employee who is high on mental health domains while being recruited as he/she is going to be an asset to the organisation. Also, the test scores help in determining where the individual is standing in terms of present state of optimism – an important ingredient which is beneficial for their organisation. This will help them in decision making in terms of giving the right increment to the right employee.

Therefore, if the test scores are put to right use, this will greatly enhance the work climate in terms of employee satisfaction as the employers will be able to make various judicious decisions which will ultimately have a positive impact on the organisation's productivity, profitability, reaching targets while reducing employee absenteeism and negativism.

Thus, this test helps to activate the untapped power of the engaged staff too.

- In Sports, its very necessary to develop a winning attitude. And this attitude comes from the level of Optimism an individual possesses. The good news is that this attitude can be learnt. So, in sports too, while selecting the team and the coach, it's very important to measure their present levels of Optimism and also the incremental increase in their levels of optimism after training.

For this, a short, stable, reliable and valid measure need to be used which can do an accurate profile analysis of a person.

Oi 1.1 is the answer to this problem as well.

Thus, we see that Oi has an immense scope with varied populations, age groups, occupations, gender and is also cross culturally relevant.

Hypothesis: Individual Optimism is a significant positive predictor of student's academic performance and mental health.

Method

Participants and Procedure

40 adolescents studying in senior secondary school were taken for the present study. Their academic performance in terms of percentages in the previous term were taken as the pre-intervention scores. Their scores on SPPI (Student Personal Problem Index) and PGI Well Being Scale were taken before the intervention process.

They were met by the investigators' team over a two-month period, twice a week for an hour's interaction as part of the interventional program where OAT (Optimism Attitude Therapy) was used to instill the attitude of Optimism in them so that they are able to enhance

their confidence and boost up the self-esteem. It was hypothesized that there will be a significant change in their academic performance and mental health variables as a result of OAT during the interventional program.

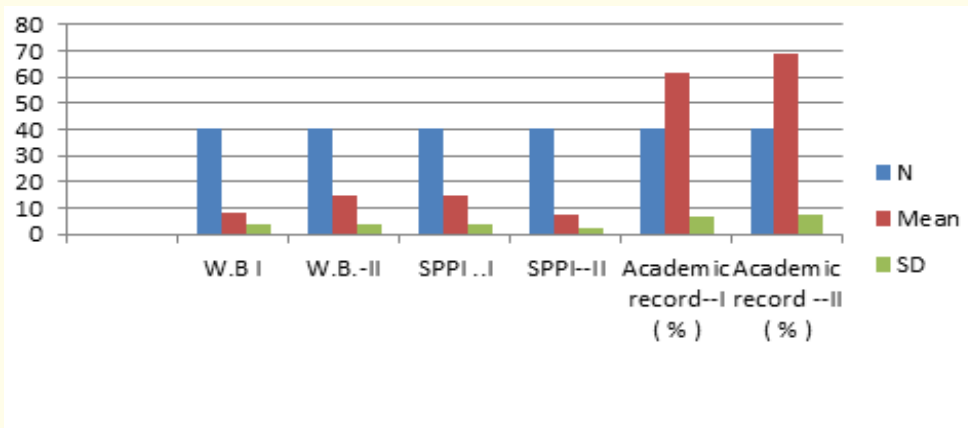
Analyses and Results

Descriptive statistics including Mean, Standard Deviation and t test were used to find out if the results were statistically significant or not.

The results are shown in table 1.

Test	Mean 1	Mean2	SD1	SD2	t value	Level of significance
WB	7.9	14.5	3.7	3.9	4.92**	0.01
SPPI	15.0	7.6	4.1	3.3	5.64**	0.01
AcAch	61.8	68.9	7.1	7.5	3.38**	0.01

Table 1: Significance of difference between means of 40 students on the test PGI Well Being Scale and Students Personal Problem Index along with their academic record before and after the Intervention.



Graph 1: Shows the scores on mental health variables and academic achievement of 40 students Before and After the Intervention.

Discussion

The results clearly indicate that Optimism does impact performance, positively. A perusal of table 1 clearly evinces that measures of mental health variables go up as a result of interventional therapy along with the academic achievement. OAT – Optimism Attitude Therapy was used for this study. Based on OAM – Optimism Attitude Model.

The students were made to visualize themselves as competent, confident and achieving despite temporary setbacks. They were asked to believe what they could visualize and remain optimistic come what may. Gradually, this thought process was conditioned in their unconscious level along with emphasis on hard work done regularly and consistently. This was the main aspect of the therapeutic program each of these 40 children were put on for 2 months. And the results clearly evinced significant change in their mental health status and academic achievement before and after the therapeutic intervention.

This indicates that the Optimism Attitude Therapy works well with adolescents as they had responded well to this therapy. This has plenty of implications for school teachers and parents and management of the school. Optimism as an attitude needs to be consciously

instilled in the young minds at the school level so that these children grow up to be more mature, independent, confident adults who do not develop suicidal ideations, depression, anxiety, panic, despondency at the smallest setbacks which at times result in frustrated aggressive tendencies which is not good not only for the individual but also for the society at large.

Of course, one should be cautious of developing over optimism too, just as over confidence is not a desirable trait. But within moderations, its desirable to develop the attitude of Optimism at all age levels which will ultimately get reflected in the prosperity of the Nation too. Healthy people, who are emotionally, physically, mentally, socially healthy, can contribute in the Nation's prosperity. Therefore, it will certainly pay dividends and an economically viable proposition too, when the Nation invests in the mental well-being of its people.

Suggestions for Future Research

Although the findings of the study are encouraging, several shortcomings of the present research should also be taken into account. Firstly, the sample size is too less and the therapeutic intervention itself contain many biases. Probably with a larger sample the results could be different and more interesting.

Secondly, the sample was taken from one school and from one area. Again, they results could yield more interesting results sample from more than one school and taken from different parts of the country as well.

A longitudinal study, over a period of time with more psychological variables would also be more fruitful in yielding different results. Effect of age and gender is another dimension which needs to be studied in detail and which has a far-reaching consequences for parenting issues and teaching learning processes at the school level itself [2-28].

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