SELF-EFFICACY, WORK MOTIVATION AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: USING FORUM THEATRE TECHNIQUES TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE IN AUSTRALIA

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Abstract

Self-efficacy is a social psychological construct that is conceptualized from an agentic perspective and refers to the motivation to perceive oneself as a causal agent. Numerous studies have shown a strong positive relationship between self-efficacy and organization performance. A recent workplace intervention within a division of a large Australian retail organization was designed to improve customer service on a sustainable basis using the 4 sources of self-efficacy information: enactive attainment, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal. This information was delivered via a Forum Theatre setting, a technique traditionally used as a catalyst for political action amongst oppressed groups. Preliminary results suggest the intervention’s format has lead to an increase in employee self-efficacy as well as improved organizational performance, demonstrating that concern for the improvement and well being of employees leads to better organizational results – doing well by doing good. This paper describes a proposed field experiment to formally investigate whether this intervention approach to improved customer service performance can be generalized to other organizations.

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INTRODUCTION

What motivates people to work? Very few topics have generated as much management and academic interest in the organization behavior and social psychology fields. Indeed, the topic of employee motivation plays a central role in the field of management, both practically and theoretically. Research in the field has a rich history (Herzberg, 1968; Maslow, 1970; McClelland, 1987; McGregor, 1985) and the search for high performance in business has historically been seen as a question of motivation (Fox, 2006). Indeed, the high level of recent interest in employee engagement (Saks, 2006) can be characterized as further evidence of management’s preoccupation with understanding what drives employee motivation and involvement in the workplace. However, in spite of voluminous studies and analysis, work motivation theory development has stagnated (Steers, Mowday, & Shapiro, 2004) while motivation continues to be a hot topic (Trinca, 2006). Indeed, developing new perspectives has been identified as a critical step for work motivation theory to make another leap forward (Locke & Latham, 2004).

Work motivation has been defined as a set of energetic forces that originate both within as well as beyond an individual’s being, to initiate work-related behavior and to determine its form, direction, intensity, and duration (Pinder, 1998). Consequently work motivation is seen to be a psychological process resulting from the interaction between the individual and the environment (Latham & Pinder, 2005). The strong influence of both psychology and social psychology on the current state of knowledge is illustrated by Locke and Latham (2004) where they present an integrated model of Work Motivation incorporating Goal Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, Job Characteristics Theory, Attribution Theory and Distributive & Procedural Justice Theories. However, the psychological and social psychological focus limits by definition other frames of reference such as sociology, economics and politics for studying work motivation issues.

One alternative would be to use a sociological perspective to enhance the development of a more comprehensive understanding of how employees are motivated. The field of social psychology was clearly founded on the recognition that
both disciplines have profound influences on human behavior that can only be fully understood from this dual perspective. However, there is a long history of social psychology operating as two distinct fields under the one umbrella (Britt, 1937) and has been argued that the direction of strongest influence has run from psychology to sociology (Thoits, 1995). In part this phenomenon is because sociologists more often assess the degree to which status characteristics, social relationships, and structural contexts influence individuals’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviors while psychologists more often explicate the mechanisms through which such social factors affect individuals (Thoits, 1995).

With respect to motivation specifically, a number of authors have stated the need for the field of sociology to develop a theory of motivation that is explicit, parsimonious and sociologically defensible (Gecas, 1991; McMahon, 1984; Turner, 1987). The lack of such a theory of motivation has hampered theory construction, contributed to an “over-socialized view of man” and handicapped the field’s assessment of the relationship between institutions and individuals (Gecas, 1991). Given the call for new approaches to push work motivation theory to another level, it is timely to reflect on how a sociologically informed theory of motivation could contribute to our knowledge of what motivates people to work.

SELF-EFFICACY’S ROLE IN WORK MOTIVATION

Within the field of social psychology, one area where there is a clear interface between sociology and psychology is the topic of self-efficacy (Thoits, 1995). The concept of self-efficacy is closely associated with the prominent personality psychologist Albert Bandura. Self-efficacy refers to people’s judgment in one’s capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to meet given situational demands (Bandura, 1986). It has been identified as a key motivational construct within organizations (Gist & Mitchell, 1992) and is a core component of Locke and Latham’s (2004) integrated model of work motivation. Within sociology, the motivational significance of self-efficacy dates back to Marx’s (1844/1963) view of human nature as a process of self-creation through efficacious action in the context of work (Gecas, 1991). Indeed, a key feature of Marx’s concept of alienation is powerlessness or a lack of self-efficacy (Gecas, 1991). As a result, the
concept and study of self-efficacy is of great interest from both a psychological and sociological perspective.

**Agentic Perspective.** Self-efficacy is conceptualized from an agentic perspective and refers to the motivation to perceive oneself as a causal agent (Bandura, 1986; Gecas, 1991). As a result, self-efficacy affects goal choice and especially goal difficulty while both goals and self-efficacy affect performance through their effects on direction, effort, persistence and task strategies or tactics (Locke et al., 2004). Self-efficacy has gained significant prominence in the field of social psychology in recent years and is also part of the renewed interest in the self phenomenon (Gecas, 1989). Therefore, understanding the interaction between perceptions of the self, self-efficacy and motivation generally as well as work motivation specifically is of critical interest within the social psychology field.

**Self Formation.** Self-efficacy scholars from all disciplines differentiate perceptions of self from perceptions of self in relation to the social environment (Gecas, 1989). However, while psychologists conceptualize expectancies as being specific to a particular task or situation (Bandura, 2006), sociologists and political scientists are more concerned with generalized expectancies about self and the social system (Gecas, 1989). As a consequence, although self-efficacy provides a common thread running between sociology and psychology with its causal agency focus, each discipline has approached the issue of self-efficacy from fundamentally different perspectives.

**Self Theory.** From a traditional sociological point of view, the issue of voluntaristic action forms a long and rich history within sociology that goes to the heart of work motivation theory (Blumer, 1969; Parsons, 1937). Further, self-theory (considered to be synonymous with symbolic interactionism) conceptualizes the individual as an actor in their world which provides agentive qualities such as spontaneity and creativity (Gecas, 1989). From a psychological perspective, the notion of human agency is a critical facet of how people’s motivation is activated and sustained. In this regard, goal theory is similarly rooted in an agentic perspective (Bandura 2003). Clearly the central notion of the individual’s perception of their own agency is important to both disciplines.
Symbolic Interactionism. The formation of the self and our perception of our own agency have long been of intense interest for both sociologists and psychologists. From a sociological perspective, symbolic interactionism provides a framework for viewing the self as a reflexive phenomenon with its constituent parts of the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ (Mead & Strauss, 1956). As the self-concept develops, the individual is motivated to maintain and enhance three motives associated with the self concept: self-esteem; self-efficacy; and authenticity (Gecas, 1991). Each of these motives is influenced by socialization processes such as reflected appraisals, social comparisons, self-attributions, role learning and social identity development (Gecas, 1991). With respect to self-efficacy in particular, there are significant parallels with the psychological processes articulated within Social Cognitive Theory such as the development of personal standards and social referential comparisons.

NEW PERSPECTIVES TO SELF FORMATION

In recent years, an emerging sociological approach to the self reflects new emphases on power, reflexivity and social constructionism (Callero, 2003). This new perspective states that the self is the direct consequence of power and is brought into existence by imposing disciplinary practices on the body (Foucault, Martin, Gutman, & Hutton, 1988). In this view, the traditional assumption of an individual with a core, rational, unitary self, endowed with an essential nature and an independent consciousness have been replaced by the perspective of the self as a mechanism of control where it is coerced into existence (Callero, 2003). As a consequence, the Enlightenment ideals of a universal self and the assumption of an agentic and knowledgeable actor have been dissolved (Elliott, 2001).

This emerging approach has been heavily criticized because it ignores the problem of seeking social change without free and active agents. Indeed, it sharply contrasts with self-efficacy’s conceptualization of the individual as one who has the motivation to perceive oneself as a causal agent. Nevertheless, this new approach has made a key contribution by connecting the study of the self with the historical deployment of power and demonstrates that the self is constituted within relations of control and is deeply embedded within systems of knowledge and discourse (Callero, 2003).
In common with traditional sociological perspectives such as symbolic interactionism, this new scholarship reinforces the principal that the self is socially constructed. Effectively, the self is both a social product (determined by the social world) and a social force (pre-given at birth) (Rosenberg, 1981). For example, the wide ranging use of psychological and psychiatric techniques to help individualize identities and invent our selves has been examined at length (Rose, 1998). Similarly, the notion of homo economicus has evolved to a modern variation where man is being encouraged to adopt the guise of the enterprising or entrepreneurial self (Du Gay, 2000). The range of ‘technologies of the self’, a phrase originally coined by Foucault (1988), provides further evidence of the extent to which the self can be analyzed from a range of sociological and psychological points of view (Hollway, 1991). Given the above, a broader conceptualization of context that extends beyond the immediate situation (as in symbolic interactionism) to include historical, cultural and social influences is necessary to gain a full understanding of self-meanings, self-images and self-concepts (Callero, 2003).

Therefore, a sociological perspective for understanding what motivates people to work and contributes to employee engagement would incorporate not only traditional sociological concepts such as reflexivity but extend them to include a new emphasis on power and a stronger focus on social constructionism. The challenge is to develop frameworks for analyzing the influence of power in particular in shaping the self and in turn, its impact on self-efficacy. Such an analysis could be conducted within the accepted practice of a social psychological field experiment in order to provide a credible means for demonstrating the impact on people. From a psychological point of view, such an approach would reinforce the prerogative of the individual’s deterministic nature within their environment whilst from a sociological point of view the impact of broader environmental factors on an individual’s concept of self and voluntaristic control of one’s life would be examined. Therefore, undertaking research that views the self and self-efficacy from this dual perspective provides an arguably novel approach to the topic of work motivation and employee engagement.
Contemporary management thinking with respect to employee motivation is still deeply shaped by a number of thought leaders including Elton Mayo, Abraham Maslow, Douglas McGregor and Frederick Herzberg. In some respects, the management principles and practices they advocated were a response to the perceived failings of Scientific Management as their research was conducted and theories developed in the mid part of the 20th century. These researchers formed the humanistic school of psychology and were principal influences on the development of mechanisms for employee motivation. Their research provided the rationale for the introduction of practices such as job enrichment, empowerment, devolved responsibility and a focus on salient outcomes as the prescription for employee motivation. Indeed, a survey of management textbooks and university courses demonstrates how much these historical figures continue to influence contemporary management thinking.

During the latter part of the 20th century, goal theory emerged as the single biggest influence on management practice with its concomitant use of incentives as rewards whenever goals are achieved. In this regard, the use of extrinsic rewards was reinforced by economic theory. Other work motivation related theories such as job characteristics theory, attribution theory, social cognitive theory, self-determination theory, distributive & procedural justice theory and social identity theory have been developed but have had limited impact on management thinking and hence practices. In addition, Locke and Latham (2004) found only limited or no empirical support for humanistic school concepts such as Maslow’s (1970) hierarchy of needs where employees ostensibly desire a state of self-actualization or Deci and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory which states that the use of extrinsic rewards depletes intrinsic motivation. As a consequence, the question of what motivates employees takes on even greater importance because core managerial assumptions are being challenged.

Given the above, it is understandable that self-efficacy has been eagerly embraced by management scholars because of its potential for application to work-related performances (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Although self-efficacy is a relatively
recent addition to the organizational research agenda (Gist et al., 1992), it has been incorporated into an integrated model of work motivation (Locke, 1997). However, a review of a number of organizational behavior textbooks and course notes reveals that the concept of self-efficacy does not feature as a significant subject, particularly in relation to employee motivation. Further, discussions with HR practitioners suggest that self-efficacy has not been widely adopted as a motivational tool for employees. Therefore, research into the application of the self-efficacy concept and practices within the workplace as an alternative approach to address the issues of employee motivation and engagement.

Social Cognitive Theory
Research on self-efficacy within social psychology has been heavily based on Bandura’s (1986) construct derived within social cognitive theory. Social cognitive theory sets out a comprehensive framework for how individuals develop a sense of self-efficacy using a personality psychology framework. The social cognitive approach views the person as a more-or-less rational and planful knower who actively seeks information in the social world and draws upon a rich storehouse of social knowledge in order to regulate his or her own behavior and enact plans and goals in a wide orange of social environments (Markus & Wurf, 1987; McAdams, 2000).

Social cognitive theory posits a triadic reciprocal causation model in which behavior, cognitions and the environment all influence each other in a dynamic fashion (Bandura, 1986). Within social cognitive theory, self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one’s capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to meet given situational demands (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Clearly the process by which one develops the necessary beliefs to act in a self-efficacious manner is critical as are the environmental influences that lead to these beliefs. Developing a comprehensive motivational framework that embraces the self-concept is critical because the self is a social product, emerging out of and dependent on social interaction (Gecas, 1991). Therefore studying self-efficacy from a combined sociological and psychological perspective will provide a more comprehensive view of the interaction between the self-concept and self-efficacy.
By definition, understanding how one forms self perceptions is of primary importance to psychologists. There is a very long list of terms and theories incorporating the ‘self’: self-actualization; self-attribution; self-determination; self-discrepancy; self-identity; and self-regulation are but a few. From a social cognitive perspective, the formation of a self-schema is a central concept in cognitive approaches to personality psychology and contains a vast and complex array of emotionally laden information (McAdams, 2000). Further, the self-schema contains multiple generalizations about the current, past and prominent possible selves that link the self to the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In this view, possible selves serve as the crucial link between motivation and cognition in understanding (McAdams, 2000).

Given the above, a critical research challenge is to determine the influence of self-efficacy principles and practices in shaping employee motivation. A key step will be to develop a better understanding of how we form a self image from a sociological point of view. Analyzing multiple perspectives of how the self is created i.e. (Du Gay, 2000; Foucault et al., 1988; Rose, 1998) using psychological techniques provides a novel means to assess how the self-concept is formed. The extent to which the self is socially constructed through these technologies will have an impact on an individual’s self-efficaciousness. Once these influences have been measured and combined with traditional measures of self-efficacy from a psychological perspective, a new picture from a comprehensive social psychology view will be possible.

Measuring self-efficacy

There are several approaches to the measurement of self-efficacy (Gecas, 1989). These measures use typical self-reporting psychometric instruments and fall into a number of categories. For example, Bandura (1977) focuses on task-specific measures that relate to the competency or skill to the task at hand and are not intended to be a general measure of self-efficacy. Some measures are domain-specific such as a Health Locus of Control Scale (Wallston, Wallston, Kaplan, & Maides, 1976) which measures control orientations specific to the health area. Other scales have been developed to measure an individual’s general sense of personal mastery and self-efficacy (Gecas, 1971; Pearlin, 1983; Sherer & et al., 1982).
General self-efficacy. The development of self-efficacy scales has provided tools to undertake a wide range of self-efficacy based research. For example, a meta-analysis of self-efficacy and work related performance demonstrated the positive relationship between self-efficacy and different motivational outcomes in organization settings (Stajkovic et al., 1998). This finding that self-efficacy is positively and strongly related to work-related performance is particularly noteworthy from a practitioner perspective (Stajkovic et al., 1998). However, the relationship between self-efficacy and work-related performance is moderated by task complexity and locus of performance (Stajkovic et al., 1998). Therefore, applying self-efficacy practices in the workplace need to take these variables into account.

Notwithstanding the clear links between self-efficacy and work related performance, the measurement of self-efficacy is still rather primitive, even by social psychological standards (Gecas, 1989). Although the state of self-efficacy scale development is due to the relatively recent emergence of self-efficacy in social psychological research (as distinct from previous sociological or psychological research into self-efficacy's predecessors), more extensive development of a general measure of self-efficacy is especially needed (Gecas, 1989). Such a measure would enable a more comprehensive understanding of people’s perceptions of self-efficacy and what impact it may have on their motivation.

Personal Agency and Control. The issue of agency and control is a major topic in both the psychology and sociology literature. From a psychological perspective, to be an agent is to influence intentionally one’s functioning and life circumstances (Bandura, 1986). In this view, people are self-organizing, pro-active, self-regulating, and self-reflecting and are not simply onlookers of their behavior (Bandura, 2006). Human agency incorporates four core properties: intentionality; forethought; self-reactiveness; and self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 1986). These four properties provide individuals with the cognitive frameworks to make choices about their actions.

Notwithstanding the distinctively human capabilities these frameworks enable, most human functioning is socially situated and therefore psychological concepts are socially embedded (Bandura, 1977). As a result, human agency is a product of not only intrapersonal determinants but also behavioral influences and environmental
factors (Bandura, 1986). Therefore, social systems are created by human activity and in turn, social systems help to organize, guide and regulate human affairs (Bandura, 1986). This perspective is a close parallel to the symbolic interactionist tradition within sociology where the individual is primarily an actor in the environment, shaping and creating his/her world as well as being created by it (Gecas, 1989). Indeed, symbolic interaction theory (which is largely synonymous with self-theory) strongly emphasizes an active and creative view of the self. Clearly, both the psychological and traditional sociological disciplines view agency as a central issue of human functioning.

The heart of the issue for both sociologists and psychologists is that of control. For example, the extent to which the individual has control over his/her labor is a precondition of alienation (Marx & Bottomore, 1963). If the locus of control is outside the individual, then people become alienated (Gecas, 1989) or experience powerlessness (Seeman, 1983). Similarly, locus of control is a consistent concern for psychologists (deCharms & Muir, 1978; Deci, 1985). To the extent an individual perceives that their environment is outside their control, their intrinsic motivation will be reduced (Deci, 1985).

**Competency.** Another factor influencing an individual’s self-efficacy is the perceived skill or competence they have to perform a required task or function. The notion of competence and personal mastery has been consistently raised as an important part of human functioning (Bandura, 1991; Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Deci, 2002; Harter, 1978; White, 1959). People who believe they do not have the requisite skill will be unlikely to demonstrate persistent and sustained energy focusing on a given task because the likelihood of success is perceived to be low.

An individual’s perception of their competence is governed by their efficacy expectations (Bandura, 1977). An efficacy expectation is a belief that one can successfully perform a particular action and is therefore a belief about one’s competence (Bandura, 1977). Individuals develop their belief about their own competency through three sources: personal standards, social referential comparators, and self-reactive influences (Bandura, 1991). Personal standards are based on how
significant persons react to an individual’s behavior; through teaching; and through evaluative reactions of others to one’s behavior (Bandura, 1991).

**Effectiveness.** An individual’s effectiveness is influenced by their perceptions of how the social environment impacts their ability to achieve certain outcomes. To the extent that an individual believes that a given action will lead to a certain outcome, they will feel more effective (Bandura, 1991). This belief has been categorized as an outcome expectation (Bandura, 1991) and has parallel’s to the Expectancy Theory construct of outcome expectancy (Vroom & Deci, 1970). There has been some criticism about the perceived ambiguousness of the distinction between outcome expectation and efficacy expectation (Eastman & Marzillier, 1984). However, from a sociological perspective, the term “system responsiveness” provides a more appropriate label than outcome expectation (Gecas, 1989) and has been used to distinguish between self-perceived competence and a system’s responsiveness (Almond & Verba, 1989; Barber, 1983). Therefore, to the extent individuals perceive the social environment will enable them to achieve an outcome expectation the “system” has been responsive.

**JUSTIFICATION FOR THE RESEARCH**

The ongoing interest in work motivation theories and employee engagement is being driven by numerous factors including globalization, work/life balance, information technology, new forms of working and the growth in service industries. In a service and information based economy, developing a deeper and broader understanding of the factors that impact employee motivation. From an Australian perspective, the float of the Australian dollar, abandonment of the centralized arbitration system, ongoing reduction in tariffs, privatization of many government enterprises and more robust regulatory environment have all served to intensify competition and stimulate the economy. In turn, this strong economic growth has led to historically high levels of employment and ever increasing competition to attract, motivate and retain good employees.

Yet how well do modern Australian managers understand how to motivate employees? Historically, the centralized nature of Australia’s wage fixing system has
largely obviated the need for management to focus on understanding the extrinsic needs of employees and develop appropriate reward structures. Further, the relatively closed nature of Australia’s economic and industrial system greatly reduced the need for management to understand employee needs and provide appropriate workplace environments. Over the past 20 years, Australian managers have largely relied on international (principally American) research and management practices to foster higher levels of employee motivation and engagement as organizations have adapted to changes in the socio-economic environment. Although many of the concepts used have application in the workplace, Australia’s unique workplace heritage and national culture suggest that simply copying overseas models is unlikely to be the most effective means of improving motivation. Given the ongoing international interest in employee motivation and engagement and call for new perspectives to work motivation theories, taking a fresh approach is sensible.

From a historical perspective, using social constructionism practices to create societal norms that institutionalize work motivation for the good of the individual is common. Religious philosophies typically used work as a vehicle to enshrine societal discipline: in the Judeo-Christian tradition, work was punishment for man’s original sin; in the Islamic tradition, work was the way to make man pleasing and acceptable to God; in the Buddhist tradition, Nirvana was reached through hard work (MOW_International_Research_Team, 1987). In contrast, prior to the American industrial revolution, the need to ‘motivate’ man to work was relatively foreign as profits were effectively shared once goods were sold so workers and the owners of the means of production had a common goal (Jacques, 1996). However, since the introduction of ‘salary and wages’ to American commerce, work has been characterized as a vehicle for success and salvation (Jacques, 1996) while the quintessentially American life story and culture of work and entrepreneurial drive reinforces the importance of self-redemption (McAdams, 2006). Indeed, the use of psychological techniques to validate work as an intrinsically satisfying experience provides another example of how social constructionism has institutionalized work motivation as a means of governing the soul (Rose, 1999).

From a sociological perspective, although the general theme of action and agency is well established within symbolic interaction theory, the topic of self-efficacy is rarely
treated explicitly (Gecas, 1989). To date, research on self-efficacy within sociology has mainly dealt within the broader theme of social structure and culture. As organizations are complex social institutions with sophisticated social structures and diverse cultures, developing a greater understanding of the impact of sociological and anthropological factors such as structure and culture on self-efficacy is crucial. Further, gaining insight into social factors that impact the self concept is an essential part of assessing self-efficacy’s impact on employee motivation. In this regard, symbolic interaction provides a framework for understanding the factors that may enhance an individual’s self-efficacy as they move beyond infancy (Gecas, 1989).

From a psychological perspective, most research has been carried out on the consequences of self-efficacy and on its early development (Gecas, 1989). With respect to consequences, a number of studies have reported on the beneficial effects of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Seeman, 1983; Seligman, 2006) from both a physical and mental health point of view. Although there are limitations to the therapeutic consequences of self-efficacy (Gecas, 1989), its application within a work environment would arguably have similar effects. The development of self-efficacy is achieved through sources of efficacy information such as personal mastery, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977). In this regard, the family context is a primary influence on self-efficacy development. Importantly, it is how we perceive our performance successes that are the key to efficacious children, a finding that is consistent with both symbolic interactionist and psychological frameworks. However, the explicit use of self-efficacy in Australian organizational settings and its impact on employee motivation is not well documented.

Therefore, from a variety of perspectives, research into the impact of self-efficacy principles and practices on work motivation and employee engagement, particularly within Australian organizations is needed. Understanding how individuals develop a sense of agency within an organizational setting as well as reconciling the different views of self are important sociological and psychological issues. The themes of agency, personal control and perceived competence are central to both disciplines and therefore the study of self-efficacy is eminently suited to appraisal within a broad social psychological framework. Both disciplines offer different perspectives and
methodologies to interpret the meaning and effect of self-efficacy in practice. In addition, increasing self efficacy has been clearly demonstrated to have a positive impact on individual mental and physical health and well being. Therefore, studying self-efficacy in the workplace may concurrently yield insights into how individuals can achieve a better work-life balance, help cope with stress and achieve an improved level of self-realisation and perceived control. In effect, organizations introducing self-efficacy principles and practices have the potential of “Doing Well by Doing Good”.

Summary and Hypotheses
The positive relationship between self-efficacy and work motivation has been clearly established from a theoretical perspective. However, empirical work is needed in the workplace to determine how self perceptions of general self-efficacy affect work motivation and employee engagement. In addition, the extent to which self perceptions of personal agency and control, competency and effectiveness (the specific elements within self-efficacy) are related to work motivation and employee engagement also needs to be investigated in a workplace environment. Besides the relationship between absolute levels of general self-efficacy, personal agency and control, competency and effectiveness, it is critical to understand the impact an intervention designed to improve self-efficacy has on individual perceptions of general self-efficacy, personal agency and control, competency and effectiveness. To the extent that individual perceptions change and a positive relationship between self-efficacy, work motivation and employee engagement is found, support for self-efficacy based interventions to improve organizational performance will be reinforced. The proceeding discussion leads to the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1a – Individual’s with a higher general sense of self-efficacy will have a correspondingly higher level of work motivation.
Hypothesis 1b – Increasing an individual’s general sense of self-efficacy will result in an increase in their level of work motivation.
Hypothesis 2a - Individual’s with a stronger sense of personal agency will have a correspondingly higher level of work motivation.
Hypothesis 2b - Increasing an individual’s sense of personal agency will result in an increase in their level of work motivation.
Hypothesis 3a - *Individual’s with a perceived higher level of competence will have a correspondingly higher level of work motivation.*

Hypothesis 3b - *Increasing an individual’s perceived level of competence will result in an increase in their level of work motivation.*

Hypothesis 4a - *Individual’s with a higher perceived level of effectiveness will have a correspondingly higher level of work motivation.*

Hypothesis 4b - *Increasing an individual’s perceived level of effectiveness will result in an increase in their level of work motivation.*
PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

Overview
A key issue when undertaking research on a topic common to two disciplines is developing a methodology that satisfies one without antagonizing the other. In spite of the overarching “social psychology” label both founding disciplines use, their discourse and paradigm are arguably very different. This issue is a long standing one (Britt, 1937).

To determine what impact the meaning of and changes to self-efficacy may have on work motivation and employee engagement, field research will be required. In order to adopt both a sociological and psychological perspective, a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques will be required. The qualitative techniques will enable an inductive and descriptive evaluation of the ways in which employees interpret and ascribe meaning to self-efficacy. The quantitative techniques will provide a statistical measure of self-efficacy and its antecedents. Both techniques will be used to undertake pre and post evaluation of changes to perceptions of self-efficacy as a result of an intervention designed to increase individual self-efficacy in a work setting.

**Host Organizations.** Three companies from different industries will act as host organizations. An intervention based on improving the customer service skills of individuals working with the host organizations will be designed based on self-efficacy principles and practices. The proposed industries and job types are:

Financial Services (frontline branch and contact centre employees)
Retail (sales/service assistants and cashiers)
Hospitality/Property (food and beverage servers and security officers)

These companies are all considered to be service industries and as a result are reliant on customer service as a key point of differentiation with competitors. As customer service processes are relatively similar across industries, it will be feasible to generalize the results to other industries. Another factor favoring an intervention based on customer service is that it can be independently observed and measured from the customer’s point of view using techniques such as mystery shopping. While
customer service can be viewed as a global attitude, it can also be viewed as a competence to be developed and is therefore an acquirable skill.

These industries have been chosen because they have relatively low skill levels necessary for new entrants. Partially as a result, employee turnover tends to be high and there are significant issues with regards to employee motivation. The job types nominated all involve direct customer interaction but have a variety of face to face vs. separated; transaction vs. sales; and service vs. compliance foci. The nominated companies are all large Australian public companies and have a range of workplace environments. Therefore, from a sociological point of view, having both large and small workplace environments within large organizations will facilitate understanding the effect of structure, bureaucratization, control and culture.

**Stage 1 – Recruit Host Organizations**

Preliminary discussions have been held with a number of potential host organizations. Each host organization would be required to contribute up to $20,000 towards the research, principally to cover the cost of conducting Stage 5 – Customer Service Training Intervention. Host organizations would need to provide access to employees for interviews and quantitative data collection. In addition, host organizations would be responsible for releasing 80 employees for the training sessions for one day.

**Stage 2 – Observational Research**

Up to two weeks will be spent at each organization developing a better understanding of structure, roles, norms, values and any other social factors that may influence behavior. A review of HR material including induction programs, training materials, performance appraisal systems, recruitment and selection procedures and remuneration policies will be undertaken. Attendance and observation of training sessions including an induction program would be made. At the end of the two weeks, a good working knowledge of the organization’s culture and social environment will be gained.

**Stage 3 – Employee Interviews**

A minimum of one week will be spent at each organization conducting a minimum of 15 interviews with front line employees relating to self-efficacy, work motivation and
employee engagement. Approximately 10 existing employees with more than 1 year’s service and 5 new employees with less than 3 months service will be interviewed. The aim of the interviews is to collect as much qualitative data as possible concerning the environmental factors that have influenced employee perceptions of self-efficacy. Possible questions include:

How do we as individuals form judgments of self?
To what extent do environmental factors determine our view of self?
Are there multiple selves and how do we reconcile these with expectations about work?
How do we form a belief that the self can successfully perform a particular action and that a given action will lead to a certain outcome?

Other factors to be discussed include long-term social ones such as the impact of family, school, peers, institutions, media and other employment on self-efficacy, work motivation and employee engagement. Employees will also be asked about their perceptions of the level of agency, competence and effectiveness they feel working at their host organization. Finally, employee perceptions of how their employer’s induction and on-going training programs have impacted their self-efficacy will be explored.

**Stage 4 – Scale Selection, Modification and/or Development**

The information from Stages 1 and 2 will be collated and key themes and issues identified prior to conducting a review of existing general self-efficacy scales as well as any specific self efficacy, work motivation and employee engagement scales. The review may determine that an existing scale will perform adequately or will provide a solid basis for a revised scale. The final output of this stage will be a new or updated General Self-Efficacy scale and Work Motivation and Employee Engagement subscales.

**Stage 5 – Pre-test of General Self-Efficacy and Work Motivation**

The new instrument will be used to measure General Self-Efficacy, Work Motivation and Employee Engagement within the three host organizations. A target total of 960 surveys (320 per host organization) will be distributed and collected. Half of the surveys (160) will be distributed to ‘new’ (less than 12 months working at the host
organization) and the other half of the surveys (160) will be distributed to existing
(more than 12 months service at the host organization. Within each organization, the
surveys will be split equally between the two nominated job categories (80 for each).
The table below illustrates the number of surveys being distributed to each employee
classification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Financial Service</th>
<th>Retail</th>
<th>Hospitality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New – Job Type 1</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing – Job Type 1</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New – Job Type 2</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing – Job Type 2</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If possible, participants will be selected on the basis of their store location to facilitate
dividing each participant segment into two groups. At a later date, one group will be
invited to participate in a training intervention designed to improve an individual’s
self-efficacy with respect to customer service and its impact on work motivation.

**Stage 6 – Customer Service Training Intervention**

Each cell of the surveyed employees will be split into 2 groups of 40 participants.
One group will participate in a customer service training intervention while the other
group will have not training and therefore act as a control group. Within each Job
Type, two, 1 Day customer service improvement workshops will be held with up to
20 people attending each. The workshops will use one facilitator and two actors to
lead participants through a program designed to improve each participant’s self-
efficacy, particularly in relation to customer service. The focus will be on providing
the opportunity for participants to experience each of the four means by which self-
efficacy improves: Vicarious learning; personal mastery; verbal persuasion and
emotional arousal.

The primary vehicle for enabling participants to improve their self-efficacy is a form
of simultaneous dramaturgy known as Forum Theatre created by Augusto Boal.
Participants (spectators) will watch a scripted performance by the actors illustrating
poor customer service scenarios within the company based on mystery shopping experiences. At the end of each scenario, participants will have the opportunity to point out inappropriate customer service behavior. The actors will then reprise the scripted scenarios but at any point, participants (now referred to as spect-actors) may call out “stop!” and either take the actor’s place or coach the actor on the appropriate behavior. Through this process of active participation, spect-actors become empowered to achieve individual, group and even organizational change. Participants are encouraged to not only imagine the required change but are actually given the opportunity to practice it. In effect, participants experience all 4 forms of improved self-efficacy through learning vicariously, practicing personal mastery, receiving verbal coaching and experiencing heightened emotional arousal throughout the performance.

At the end of each workshop, participants should, at a minimum, judge they are more competent than before with respect to customer service. The ability to exert personal agency and perceive one is effective in the workplace will be somewhat contingent on the environment at each host organization. To the extent that the workplace environment, both at a local level and across the host organization, supports the individual in practicing their refined customer service skills, the more the participant will feel they have personal agency to have impact.

**Stage 7 – Post-test of General Self-Efficacy and Work Motivation**

Approximately 3 months after the customer service training initiative, all previous respondents will be sent the General Self Efficacy, Work Motivation and Employee Engagement instrument to complete a second time. The results will then be compared with the previous survey to see what change, if any, has occurred in participant’s sense of self-efficacy, work motivation and employee engagement. The results for participants in the customer service training intervention will also be compared to what change, if any, has occurred in the control group in order to account for any global or organization wide changes that may have occurred.

**Stage 8 – Data Analysis**

The pre and post test sets of data will be compared across the entire participant population as well as between organizations. These comparisons will highlight what,
if any, general changes have resulted in participant self-efficacy, work motivation and employee engagement as well as between organizations. In addition, intra-organization comparisons will be conducted between the two different job categories. Similarly, job categories across all 3 host organizations will also be compared to determine to what extent the nature of individual jobs may have impacted self-efficacy, work motivation and employee engagement. The findings from the earlier qualitative research will be reviewed in light of the quantitative information to illuminate possible reasons for differences.

**Conclusion**

The research program outlined has the potential to make a contribution in a number of ways. First, by adopting elements of a sociological approach to work motivation, it is an attempt to meet the call to introduce new perspectives to the field’s theoretical development. In particular, the focus on self-efficacy and the underlying concept of human agency embodied within it recognized by both the sociology and psychology disciplines provides elements of a common discourse that recognizes both the social nature of organizations and individual’s that work within them.

Second, the focus on self-efficacy provides a new way for management to think about work motivation and employee engagement. Rather than the traditional use of extrinsic and intrinsic incentives, a focus on helping people to develop a greater sense of self-efficacy through increased perceived control, competence and effectiveness will help to frame the way in which managers think about employee motivation.
REFERENCES


Mead, G. H., & Strauss, A. L. 1956. The social psychology of George Herbert Mead. [Chicago]: University of Chicago Press.


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