

Regulatory Focus Theory: Implications for the Study of Emotions at Work

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Previous theory and research have shown that people have two distinct self-regulatory foci. When promotion focused, people are motivated by growth and development needs in which they attempt to bring their actual selves (their behaviors and self-conceptions) in alignment with their ideal selves (self-standards based on wishes and aspirations of how they would like to be). When prevention focused, people are responsive to security needs in which they try to match their actual selves with their ought selves (self-standards based on felt duties and responsibilities). Strategically, eagerness or ensuring gains predominate for promotion-focused persons, whereas vigilance or ensuring nonlosses predominate for prevention-focused persons. People's regulatory focus influences the nature and magnitude of their emotional experience. Promotion-focused people's emotions vary along a cheerful-dejected dimension, whereas prevention-focused people's emotions vary along a quiescent-agitated dimension. We consider the implications of the relationship between regulatory focus and emotions for such topics as person/organization fit, goal-setting theory, expectancy-valence theory, behavioral decision theory, and employee resistance to organizational change. Possible antecedents of employees' regulatory focus also are discussed. © 2001 Academic Press

The study of emotions has had a long history in psychology (James, 1890), particularly in the subareas of clinical, personality, and social psychology. Recently, organizational psychologists have devoted increased attention to the causes, consequences, and expression of emotions in the workplace (e.g., George & Brief, 1996; Staw & Barsade, 1993; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989). In accordance with the theme of the current issue of *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*—to delineate how basic theory and research on emotions sheds light on employees' work attitudes and behaviors—we discuss the implications of regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997, 1998) for the study of emotions in organizational settings.

Six sections follow. First, we provide a brief account of regulatory focus theory. Second, we present theory and research showing how people's regulatory focus influences the nature and magnitude of their emotional experience. Third, we discuss the implications of the relation between regulatory focus and emotions for a number of important topics in organizational psychology, including person/organization fit (e.g., Chatman, 1989), goal-setting theory (Locke, 1968), expectancy-valence theory (Vroom, 1964), and behavioral decision theory (Thaler, 1980). In the fourth section, we analyze the consequences of the emotions emanating from employees' regulatory focus for their work attitudes and behaviors, including such topics as employees' resistance to organizational change. Fifth, we speculate about the factors that influence people's regulatory focus at work. The sixth section offers concluding comments and additional directions for future research

TOWARD EXPLAINING EMOTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE: REGULATORY FOCUS THEORY

Based on much prior theory and research, our working assumption is that people's work attitudes and behaviors are affected by differences in the *nature* and *magnitude* of their emotional experiences (e.g., George & Brief, 1996). Meaningful differences between emotions may be general or specific. An example of a general distinction is valence (e.g., Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Research on the work attitude of job satisfaction suggests that people are more satisfied when their emotional experience at work is positive rather than negative (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Relatively little research has examined, however, whether certain types of positive or negative emotional experiences are more or less strongly predictive of work attitudes. For example, is the job dissatisfaction associated with feeling anxious greater than, less than, or equal to the dissatisfaction associated with feeling sad?

Sometimes, the general valence (positive or negative) of people's emotions influences (or at least predicts) their work attitudes and behaviors. In other instances, however, it may be important to make more specific distinctions within the broader categories of positive versus negative emotions. For example, the relief that employees may feel after not being laid off may be quite different from the elation they experience after receiving a coveted promotion. Not only are these positive emotions phenomenologically different from one another, but also they may give rise to different work attitudes and behaviors (Higgins, Simon, & Wells, 1988). For example, people who feel elated may be more job satisfied or more willing to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors than people who feel relieved. Within the broader category of negative emotions, the fear or anxiety that people experience after being laid off (or after watching their co-workers being laid off) may be very different from the disappointment they may feel if they are passed over for a coveted promotion.

While previous theory and research have considered the relationship between employees' emotional experience and their work attitudes and behaviors (e.g.,

George & Brief, 1996), organizational scholars have devoted much less attention to the psychological processes that affect the nature and magnitude of people's emotional experience. In contrast, recent social psychological theories of self-regulation such as regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997, 1998) are specifically concerned with the nature and magnitude of people's emotional experience and, by extension, may help elucidate their work attitudes and behaviors. The next section describes the underpinnings of the theory.

Basic Elements of Regulatory Focus Theory

Self-regulation refers to the process in which people seek to align themselves (i.e., their behaviors and self-conceptions) with appropriate goals or standards. Extending the basic hedonic principle that people are motivated to approach pleasure and avoid pain, Higgins (1997, 1998) suggested that there are important differences in the process through which people approach pleasure and avoid pain. Higgins proposed two distinct hedonic self-regulatory systems, one in which people have a promotion focus and the other in which they have a prevention focus. People's regulatory foci are composed of three factors which serve to illustrate the differences between a promotion focus and a prevention focus: (a) the needs that people are seeking to satisfy, (b) the nature of the goal or standard that people are trying to achieve or match, and (c) the psychological situations that matter to people.

Needs. Many prominent psychologists (e.g., Bowlby, 1969; Maslow, 1955; Rogers, 1960) suggest that people have a number of fundamental needs, including those pertaining to growth and development, on the one hand, and those referring to safety, protection, and security on the other. Regulatory focus theory suggests that the hedonic principle of approaching pleasure and avoiding pain operates differently, depending on the needs that people are trying to satisfy. Growth and development needs predominate for those who are promotion focused, whereas security needs drive those who are prevention focused.

Goals/standards. As Higgins (1987) suggested, certain standards represent people's beliefs of their *ideal* selves and thus reflect their hopes, wishes, and aspirations (e.g., a manager who wishes to be seen as charismatic or the salesperson who intrinsically wants to reach his/her ambitious quarterly performance goals). Other standards represent people's beliefs about their *ought* selves and as such refer to their felt duties, obligations, and responsibilities (e.g., the manager who is trying to conduct performance reviews in a timely fashion or the senior executives who believe that their company must comply with the guidelines imposed on them by a governmental regulatory agency). Promotion-focused people seek to attain the goals or standards associated with the ideal self, whereas prevention-focused people seek to attain the goals or standards associated with the ought self.

Psychological situations. The presence and absence of positive outcomes are salient for people who are promotion focused. That is, the goals and standards associated with the ideal self represent the presence of positive outcomes (e.g.,

aspirations). Upon bringing themselves into alignment with their ideal selves people experience the pleasure of a gain. When people fall short of their ideal self they experience the pain of a nongain. The absence and presence of negative outcomes are salient for people who are prevention focused. That is, the goals and standards associated with the ought self represent the absence of negative outcomes (e.g., safety or security). Upon bringing themselves into alignment with the ought self people experience the pleasure of a nonloss (i.e., they avoid a negative outcome). Failure to reach the ought self, in contrast, elicits the experience of the pain of loss.

In summary, when engaged in a promotion-focused self-regulatory process people's growth and development needs motivate them to try to bring themselves into alignment with their ideal selves, thereby heightening the salience (or felt presence or absence) of positive outcomes. In contrast, when engaged in a prevention-focused self-regulatory process people's security needs prompt them to attempt to bring themselves into alignment with their ought selves, thereby increasing the salience (or felt absence or presence) of negative outcomes. Elsewhere, Higgins (1997, 1998) has discussed the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral effects of people's regulatory focus. Our emphasis will be on the emotional effects and, in particular, the implications of the relationship between regulatory focus and emotionality for processes and outcomes of importance to organizational psychologists.

In addition to their many important consequences, people's regulatory focus is multiply determined. Whether people are predominantly promotion or prevention focused has been shown to be a reliable individual difference variable (e.g., Higgins, 1998). External factors also affect whether people adopt more of a promotion versus prevention focus; in a later section we discuss possible workplace determinants of employees' regulatory focus.

REGULATORY FOCUS THEORY AND EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

Regulatory focus theory posits that people's degree of promotion and prevention focus influences the nature and magnitude of their emotional reactions to success and failure. In a typical self-regulatory episode, people engage in behavior designed to bring themselves in line with the goals and standards (ideal or ought) associated with their predominant focus. When promotion focused, the person strategically tries to match his/her behavior to a goal or standard (e.g., a research scientist eagerly performing groundbreaking experiments to discover a cure for human disease). When prevention focused, the person strategically tries to avoid behaviors that mismatch a goal or standard (e.g., an employee in a downsized organization who is careful to do what is necessary to be retained in a subsequent downsizing). At one or more points during the episode people make inferences about the effectiveness of their self-regulatory efforts, which gives rise to their experience of emotion.

Types of Empirical Questions Examined in Previous Research

Previous research has analyzed different aspects of a typical self-regulatory episode (Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997; Roney, Higgins, & Shah, 1995).

For example, the judgments people make about their self-regulatory effectiveness may pertain to the extent to which they reached their ultimate goal (outcome feedback) or to the degree of progress they are making in the process of trying to reach their ultimate goal (process feedback).

Other research has looked at the effect of regulatory focus on the level of motivation people exhibited in trying to match their behavior to standard (Shah, Higgins, & Friedman, 1998). While emotion may not have been measured in these studies, it is quite likely that people's emotions were affected nonetheless. The prospect that (unmeasured) emotion was influenced in these studies is based on the premise that people's level of motivation is positively related to the magnitude of emotion they experience upon perceiving how well they have performed. People striving hard who succeed (fail) will experience more positive (negative) emotion, relative to their less motivated counterparts. Put differently, people's level of motivation is a precursor or predictor of the strength of their emotional experiences.

Regulatory Focus and Emotionality: A Conceptual Organizing Framework

The nature and magnitude of people's emotional experience depend on regulatory focus processes. More specifically, the *nature* of their emotional experience is dictated by whether they are promotion focused or prevention focused. When promotion focused, people's emotional experience varies along a cheerful-dejected dimension. Positive feedback (self-regulatory effectiveness) brings about cheerful reactions, whereas negative feedback (self-regulatory ineffectiveness) elicits dejection and disappointment. When prevention focused, their emotional reactions vary along a quiescence-agitation dimension. Positive feedback leads to quiescence while negative feedback elicits agitation (e.g., anger and fear).

One determinant of the *magnitude* of the emotions experienced within each type of regulatory focus is the extent to which people's actual self falls short of their goal or standard (i.e., self-regulatory ineffectiveness), hereafter referred to as a negative discrepancy. The more negative the discrepancy, the more likely are people to experience negative emotional reactions (dejection in the case of a promotion focus and agitation in the case of a prevention focus). To test this hypothesis, Strauman and Higgins (1989) assessed the magnitude of the negative discrepancies between people's actual self/ideal self and their actual self/ought self. Two months later, participants completed various measures of emotionality. Factor analysis of the latter measures revealed two dimensions: disappointment/dissatisfaction (e.g., "disappointed in yourself") and fear/restlessness (e.g., "feeling you are or will be punished"). The relationship between the magnitude of the actual self/ideal self discrepancy and disappointment/dissatisfaction was significant, but there was no relationship between actual self/ideal self discrepancy and fear/restlessness. Moreover, the relationship between actual self/ought self discrepancy and fear/restlessness was significant, but there was no relationship between actual self/ought self discrepancy and disappointment/dissatisfaction.

A second determinant of the magnitude of people's emotional experience within each type of regulatory focus is the psychological significance of the goal or standard. The significance of the goal or standard moderates the relationship between the size of the discrepancy and degree of emotionality such that the relationship is more pronounced when the psychological significance of the goal or standard is relatively high (Higgins, 1989).

In sum, regulatory focus theory extends our understanding of emotions in at least two important ways. First, although it has long been known that people have more positive emotional reactions to more favorable feedback about their self-regulatory effectiveness, taking their regulatory focus into account helps to specify further *the nature of* those reactions (cheerfulness versus quiescence in the case of positive feedback and dejection versus agitation in the case of negative feedback).

Second, prior research has identified two major taxonomic dimensions that capture people's emotional experience: (a) valence (e.g., Watson et al., 1988) and (b) arousal/activation level (e.g., Russell, 1978). Note, however, that this two-factor taxonomy is primarily descriptive. While it helps to elucidate *what* people experience emotionally, it does not explain *why* people have those experiences. In contrast, regulatory focus theory helps to explain people's emotionality in part by delineating the factors that affect whether they will have one type of emotional experience rather than another. Degree of promotion and prevention focus, in conjunction with self-regulatory effectiveness, influence people's emotions. Importantly, the emotions emanating from regulatory focus and self-regulatory effectiveness dovetail with those suggested by the two-factor taxonomy. That is, the combination of high promotion focus and high self-regulatory effectiveness gives rise to cheerfulness (positive valence/high arousal). High promotion focus and low self-regulatory effectiveness elicits dejection (negative valence/low arousal). The combination of high prevention focus and high self-regulatory effectiveness induces quiescence (positive valence/low arousal). High prevention focus and low self-regulatory effectiveness produces agitation (negative valence/high arousal).

Elsewhere, Higgins (2001) has further delineated the factors mediating the effects of regulatory focus and self-regulatory effectiveness on emotions. While it is beyond the scope of this article to describe Higgins' (2001) analysis, the crucial point for present purposes is that regulatory focus theory provides explanatory power beyond previous conceptions of emotions that have identified valence and arousal as central organizing dimensions.

The Operationalization(s) of Regulatory Focus

Whether people adopt more of a promotion focus or prevention focus is a function of situational and dispositional factors. Accordingly, regulatory focus has been operationalized through a variety of experimental manipulations and also as an individual difference measure. One operationalization of a situational determinant of regulatory focus was based on the framing of the perceived

contingency between people's performance and the consequences of their performance. For example, all participants in a recent study (Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997) worked on a task in which their pay was tied to how well they performed. Those in the promotion focus condition were informed that they stood to gain additional money by performing at or above a certain level on the memory task; thus, they were induced to think of their outcome as either gains (if they succeeded) or nongains (if they failed). Those in the prevention focus condition were told that it was possible for them not to lose money by performing at or above the same level on the task; that is, they were induced to think of their outcomes as either nonlosses (if they succeeded) or losses (if they failed).¹

Another situational induction of regulatory focus uses a priming manipulation to vary people's attention to different types of standards. Those primed to be promotion focused are "asked to describe the kind of person that they and their parents would ideally like them to be and to discuss whether there had been any change over the years in these hopes and aspirations for them" (Higgins, 1998, p. 11). In contrast, those primed to be prevention focused are "asked to describe the kind of person that they and their parents believed they ought to be and whether there had been any change over the years in these beliefs about their duties and obligations" (Higgins, 1998, p. 11). Importantly, studies have shown that both the framing and priming manipulations (combined with self-regulatory effectiveness) have highly similar effects on people's emotional experiences (Higgins, 1998).

The individual difference measure of regulatory focus was derived from response latencies exhibited by participants when completing a survey known

¹ It is important to describe how this situational induction of regulatory focus differs from a more conventional manipulation of framing (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). In the latter, people are led to attend to *either* the positive or the negative consequences of a decision. For example, in Kahneman and Tversky's classic "Asian disease" problem (in which people are forewarned about the outbreak of a disease that is expected to lead to 600 deaths), in the positive frame condition people are told that one of the plans to counteract the disease will save 200 lives, whereas in the negative frame condition they are told that one of the plans to counteract the disease will lead to the loss of 400 lives. In contrast, the situational induction of regulatory focus used by Higgins, Shah, and Friedman (1997) and others provides all people with information about *both* the positive and negative consequences of an occurrence. What is varied, however, is the nature of the information. In the promotion focus condition people are led to think about gains (if they succeed) and nongains (if they fail). In the prevention focus condition people are led to think about nonlosses (if they succeed) and losses (if they fail). If people were merely responding to whether they were given information about positive consequences or negative consequences (as in a typical framing study), then the Higgins et al. induction of regulatory focus should have no effect in that participants in both the promotion and prevention focus conditions are given information about both types of outcomes. In a related vein, the difference between being promotion focused versus prevention focused does not simply refer to the age-old distinction between the desire to approach a positive end-state versus the desire to avoid a negative end-state. The content of *both* ideal standards (hopes and aspirations) and ought standards (duties and responsibilities) represent desired end-states. The distinction between being promotion focused and prevention focused resides in the *process* that people use (strategic approach or eagerness versus strategic avoidance or vigilance) to try to bring about the desired end-state.

as the Selves Questionnaire (Higgins, 1989). The Selves Questionnaire requires participants to list attributes that comprise the person that they would ideally like to be and (different) attributes that define the person that they believe they ought to be. After listing each of their ideal self attributes, participants make two ratings: (a) the extent to which they would ideally like to possess that attribute and (b) the extent to which they believe that they actually possess that attribute. Similarly, after listing their ought self attributes, people indicate the extent to which they ought to possess that attribute and the extent to which they believe that they actually possess that attribute.

The amount of time participants took to make ratings of their ideal, ought, and actual selves constituted the measure of the strength of their regulatory focus. Research on attitudes has shown that people have a shorter response latency when asked questions about attitudes that are more psychologically significant or accessible to them (Fazio, 1995). The same logic has been applied to measure the strength or importance of people's regulatory focus. The less time it took for people to list their ideal self-attributes and make judgments about how ideal those attributes were, and the extent to which they believed they actually possessed the ideal attributes, the stronger their promotion focus has been shown to be. Similarly, the less time it took for them to list their ought self-attributes and make judgments about how much they ought to possess those attributes, and the extent to which they believed they actually possessed the ought attributes, the stronger their prevention focus has been shown to be (e.g., Higgins, 1998).

Regulatory Focus, Self-Regulatory Effectiveness Feedback, and Emotionality

Outcome feedback. Higgins, Shah, and Friedman (1997) conducted a series of studies on people's emotional experiences as a function of the strength of their regulatory focus and the type of negative discrepancy they experienced: (a) one concerning the magnitude of the negative discrepancy between their actual self and ideal self and (b) the other concerning the magnitude of the negative discrepancy between their actual self and ought self. Moreover, two sets of emotional experiences were assessed. One consisted of dejection-related items (e.g., disappointed, discouraged, low, and sad), which were expected to be rated more strongly among promotion-focused participants who perceived a greater discrepancy between their actual and ideal selves. The other consisted of agitation-related items (e.g., agitated, on edge, uneasy, and tense), which were expected to be rated more strongly by prevention-focused participants who perceived a greater discrepancy between their actual and ought selves.

Three of the studies consisted of correlational designs in which people completed the Selves Questionnaire. The content of their ratings allowed the investigators to determine the magnitude of the negative discrepancies between their actual self with each of their ideal and ought selves. Response latencies for ideal and ought attributes were used to assess the strength of people's promotion and prevention foci, respectively.

The results of all three studies strongly supported the predictions. Strength

of promotion focus interacted with the magnitude of the discrepancy between actual self and ideal self to influence dejection-related emotions; greater discrepancies led to greater dejection among people with more of a promotion focus. Moreover, promotion focus and the discrepancy between actual/ideal self did not interact to influence people's agitation-related emotions. Strength of prevention focus interacted with the magnitude of the discrepancy between people's actual self and ought self to influence agitation-related emotions; greater discrepancies led to more agitation among people who had a stronger prevention focus. Furthermore, prevention focus did not interact with the magnitude of the discrepancy between actual self and ought self to influence people's dejection-related emotions.

In a fourth study Higgins et al. (1997) orthogonally manipulated regulatory focus and outcome feedback. Participants worked on a task and were told that they had a chance to earn more money if they performed well. Regulatory focus was operationalized via a framing manipulation. Those in the promotion focus condition were informed that they would receive \$5 for taking part in the study and that they could gain an additional dollar by performing at or above a certain level on the task ("If you score above the 70th percentile, then you will gain a \$1. However, if you don't score above the 70th percentile, then you will not gain \$1.") Those in the prevention focus condition were told that they would receive \$6 for taking part in the study, but that it was possible for them to lose \$1 depending on their performance on the task. ("If you score above the 70th percentile, then you won't lose \$1. However, if you don't score above the 70th percentile, then you will lose \$1.")

Self-regulatory effectiveness came in the form of outcome feedback. Half of the participants were told that they had performed above the 70th percentile (high effectiveness condition), whereas half were told that they had performed below the 70th percentile (low effectiveness condition). All participants completed two sets of emotional reactions. One consisted of items pertinent to the cheerfulness–dejection dimension (happy vs discouraged), whereas the other consisted of items relevant to the quiescence–agitated dimension (relaxed vs tense). Consistent with their correlational findings, Higgins et al. (1997) found an interaction between regulatory focus and self-regulatory effectiveness. Greater ineffectiveness led participants induced to have a promotion focus to exhibit more of an increase in dejection than agitation, relative to their counterparts in the prevention focus condition. Furthermore, greater ineffectiveness led prevention-focused participants to show more of a boost in agitation than dejection relative to those in the promotion focus condition.

Process feedback. People do not only make judgments about the success of their attempts to self-regulate (and thus experience emotion) in response to outcome feedback. When in the process of self-regulating, they are likely to ask themselves questions such as, "How am I doing?" Their answer to this question dictates whether they will experience emotional pleasure or pain. Moreover, Roney, Higgins, and Shah (1995) tested the hypothesis that the *type* of emotional pleasure or pain people experience depends on their regulatory

focus. In this study participants worked on a task in which they were assigned a specific performance goal. Their level of emotionality on the dimensions of cheerful–disappointed and calm–agitated were assessed before they worked on the task, in the middle of the process, and after they completed the task. The task was relatively easy, making it likely that participants would perceive that they were progressing nicely along the way; in fact, they did ultimately succeed at the task.

Regulatory focus was experimentally manipulated by the framing of the performance goal and consequences for goal attainment. All participants were told that after completing the task they would have to work on one of two tasks, one interesting and the other dull. Those in the promotion focus condition were told that they would be allowed to work on the interesting task if they solved 22 of the 25 problems in the current task; if they did not, they would have to work on the dull task. In contrast, participants in the prevention focus condition were told that if they did not solve four or more of the 25 problems in the current task they would have to work on the dull task; otherwise they would be allowed to work on the interesting task. Of greatest concern is how participants' emotionality changed in the middle of the activity (during which they should have made process feedback inferences) relative to before they started working on the task. Those in the promotion focus condition were more cheerful than they were at the outset but were not more calm. In contrast, those in the prevention focus condition were more calm than they were at the outset, but were no more cheerful. Thus, the participants in this study experienced emotion even prior to the receipt of final outcome feedback, and the nature of their emotion differed depending on whether they were promotion focused or prevention focused.

Regulatory Focus as a Precursor to (Predictor of) Emotionality

Previous theory and research have established strong associations between people's level of motivation and the emotions they experience when making inferences about how well they performed (e.g., Weiner, 1986). The stronger the motivation (i.e., the more vigorously people attempt to achieve desired outcomes or avoid undesired outcomes), the greater the degree of emotionality they experience, for better or worse. That is, highly motivated people who succeed feel better than less motivated people who succeed, and highly motivated people who fail feel worse than less motivated people who fail.

Identifying the factors affecting people's motivation to self-regulate thus offers insight into the degree of emotion that they are ready to experience, pending their judgments of how well they have performed. However, regulatory focus does more than specify factors affecting people's level of motivation; it distinguishes between promotion-focused motivation and prevention-focused motivation (and thus between the types of corresponding emotional experiences). In this way, regulatory focus theory has much to say about the precursors (or predictors) of employees' emotional experience.

Comparing positive and negative incentives. A question for the ages in psychology, and organizational psychology in particular, is whether incentives are more motivating if they provide people with positive outcomes for goal attainment or enable them to avoid negative outcomes for goal attainment. Queried differently, which is more motivating, a promotion focus incentive system or a prevention focus incentive system? Regulatory focus theory suggests that there is no single answer to this question. Instead, it identifies the conditions under which (or the people for whom) one type of incentive system will be more motivating than the other (and thereby elicit different types and degrees of emotionality).

A central concept in organizational psychology is the notion of person/organization fit (e.g., Chatman, 1989). The general premise is that employees' work attitudes and behaviors are more positive (e.g., motivation will be greater) when their skills, needs, and interests are congruent with various aspects of their work environments. More specifically for present purposes, we posit that incentive systems will have greater reward value and hence elicit greater motivation when they are congruent with people's needs and strategic orientations.² When people are promotion focused they should be more motivated by a so-called "positive" incentive system that gives them the opportunity to gain the goal through gains and advancements; what they want to ensure against is failing to eagerly pursue all means of advancing to the goal, which would result in a nongain. Alternatively, when they are prevention focused they should be more motivated by a so-called "negative" incentive system that gives them the opportunity to attain the goal by being careful and vigilant to ensure nonlosses; what they want to ensure against is committing mistakes, which would result in a loss.

This reasoning was tested in a recent study by Shah, Higgins, and Friedman (1998). All participants worked on a task and were given the same goal of solving 90% of the problems given to them. Also, all of the participants stood to earn \$5 if they succeeded and \$4 if they failed. The presentation of the incentive system was experimentally manipulated. Half were given a promotion focus in which they were told that by solving 90% of the problems they would earn an extra dollar and that if they failed to solve 90% of the problems they would not receive the extra dollar. The remaining half were induced into a prevention focus by telling them that they could avoid losing a dollar they already had by not missing more than 10% of the problems and that they would lose the dollar if they missed more than 10% of the problems. Importantly, there was no overall performance difference as a function of the framing of the incentive system per se. There was, however, an interaction between the framing of the incentive system and people's dispositional tendencies to be promotion focused versus prevention focused. Participants whose dispositional regulatory

² Hackman and Oldham (1976) made a similar point in the case of tasks which provided intrinsic rewards. People high in growth needs exhibited more of a relationship between intrinsically rewarding job characteristics and motivation/satisfaction than did their counterparts with lower growth needs.

focus was congruent with the framing of the incentives (i.e., promotion-focused individuals who were given the promotion framing, and prevention-focused people who were assigned to the prevention framing) performed better than those who experienced a lack of fit between their dispositional tendencies and the framing of the incentive systems.

Assuming that the effect of congruence between dispositional and situational regulatory focus on performance was mediated by motivation, we also can provide informed speculations about the nature of the emotions that participants were likely to have experienced in the various conditions. Regulatory focus theory suggests that participants' emotional experience in the two conditions of person/situation congruence may have differed, even though both groups performed equally well. The favorable performance elicited by person-situation congruence in promotion focus may have caused people to feel relatively cheerful, whereas the same favorable performance elicited by person/situation congruence in prevention focus may have caused people to feel relatively quiescent.

Furthermore, people in the incongruent conditions may have experienced different emotions even though they performed similarly (poorly). Those with a dispositional promotion focus who performed poorly because of the incongruent (i.e., prevention focused) incentive system may have felt disappointed, while those with a dispositional prevention focus who performed poorly because of the incongruent (i.e., promotion focused) incentive system may have felt agitated.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REGULATORY FOCUS AND EMOTIONALITY

Person-Organization Fit

The notion that person-organization fit leads to more favorable work attitudes and behaviors is hardly novel. What the Shah *et al.* (1998) findings suggest, however, is that a fundamental dimension along which to assess the degree of congruence between employees and their work environments has been omitted from previous theory and research: regulatory focus. Higgins (2000) has recently described the many implications for decision making of the degree of fit between the regulatory focus orientation of people and their environments. For instance, people actually assign greater monetary value to a chosen object when environmental cues made the choice *process* more congruent with their dispositional tendencies toward promotion and prevention focus, independent of the value of the object itself.

In addition to the fact that greater person-environment regulatory focus fit heightens work motivation (and thus the valence and degree of their postfeedback emotions), regulatory focus theory also suggests that *within* different states of person-environment fit employees may have different emotional experiences. The emotion elicited by promotion-focused congruence between people and organizations (e.g., cheerfulness) is likely to be different than the emotion elicited by prevention-focused congruence between people and organizations (e.g., quiescence).

Goal-Setting Theory and Research

Research has shown that people often perform better when working on a task having a specific, challenging goal (Locke & Latham, 1990). All of the participants in the Shah, Higgins, and Friedman (1998) study were exposed to a specific, challenging goal (i.e., to solve 90% of the problems). Although the goal was identical for all participants, their performance was not. We think this is because the independent variables in the study influenced participants' level of goal acceptance or commitment. People will be more accepting of or committed to goals when they perceive that more is at stake, that is, when the consequences for attaining or failing to the goal are greater (Locke & Latham, 1990). What may have influenced the perceived stakes in the Shah et al. (1998) study was the degree of congruence between participants' dispositional tendency to be promotion versus prevention focused and the situational framing of the incentive system. Those for whom the incentive system was congruent with their dispositional regulatory focus may have felt that more was at stake (e.g., that attaining the goal would be more rewarding) relative to those who experienced a lack of congruence between their dispositional regulatory focus and the framing of the incentive system.

A major focus in the goal-setting literature is to delineate the conditions under which specific, challenging goals influence people's motivation and performance. On the one hand, the Shah et al. (1998) study is consistent with this orientation by showing that the congruence between dispositional and situational regulatory foci moderated the impact of specific, challenging goals on performance. On the other hand, regulatory focus theory calls attention to a more neglected aspect of the goal-setting literature by focusing on the emotional consequences of goal attainment/nonattainment. To the extent that specific, challenging goals elicit greater work motivation, people should experience more positive emotions when they attain the goal and more negative emotions when they fail to attain the goal (Locke, 1968). Of greater importance, regulatory focus theory suggests that the *nature* of the emotional consequences of goal attainment/nonattainment may be quite different, depending on whether people engaged in goal-directed behavior with a promotion or prevention focus. The emotional reactions of promotion-focused persons should range from cheerfulness to dejection, depending on their perceived self-regulatory effectiveness. In contrast, the emotions of prevention-focused persons should range from quiescence to agitation, depending on their self-regulatory effectiveness.

Expectancy-Valence Theory

The predominant explanation of work motivation in organizational psychology is expectancy-valence theory (e.g., Vroom, 1964). According to this viewpoint, people's work motivation is influenced by their expectancies of the outcomes of their behaviors as well as the reward value that they attach to those outcomes. Moreover, the theory posits that expectancies and values combine interactively to influence people's work motivation. More specifically, the effect of expectancies on motivation is considerably greater when the reward value

(or valence) of the outcomes is relatively high. Put differently, when outcomes have little consequence people's level of motivation is relatively unaffected by their expectations for success (Behling & Starke, 1973).

While some studies have found support for the above-mentioned interactive relationship between expectancies and valences (e.g., Feather, 1988), others have not (e.g., Feather & O'Brien, 1987). Regulatory focus theory specifies the conditions under which expectancies and valences are more versus less likely to interact to influence motivation in the manner predicted by expectancy-valence theory. In particular, promotion focus entails behavior in which people use strategic *approach* means to attain a desired end-state. Behaviors enacted under a promotion focus refer to motivation in which people eagerly seek to maximize the product of their outcome expectancies and outcome valences. The net effect of promotion-focused strivings is that the interaction between expectancies and valences should take the form predicted by expectancy-valence theory (Vroom, 1964). As outcome valence increases, the effect of expectancies for success on motivation should increase. Put differently, the motivation level of promotion-focused people faced with a low outcome valence should be less influenced by their expectancies for success relative to when their outcome valence is high (see the top half of Fig. 1 for a graphical representation of the predicted effect on motivation of expectancy and valence for promotion-focused individuals).

In contrast, a prevention focus leads to behavior in which people use strategic *avoidance* means to attain a desired end-state. As Higgins (1998) suggested:

a prevention focus on goals as security or safety might induce an . . . inclination to avoid all unnecessary risks by striving to meet . . . responsibilities that are clearly necessary (i.e., high value prevention goals). As the value of a prevention goal increases, the goal becomes a necessity like . . . the safety of one's child. When a goal becomes a necessity, one *must* do whatever one can to attain it regardless of the ease or likelihood of goal attainment. That is, expectancy information becomes less relevant as a prevention goal becomes more like a necessity. (p. 35)

This reasoning suggests that the interaction between expectancies and valences will take a very different form for prevention-focused individuals. Specifically, when people have a prevention focus the tendency for more favorable expectancies to lead to greater motivation should be less pronounced when outcome valence is higher (i.e., more like a necessity; see the bottom half of Fig. 1 for a graphical representation of the hypothesized interactive relationship between expectancy and valence among prevention-focused persons).

Shah and Higgins (1997) reported four studies in which the nature of the interactive relationship between expectancies and valences varied as a function of regulatory focus. For example, in one study participants having a dispositional tendency to maintain either a promotion or prevention focus worked on a task. They were told that by performing at a certain level they could earn extra money. Participants also rated their expectancies for being able to perform at the level needed to earn additional money as well as the valence associated with earning the additional money. Among participants with a promotion focus, the interaction between expectancies and valence took the form posited by

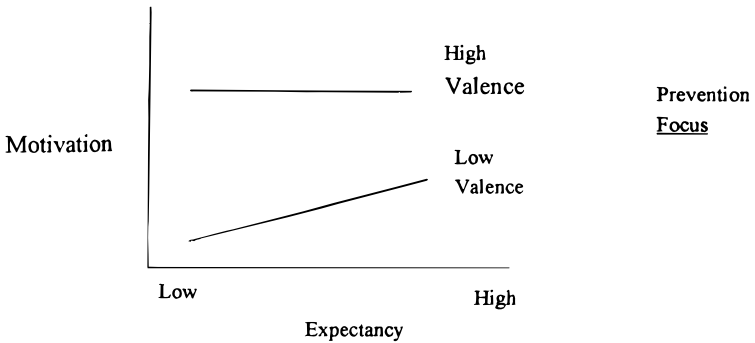
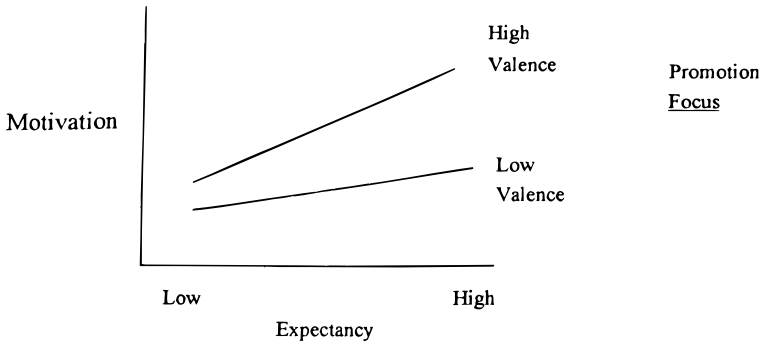


FIG. 1. Motivation when promotion and prevention focused as a function of expectancy and valence.

expectancy-valence theory: the tendency for expectancies to be more positively related to performance was more pronounced when outcome valence was high rather than low.

The interaction exhibited by participants with a prevention focus took a very different form. Among this group, the tendency for expectancies to be more positively related to performance was less pronounced when outcome valence was higher. In other words, prevention-focused individuals did not behave in the manner predicted by expectancy-valence theory.

What about the emotional consequences of expectancies, valences, and regulatory focus? Shah and Higgins (1997) did not include emotion as a dependent variable. However, it is possible to offer some informed speculations. As mentioned above, the nature and magnitude of people's emotional experiences depends on their regulatory focus, level of motivation, and self-regulatory effectiveness. Given that expectancies and valences influence people's level of motivation, those conditions in which expectancies and valences give rise to higher levels of motivation should be associated with more positive emotions when

they succeed and more negative emotions when they fail. Furthermore, the emotions should vary on a cheerful–disappointed dimension when people are in promotion focus and on a quiescence–agitated dimension when they are in a prevention focus.

Given that expectancies and valences combine to influence motivation differently as a function of regulatory focus when their valences are high while their expectancies are low, a caveat about people's emotional experiences is in order under such conditions. As can be seen in Fig. 1, the combination of low expectancy and high valence is the only instance in which regulatory focus influences people's *level* of motivation such that motivation is greater when people are in a prevention focus than in a promotion focus. An intriguing implication of this finding is that when people maintain low outcome expectancies and high outcome valences, their emotions will differ as a function of their regulatory focus *both* in nature *and* in magnitude. Given the higher motivation exhibited by prevention-focused individuals with low expectancies and high valences, they should experience relatively *strong quiescence* when they succeed and relatively *strong agitation* when they fail. Given the lower motivation exhibited by promotion-focused individuals with low expectancies and high valences, they should experience relatively *mild cheerfulness* when they happen to succeed and *mild disappointment* when they happen to fail.³

“Between-Emotion” Comparisons and Behavioral Decision Theory

The salient dimension of emotional experience associated with a promotion focus (cheerfulness–dejection) differs in nature from that associated with a prevention focus (quiescence–agitation). Thus far, our discussion has focused on the factors that affect the degree of cheerfulness–dejection or quiescence–agitation that people experience *within* the corresponding regulatory focus states of promotion and prevention, respectively.

Regulatory focus theory also delineates differences in the degree of people's emotional experience *between* the two states of promotion and prevention. For example, the magnitude or intensity of people's emotionality depends on whether they are experiencing the pleasure of cheerfulness or the pleasure of quiescence. Similarly, the magnitude of their emotionality depends on whether they are experiencing the pain of dejection or the pain of agitation. Idson, Liberman, and Higgins (2000) recently tested the hypotheses that the subjective experience of positive emotion following success is more intense when people are promotion focused than prevention focused (i.e., that cheerfulness

³ The speculation that promotion-focused people with low expectancies and high valences would experience relatively mild emotion was based on the assumption that their motivation level will be lower relative to prevention-focused people with low expectancies and high valences (as illustrated in Fig. 1). If this assumption is not correct (i.e., if promotion-focused people with low expectancies and high valences actually exhibit high motivation), they may experience especially strong levels of emotion. For example, they may feel particularly cheerful if they happen to succeed. That is, if they were motivated enough to take on a challenge in which the chances of success seemed remote, and yet were successful, their feelings of cheerfulness may be especially high.

is more intense than quiescence) and that the subjective experience of negative emotion following failure is more intense when people are prevention focused than promotion focused (i.e., that agitation is more intense than dejection).

The principle underlying the Idson et al. (2000) predictions concerns the motivational intensity that underlies emotions. Regulatory focus theory proposes (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Higgins, 1997, 1998) that individuals with a promotion focus tend to use eagerness approach means in goal pursuit because eagerness means ensure the presence of positive outcomes (ensure hits and look for means of advancement) and ensure against the absence of positive outcomes (ensure against errors of omission and do not close off possibilities). Individuals with a prevention focus tend to use vigilance avoidance means in goal pursuit because vigilance means ensure the absence of negative outcomes (ensure correct rejections and be careful) and ensure against the presence of negative outcomes (ensure against errors of commission and avoid mistakes). The eagerness of individuals in a promotion focus is maintained by a positive outcome (gain and “joy”) but is reduced by a negative outcome (nongain and “sad”), whereas the vigilance of individuals in a prevention focus is maintained by a negative outcome (loss and “worried”) but is reduced by a positive outcome (nonloss and “calm”). Forster, Higgins, and Idson (1998) found, for example, that motivational intensity was stronger with promotion success than promotion failure and was stronger with prevention failure than prevention success. Thus, for positive outcomes or success the intensity of emotions is higher for a promotion than a prevention focus (eagerness is maintained but vigilance is not), whereas for negative outcomes or failure the intensity of emotions is higher for a prevention than a promotion focus (vigilance is maintained but eagerness is not).

Participants in the Idson et al. (2000) study read hypothetical scenarios in which they were induced to be either promotion focused or prevention focused. One of the promotion focus scenarios read as follows:

You are in a bookstore, buying a book that you need. The book's price is \$65. As you wait in line to pay, you realize that the store offers a \$5 discount for paying in cash, and you decide (that you want) to pay cash.

The corresponding prevention focus scenario was the following:

You are in a bookstore, buying a book that you need. The book's price is \$60. As you wait in line to pay, you realize that the store charges a \$5 penalty for paying in credit, and you decide (that you want) to pay cash.

Outcome valence also was manipulated. Promotion focus participants were told either that, “You look in your purse, and you realize that you actually have the cash, so that you will be getting the discount” (gain condition) or that “You look in your purse, and you realize that you don't have the cash. You will have to use your credit card, so that you will not be getting the discount” (nongain condition). In the prevention focus conditions, participants were told either that, “You look in your purse, and you realize that you actually have the cash, so that you will not be paying the penalty” (nonloss condition), or that, “You look in your purse, and you realize that you don't have the cash.

You will have to use the credit card, so that you will be paying the penalty" (loss condition).

All participants then were asked to indicate how bad or good they felt about the outcome as a function of regulatory focus and valence of the outcome. As might be expected, participants reported feeling much better about outcomes that were positive (in the gain and nonloss conditions) than those which were negative (in the nongain and loss conditions). Of greater importance, regulatory focus also influenced how they felt about their outcomes. Those with a positive outcome valence felt better about their outcomes when they were promotion focused (gain condition) than when they were prevention focused (nonloss condition). Furthermore, those with a negative outcome valence felt worse about their outcomes when they were prevention focused (loss condition) than when they were promotion focused (nongain condition).

Such findings are consistent with the possibility that the promotion-focused positive emotion of cheerfulness is more intense than the prevention-focused positive emotion of quiescence and that the prevention-focused negative emotion of agitation is more intense than the promotion-focused negative emotion of dejection. To evaluate this possibility further, Idson et al. (2000) conducted another study in which participants varying dispositionally in their tendencies to be promotion focused or prevention focused worked on a task in which they were told that they would receive more money if they performed better rather than worse. The outcome was described identically to all participants; that is, unlike the preceding study there was *no* experimental framing. Participants then were given feedback that they had done either well or poorly. It was assumed that promotion-focused participants would spontaneously represent positive feedback as a gain and failure as a nongain, whereas prevention-focused persons would spontaneously represent positive feedback as a nonloss and negative feedback as a loss. All participants then completed a measure of emotion consisting of the following four items: happy, discouraged, relaxed, and tense.

Note that the four items map onto the various types of emotions created by a 2×2 factorial crossing of regulatory focus (promotion versus prevention) and valence of emotion (positive versus negative). Separate analyses were conducted on each of the items, for which Table 1 shows the corresponding means. Among those participants given negative feedback, the tendency to respond more negatively (or less positively) if they were prevention focused rather than promotion focused was more pronounced on the prevention-focused negative emotion (tense; *M*s of 5.28 and 4.02, respectively) than on the promotion-focused negative emotion (discouraged; *M*s = 4.84 and 4.14, respectively). Moreover, the tendency for negative outcome participants to respond less positively if they were prevention focused rather than promotion focused was more pronounced on the prevention-focused positive emotion (relaxed; *M*s = 4.19 and 5.46, respectively) than on the promotion-focused positive emotion (happy; *M*s = 5.38 and 5.35, respectively).

Among participants given favorable performance feedback, their tendency to respond more positively (or less negatively) if they were promotion focused

TABLE 1

Means of Different Types of Emotional Intensity as a Function of Valence of Feedback and Regulatory Focus (from Idson, Liberman, & Higgins, 1999)

| Valence of feedback | Regulatory focus | |
|---------------------|------------------|-----------|
| | Prevention | Promotion |
| Negative outcome | | |
| Tense | 5.28 | 4.02 |
| Discouraged | 4.84 | 4.14 |
| Relaxed | 4.19 | 5.46 |
| Happy | 5.38 | 5.35 |
| Positive outcome | | |
| Tense | 4.31 | 4.47 |
| Discouraged | 3.24 | 2.97 |
| Relaxed | 5.24 | 5.89 |
| Happy | 5.46 | 6.29 |

Note. Source could range from 1 to 9, with higher scores reflecting a stronger experience of the corresponding emotional state.

than prevention focused was more pronounced on the promotion-focused positive emotion (happy; $M_s = 6.29$ and 5.46 , respectively) than on the prevention-focused positive emotion (relaxed; $M_s = 5.89$ and 5.24 , respectively). Furthermore, their tendency to respond less negatively if they were promotion focused rather than prevention focused was more pronounced on the promotion-focused negative emotion (discouraged; $M_s = 2.97$ and 3.24 , respectively) than on the prevention-focused negative emotion (tense; $M_s = 4.47$ and 4.31 , respectively).

Taken together, these findings provide strong support for the notion that the intensity of people's positive and negative emotions does not vary simply as a function of outcome valence. It also varies within positive valence and within negative valence as a function of regulatory focus. When promotion-focused persons experience a favorable outcome (a gain), their positive experience of emotion will be more intense than that of prevention-focused persons who experience an objectively equivalent favorable outcome (a nonloss) because the eagerness of the former is maintained, whereas the vigilance of the latter is not. When prevention-focused persons experience an unfavorable outcome (a loss), their negative experience of emotion will be more intense than that of promotion-focused persons who experience an objectively equivalent unfavorable outcome (a nongain) because the vigilance of the former is maintained, whereas the eagerness of the latter is not.

Moreover, the results presented in Table 1 suggest, as Idson *et al.* (2000) put it, the following:

the greater intensity of pain felt by participants with a strong prevention focus compared to those with a strong promotion focus is agitation-related pain rather than dejection-related pain. Similarly, . . . in response to a positive outcome, the greater intensity of pleasure felt by participants with a strong promotion focus compared to those with a strong prevention focus is cheerfulness-related pleasure rather than quiescence-related pleasure. (p. 266)

Implications for behavioral decision theory. A central tenet of behavioral decision theory is that “losses loom larger than gains” (e.g., losing \$10 feels bad to a greater extent than winning \$10 feels good). The tendency for losses to loom larger than gains accounts for the “endowment effect,” which posits that people find it more painful to incur a loss than to forego a gain of the same magnitude (Thaler, 1980). Consistent with the endowment effect, Idson *et al.* (2000) found that losses were experienced as subjectively more intense than were nongains.

The “losses loom larger than gains” effect also leads to the prediction that the positive experience associated with a nonloss (quiescence) should be more intense than the positive experience associated with a gain (cheerfulness). However, Idson *et al.* found the exact opposite to be the case. Thus, regulatory focus theory offers an important refinement to behavioral decision theory. The assertion that losses loom larger than gains *depends on people’s regulatory focus* (Liberman, Idson, & Higgins, 2000). Consistent with behavioral decision theory, the experience of negative outcomes for people in a prevention focus is more intense than the experience of the objectively equivalent outcome for people in a promotion focus; loss (agitation) is more intense than a nongain (dejection). However, contrary to behavioral decision theory (but consistent with regulatory focus theory), the experience of positive outcomes for people in a promotion focus is more intense than the experience of the identical outcome for people in a prevention focus; gain (cheerfulness) is more intense than a nonloss (quiescence).

THE CORRELATES/CONSEQUENCES OF EMOTIONS INDUCED BY REGULATORY FOCUS

In this section we consider how variation in employees’ emotions attributable to being promotion versus prevention focused influences (or at least predicts) their beliefs and behaviors on the job. Regulatory focus theory suggests that employees experience different types of emotional pleasures and pains. Each type of pleasure and pain, moreover, may affect their work attitudes and behaviors. Let us first consider differences between the positive emotions. As Idson *et al.* (2000) discovered, the emotional intensity emanating from a promotion focus success (cheerfulness) is greater than the emotional intensity that grows out of a prevention focus success (quiescence). This finding raises the possibility that work attitudes such as job satisfaction may be experienced more intensely when people succeed on the job with a promotion focus than with a prevention focus.

Furthermore, there may be important qualitative (as well as quantitative) effects associated with the emotions resulting from people’s regulatory focus. Promotion focus is associated with trying to reach aspirations; prevention focus is associated with fulfilling duties. Reaching an aspiration is something that most people feel that they *want* to do. That is, the behaviors accompanying people’s attempts to reach their aspirations are intrinsically motivated. In contrast, fulfilling duties is something that most people believe that they *have*

to do. That is, the behaviors reflecting people's attempts to fulfill their duties are extrinsically motivated. This reasoning suggests that the emotional states resulting from people's regulatory foci may be associated with different types of motivation. Cheerfulness may reflect more intrinsic motivation than quiescence, whereas quiescence may reflect greater extrinsic motivation than cheerfulness. Thus, it is not simply that the emotional states resulting from being promotion focused or prevention focused differ in intensity; there may be qualitative differences between the emotional states as well (Friedman, 1999).

If cheerfulness reflects more of an intrinsically motivated orientation than quiescence, then the two emotional states also may lead to different behaviors. For instance, employees experiencing the more intrinsically motivated state of cheerfulness may be more creative than those who experience the more extrinsically motivated state of quiescence. Amabile's (1987) studies have shown intrinsic motivation to be one of the preconditions for creative thinking (and that extrinsic motivation often inhibits creativity). In a related vein, Crowe and Higgins (1997) found that regulatory focus influenced the riskiness of people's judgments and decisions such that promotion focus led to greater risk than prevention focus. Willingness to take risks also has been shown to facilitate creativity (Amabile, 1987; Crowe & Higgins, 1997).⁴

Employees who feel agitated (i.e., the emotional pain associated with a prevention focus failure) also are likely to think and act differently than those who feel dejected (i.e., the emotional pain associated with a promotion focus failure). Idson et al. (2000) found that the former is experienced more intensely than the latter. Other studies have suggested that the greater emotional intensity associated with agitation leads to more energetic behavioral tendencies relative to those shown by people who feel dejected. For example, in one study participants varying in their dispositional tendency to be promotion focused were asked to imagine that they had performed poorly (Higgins, Bond, Klein, & Strauman, 1986). Consistent with regulatory focus theory, the two groups showed very different emotional reactions to the (imagined) negative feedback. Promotion-focused persons became more dejected, whereas prevention-focused persons became more agitated. Furthermore, persons with a promotion focus *decreased* the speed with which they wrote on a simple writing task while those with a prevention focus *increased* their writing speed on the same task. Strauman and Higgins (1987) also found that negative feedback had the effect of decreasing the rate of responding (on a verbal rather than written task) among promotion-focused persons and increasing the rate of responding among prevention-focused individuals.

These findings suggest that relative to the emotionality of dejection, the experience of agitation gives rise to more activated or energetic behaviors. Whether the greater activation associated with agitation leads to more functional or useful behaviors, however, may depend on other factors. If the energy

⁴ Recent findings of Friedman and Forster (in press) suggest that regulatory focus also can have a direct effect on people's creative cognition, independent of their intrinsic motivation or affective states.

of agitation can be channeled in productive directions, then agitation should elicit more functional behaviors than dejection. If the energy of agitation is not properly harnessed, however, agitation may be more dysfunctional than dejection. Consider, for example, an organization whose members are feeling threatened either by external events (such as competition) or internal events (e.g., a downsizing). The energy associated with their agitation could manifest itself in any of a number of ways. They could behave in ways that help the organization to counteract the threat to its existence (e.g., working vigorously to bring a new product to the market more quickly), or they could behave more counterproductively (e.g., engaging in sabotage).

The challenge for managers under such conditions is to channel employees' energy in productive directions. This may be achieved by offering a compelling vision of a desired future state of the organization, by soliciting employees' involvement in responding to the threat, and by providing the resources and support needed to respond to the threat (Jick, 1994). In short, the greater intensity of the emotional pain felt by employees who are prevention rather than promotion focused is at once a threat *and* an opportunity to managers. Agitation managed appropriately may elicit behaviors that are particularly functional to the organization, whereas the mismanagement of agitation may lead to especially counterproductive responding.

Resistance to Organizational Change

Organizations constantly require their members to respond to (indeed, anticipate) changes in the external environment. And yet, employees often fail to embrace change. Regulatory focus theory suggests that the emotions accompanying (and possibly mediating) employees' resistance to change may take rather different forms. In prevention-focused resistance, employees may feel nervous or worried, perhaps because they sense that they cannot live up to the new *responsibilities* mandated by the change (prevention-focused resistance). In promotion-focused resistance they may feel disappointed and discouraged. They may see the change as signaling a *failure to advance*, a rejection of all that they have stood for in the past, including their hopes and wishes for themselves and their organizations.

Thus, behavioral manifestations of resistance to change, which may at first seem similar, may have very different emotional substrates. Moreover, it is entirely possible that the bases of employees' resistance to change shift over time. Their immediate concerns may be more prevention focused (e.g., finding out if they still have a job and whether they will be able to meet the new demands posed by the changes). Having successfully engaged in prevention-based self-regulation, employees may partake more in promotion-based activities, which could include questioning whether the changes they must undertake are congruent with their ideal selves. Consistent with this reasoning, stage models of people's reactions to loss (e.g., Kubler-Ross, 1969; Wortman & Brehm, 1975) suggest that agitation precedes dejection in the bereavement process.

The managerial implications of more finely considering the underlying nature of employees' resistance to change also are considerable. The action steps needed to help people deal with agitation-related resistance (e.g., providing information and resources to help people meet their basic survival needs) may be rather different from those needed to deal with dejection-related resistance (e.g., having people take part in planning or implementing a vision of how they would ideally like the organization to advance).

ANTECEDENTS OF REGULATORY FOCUS

While previous sections have described the emotional consequences of regulatory focus, there has been relatively little empirical research on the antecedents of regulatory focus. Indeed, therein lies an important mandate for future research. In an attempt to stimulate research on the antecedents of employees' regulatory focus, we offer testable propositions guided by work in related areas. For example, Higgins (1991) and Higgins and Loeb (in press) have provided theory and research on how parents' child-rearing practices influence the dispositional tendencies of their children to be promotion versus prevention focused. While parent-child relationships differ from employer-employee relationships, in both types of interchanges messages are communicated by those in positions of high authority about which behaviors are or are not hoped for or should or should not be performed; thus, there may be some overlap in the antecedents of children's and employees' regulatory foci:

In the course of transacting with their organizations, employees may infer two very different messages. One is, "This is what we in positions of organizational authority *ideally* would like you to do or not do." Another is, "This is what we in authority believe that you *ought* to do or not do." Moreover, these messages may be communicated by two categories of factors. One category refers to the everyday, ongoing behaviors exhibited by organizational authorities, including (a) behavioral role modeling, (b) the use of language and symbols, and (c) the feedback they provide to subordinates about the subordinates' attempts to self-regulate. The second category pertains to contextual aspects of the formal or informal organization.

Behavioral Role Modeling

In uncertain environments (such as those found in most work settings), people take cues from other about the appropriate ways to think, feel, and behave (Bandura, 1977; Festinger, 1954). Organizational authorities thus have the power to shape their subordinates' regulatory foci by serving as role models. The more that the actions taken by authorities suggest that they are either promotion focused or prevention focused, the more likely it may be for their subordinates to follow suit. In one study (Higgins & Loeb, in press), mothers indicated how they generally responded to their children when the children acted in certain ways. Some of the children's behaviors were positive (e.g., friendly and helpful), whereas others were negative (e.g., selfish and rude).

The researchers measured the extent to which the mothers were promotion and prevention focused; also assessed were the mothers' and children's emotions (along the promotion-focused cheerful–dejected dimension and the prevention-focused quiescent–agitated dimension).

Several noteworthy findings emerged. First, the more that the mothers were promotion focused, the more likely they were to report feeling cheerful (dejected) in response to their children's positive (negative) behaviors; among mothers who were prevention focused, there was little or no relationship between their children's behavior and the degree of cheerfulness or dejection that they experienced. However, the more that the mothers were prevention focused, the more likely were they to report feeling quiescent (agitated) in response to their children's positive (negative) behaviors; among mothers who were promotion focused, there was little or no relationship between their children's behavior and the degree of quiescence or agitation they experienced.

More pertinent to the role modeling process are the results of analyses that examined the relationship between mothers' and children's independent reports of their emotions during their encounters with each other. The more that the mothers experienced promotion-focused emotions during their encounters with their children (along the cheerfulness–dejection dimension), the more that their children did too. In addition, the more that the mothers experienced prevention-focused emotions during their encounters with their children (along the quiescence–agitation dimension), the more that their children did as well. Notably, there was no relationship between the mothers' experience of promotion-focused emotions and the children's experience of prevention-focused emotions or between the mothers' experience of prevention-focused emotions and the children's experience of promotion-focused emotions.

Future research needs to evaluate whether organizational authorities also serve as role models to their followers in shaping the latter's regulatory focus. The Higgins and Loeb (in press) findings suggest that (a) the nature and magnitude of mothers' emotionality was shaped by their regulatory focus and (b) children's experience of emotion was directly related to their mothers'. The study did not directly evaluate, however, whether mothers served as role models to be emulated with respect to their regulatory focus.

The Use of Language and Symbols

Given the uncertain nature of work environments, organizational authorities as “makers of meaning” may influence members' regulatory focus through the use of language and symbols. The more that the rhetoric of authorities focuses on ideals (e.g., continuously reminding employees of the exciting vision that the organization is trying to enact), the more likely are organization members to develop a promotion focus. The more that the rhetoric focuses on responsibilities (e.g., such as the mutual ones that employers and employees have to each other), the more likely are organization members to adopt a prevention focus. This reasoning suggests that transformational (transactional) leaders may

elicit more of a promotion (prevention) focus in their followers. Transformational leaders attempt to persuade their followers through inspirational messages (Burns, 1978). One way they do so is by appealing to their followers' ideals of how the world could be (e.g., Martin Luther King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech).

Transactional leaders are more practical and less idealistic. Their work is centered more on the *implementation* of change and not as much on the conception or formulation of change. In essence, transactional leaders say to their followers, "*Given that* we have decided to move in a certain direction, this is what you need to do to make things happen." Such appeals thus emphasize the *responsibilities* of followers during the implementation process. To the extent that followers perceive their work as responsibilities, or things that they ought to do, they are adopting a prevention focus.

The hypothesized effects of transformational and transactional leadership on followers' regulatory focus provide yet another way to differentiate the two leadership styles. Typically, distinctions in leadership style focus on the attributes or behaviors of the leaders. In contrast, we suggest that transformational and transactional leaders also may differ in the psychological states they elicit in others, in particular, the regulatory focus of their followers.

Feedback

The responses of authorities to employees' self-regulatory efforts (i.e., the feedback authorities provide) also may affect employees' regulatory focus. In their study of parents' reactions to their children's self-regulatory efforts, Higgins and Loeb (in press) found that parents could be classified as providing feedback that induced more of a promotion versus prevention focus in their children. Perhaps the nature of the feedback organizational authorities provide to employees may be categorized similarly. While it is likely that organizational authorities generally provide positive feedback when employees perform well and negative feedback when they perform poorly, the feedback which authorities administer may differ in emphasis and thereby influence employees' regulatory focus. Some authorities may emphasize the use of positive feedback such as praise, delivering it when employees succeed and withholding it when they do not. This style of delivering feedback is likely to elicit a promotion focus, especially if the praise given for success focuses on that which the employee was able to accomplish (e.g., "You helped to advance an important project") rather than negative occurrences which the employee was able to prevent (e.g., "You were very careful and thereby avoided making mistakes"). Other authorities may rely more on the use of negative feedback such as criticism, delivering it when employees fail and withholding it when they do not. This style of feedback is likely to foster a prevention focus, especially if the criticism given for failure focuses on that which the employee did not prevent (e.g., "You were too careless and thereby made mistakes") rather than that which the employee did not accomplish (e.g., "You missed out on an opportunity to advance an important project").

Previous theory and research have shown that teachers differ in the extent to which they create an intrinsically motivating or extrinsically motivating learning environment for their students (Deci & Ryan, 1985). More generally, we suggest that people in authority positions (parents, teachers, and managers in work organizations) are capable of shaping the regulatory focus of their followers. As our discussion of role modeling, use of language, and feedback suggests, authorities may affect their subordinates' tendencies to be promotion or prevention focused.

Contextual Determinants of Regulatory Focus

The regulatory focus of employees depends on factors other than their interactions with organizational authorities. For example, contextual variables probably are influential, such as the perceived nature of the reward system. On the one hand, systems in which the emphasis is on recognizing people for a job well done (and withholding recognition when the job is not well done) is likely to elicit a promotion focus. On the other hand, systems in which the focus is on sanctioning people for a job that is not well done, and not sanctioning them (or doing little) when the job is well done, should give rise to a prevention focus (Roney *et al.*, 1995).

Attributes of the organization's culture (manifested in elements other than the reward system) also may shape employees' regulatory focus. The goals and values in certain kinds of organizations are inherently prevention focused. For example, in electrical utility companies attaining the goal of profitability depends on their ability to "keep the meters running" by preventing power outages. One of our colleagues (Tracie Bagans, a manager at Florida Power & Light) recently remarked, "When people go home at night and turn on their lights, nobody calls to congratulate us. It's when power is lost that we receive feedback (big time!) from customers that they are not happy." Thus, the activities of many employees at the company consist of the process of trying to prevent circumstances that create power outages.

In contrast, the values and norms in an entrepreneurial start-up company are apt to elicit in employees a promotion focus, as they engage in the process of trying to help the company reach its goals. Such companies often reflect the vision, dreams, and ideals of their founders. To the extent that (attempting to realize) the idealistic vision of the founder has become part of the company's culture, organization members are likely to adopt a promotion focus.

Individual Differences in Regulatory Focus

Until fairly recently, theory and research on the antecedents of job satisfaction emphasized contextual factors, such as job characteristics (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) and social information (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). A number of more recent studies suggest that employees' job attitudes also have a dispositional component (e.g., Staw, Bell, & Clausen, 1986). In a related vein, there also are reliable differences between people in their dispositional tendency to

be promotion focused and prevention focused (e.g., Higgins *et al.*, 1997). The notion that employees' regulatory foci have a dispositional component provides yet another reason for managers to pay attention to their selection and placement decisions. Ensuring that employees have the desired regulatory focus is not simply a matter of contextual factors; it also depends on choosing people who have the regulatory focus tendency deemed appropriate.

In summary, a considerable amount of empirical research has shown that people's regulatory focus influences the nature and magnitude of their emotionality. Very few studies, however, have delineated the antecedents of people's regulatory focus. Moreover, no studies have looked at the antecedents of people's regulatory focus in the workplace. Future research needs to redress these deficiencies.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Traditional methods of distinguishing between employees' emotionality include (a) the phenomenological approach that attempts to show, for example, how the internal experience of dejection differs from that of agitation (e.g., Fineman, 1993); and (b) the consequences approach, which examines whether different types and degrees of emotional experience give rise to varying work attitudes or behaviors (e.g., Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Regulatory focus theory provides yet another way to differentiate employees' emotional experiences: on the basis of their antecedent conditions (Salovey & Rodin, 1984). For example, both dejection and agitation are unpleasant emotions. Moreover, both occur in response to negative feedback. What differs is the engendering condition, i.e., being promotion focused in the case of dejection and prevention focused in the case of agitation.

Previous research on regulatory focus theory provides substantial evidence supporting the central tenet underlying the present analysis; namely that whether people are promotion focused or prevention focused influences the nature and magnitude of their emotional experience. We have attempted to demonstrate that people's regulatory focus, as well as the relationship between their regulatory focus and emotionality, have important implications for their work attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction) and behaviors (e.g., motivation). Nevertheless, much needs to be learned about the effects of employees' regulatory focus on their emotions, attitudes, and behaviors.

A major purpose of this article is to encourage thought and dialogue among organizational psychologists about the implications of regulatory focus theory for their lines of inquiry. Given the wide range and types of dependent variables affected by people's regulatory focus—emotions, to be sure, but also satisfaction, motivation, and decision making (Higgins, 1998)—the potential relevance of regulatory focus theory to organizational psychology is considerable.

Further research on the organizational implications of regulatory focus theory should take at least two different forms. First, the generalizability of regulatory focus theory to organizational settings needs to be evaluated. The vast majority of prior research has consisted of laboratory experiments in which

college students took part in abstract tasks. Whether similar results would emerge in organizational settings in which employees are assessed in the context of their typical work assignments is an empirical question. Second, how organizational variables and regulatory focus processes relate to each other needs to be considered further.

Toward Greater Generalizability

A recent study by Kluger, Van-Dijk, Kass, Stein, and Lustig (1999) moves regulatory focus theory in the direction of greater face relevance to organizational settings. The purpose of the study was to account for previously contradictory effects of feedback on employees' subsequent motivation. More specifically, some studies have shown negative feedback to be more motivating than positive feedback, others find the reverse, and still others find no overall difference in the motivational consequences of negative versus positive feedback (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Kluger et al. hypothesized that whether negative or positive feedback would be more motivating depends on people's regulatory focus.

Participants consisted of employees drawn from a wide variety of organizations who took part in a scenario study in which they indicated the degree to which their motivation would be altered by feedback from their supervisor. Half were induced to have a prevention focus; they were asked to imagine that they had to keep their jobs or face the prospect of being left without income. The other half were induced to have a promotion focus; they were asked to imagine that their job was one which they always wanted to have and that they wanted to develop and advance in that job. Feedback valence was manipulated by having half of the participants imagine that their supervisor had given them negative feedback, whereas the remaining half imagined that their supervisor had given them positive feedback. The results revealed no overall effect of feedback valence on motivation, but rather an interaction between participants' regulatory focus and feedback valence. Promotion-focused individuals who received positive feedback and prevention-focused persons who received negative feedback reported that they would have become much more motivated than those in the remaining conditions. Kluger et al. (1999) did not include emotion as a dependent variable; however, it is entirely likely that promotion-focused persons who succeeded felt cheerful while the prevention-focused persons who failed felt agitated.

Although the Kluger et al. (1999) study is a useful start in showing the generalizability of regulatory focus theory to organizations, it is merely a scenario study. Even better would be to examine the effect of regulatory focus on employees' emotions, attitudes, and behaviors in actual organizational settings. As future research on the consequences of people's regulatory focus moves into organizations, it is also quite important to delineate the relationship between employees' emotions and their work attitudes and behaviors. Is it the case that employees' regulatory focus *simultaneously* influences emotions and other attitudes and behaviors? Do their behaviors influence their emotions? Or do

employees' emotional reactions mediate the relationship between their regulatory focus and their work attitudes and behaviors?

Toward a Reciprocal Relationship between Regulatory Focus Theory and Organizational Psychology

In addition to evaluating the generalizability of regulatory focus theory to the organizational arena, future research needs to investigate how organization-related factors influence regulatory focus processes (e.g., see the preceding section on the organizational determinants of employees' regulatory focus). Another example stems from the fact that interactions between people in the workplace frequently take place over time. Often, there is a history to these interactions. Furthermore, there is the anticipation of future interaction. What effect do the historical or anticipated future aspects of organizational life (missing from most laboratory settings) have on the relationship between people's regulatory focus and their experience of emotion?

For example, in actual organizations people receive feedback on an ongoing basis, not simply at one point in time. What would happen, we wonder, if prevention-focused persons continued to receive negative feedback over time? At first they may feel agitated and try harder for a while, but if those renewed efforts still meet with failure they ultimately may give up (Wortman & Brehm, 1975). Moreover, upon giving up they are likely to feel dejected (the negative emotion typically associated with being promotion focused) rather than agitated. In other words, the temporal dynamics present in organizational settings (but not in laboratory experiments) may help to explain shifts in people's regulatory foci.

More generally, as future researchers examine how aspects of organizational life influence regulatory focus processes, they may illustrate the reciprocal relationship between regulatory focus theory and organizational psychology. Just as regulatory focus theory has much to say about employees' emotions, work attitudes, and behaviors, so may the study of the antecedents and consequences of people's tendencies to be promotion versus prevention focused in work settings refine and extend our understanding of regulatory focus theory.

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