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The interactive effect of positive and negative occupational attributional styles on job motivation

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Research on attributional style in the work setting has generated inconsistent results concerning the effect attributional styles for positive and negative events have on job motivation and performance. This study set out to examine whether attributional style for positive and for negative work-related events, and their interaction, are related to job motivation. One hundred and sixteen working adults completed questionnaires measuring positive and negative attributional styles, and job motivation. The findings showed that both positive and negative attributional styles, as well as their interaction, were predictors of job motivation. The interactive effect suggests that a negative attributional style is negatively related to job motivation in the absence, but not in the presence, of a positive attributional style. It was also found that employees who have stayed for a reasonably long time with an organization (more than 4 years) are particularly vulnerable to negative attributional style. These findings are discussed in terms of the theoretical framework of positive–negative asymmetry in evaluations. Implications concerning the measurement of occupational attributional style are presented, as well as practical applications for organizations.

In everyday life people normally search for causes of various events in order to understand, predict, and even construct social reality. A set of variables that determine the results of this search is information about consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness as presented in Kelley’s (1967) covariation model. Brewin and Furnham (1986) have suggested that consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness should be labelled as preattributional variables in order to be distinguished from attributional dimensions. Preattributional variables refer to the information that leads people to make attributions, whereas attributional dimensions themselves are the way of describing and categorizing various causes. For example, information concerning the behaviour of others (consensus) affects the selection of the...
cause of an event, whereas the selected cause itself can be categorized as an internal or external to the individual. Weiner (1986) proposed that the perceived causes of events are subsumed within three basic attributional dimensions, that is, locus of causality, stability, and controllability.

Apart from preattributional variables another theoretical construct that has been shown in the relevant literature to influence the process of attributing causes to events is attributional style. Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale (1978) introduced the concept of attributional style in the reformulated theory of learned helplessness and depression. These authors suggested that people tend to provide causes for positive and negative outcomes that are similar as far as the attributional dimensions of internality, stability, and globality are concerned, showing possible systematic biases in the formulation of attributions. Internality refers to whether the result of an action is perceived to depend on factors within the person or factors within the environment. Stability concerns the perception of a cause as stable and relatively enduring, or unstable and subjected to fluctuations. Finally, globality is the extent to which a cause is perceived to influence just a specific situation or a number of areas in a person’s life. One has to note that within the reformulated theory of learned helplessness the controllability of attributions is not a component of attributional style since the theory focuses only on events that are perceived as being uncontrollable.

Abramson et al. (1978) proposed that some people are characterized by a vulnerable attributional style defined as a tendency to attribute failures to internal, stable, and global causes, and successes to external, unstable, and specific ones. People with a vulnerable attributional style show motivational deficits, because they tend to generalize negative outcomes across time and situations by making stable and global attributions for these events. In addition, systematically attributing failure to internal factors and success to external ones impairs self-esteem, that is, a person’s belief about his/her place in the world as being valuable or worthless.

In a revision of the reformulated theory of learned helplessness Abramson, Metalsky, and Alloy (1989) proposed that a depressogenic attributional style is the habitual way some people tend to explain negative, rather than both positive and negative, events in terms of stable and global factors. The revised hopelessness theory of depression has deemphasized the role of positive events in the assessment of attributional style because positive events are considered to be a less rich source of attributional thinking compared to negative events. Moreover, attributional style for negative events was shown to be a more stable characteristic of a person’s way of thinking in comparison to attributional style for positive events (Burns & Seligman, 1989).

Seligman (1990) has further elaborated on the conceptualisation of attributional style by suggesting that there are two types of attributional
style, namely an optimistic explanatory style and a pessimistic explanatory style. An optimistic explanatory style is the tendency to attribute successes to internal, stable, and global factors and failures to external, unstable, and specific ones. On the other hand, a pessimistic attributional style characterizes people who habitually explain their failures in an internal, stable, and global way, and their successes in an external, unstable, and specific one. The systematic attribution of positive outcomes to internal factors and negative outcomes to external ones is considered to be a mechanism for maintaining or enhancing self-esteem, whereas attributing positive outcomes to stable and global factors and negative outcomes to unstable and specific ones leads to higher motivation and better performance.

However, there is accumulated empirical evidence showing that it is not a single process underlying attributions for positive and negative events, and that attributional styles for positive and negative events are distinct variables. In a number of studies (Ahrens & Haaga, 1993; Bridges, 2001; Corr & Gray, 1995; Haugen & Lund, 1998; Jackson, 2001; Proudfoot, Corr, Guest, & Gray, 2001; Xenikou, Furnham, & McCarrey, 1997) attributions for negative events were either uncorrelated or positively correlated with attributions for positive events. Moreover, factor analyses of the attributional dimensions for positive and negative events have supported the presence of distinct attributional styles (Corr & Gray, 1996b; Haugen & Lund, 1998; Hull & Mendolia, 1991; Xenikou et al., 1997). For example, Hull and Mendolia (1991) using structural modelling techniques found that attributions for positive and negative events did not form a single latent variable. On the same lines, research on optimism has also shown that optimism and pessimism may not be bipolar, but rather separate constructs (Mroczek, Spiro, Aldwin, Ozer, & Bossé, 1993; Plomin, Scheier, Bergeman, Pedersen, Nesselroade, & McClearn, 1992; Robinson-Whelen, Kim, MacCallum, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1997; Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994).

Besides the documented relation between attributional style and depression (for a review, see Sweeney, Anderson, & Bailey, 1986), a number of studies have shown that attributional style is significantly associated with job motivation (Corr & Gray, 1995; Furnham, Sadka, & Brewin, 1992; Proudfoot, Corr, Guest, & Gray, 2001), performance at work (Corr & Gray, 1995, 1996a; Jackson, 2001; Seligman & Schulman, 1986; Silvester, Patterson, & Ferguson, 2003), and academic performance (Houston, 1994; Metalsky, Abramson, Seligman, Semmel, & Peterson, 1982; Metalsky, Halberstadt, & Abramson, 1987; Metalsky, Joiner, Hardin, & Abramson, 1993; Peterson & Barrett, 1987). Research on attributional style in the academic and occupational settings has generated conflicting results concerning the effect attributions for positive and negative events have on motivation and performance (Corr & Gray, 1995, 1996a; Furnham, Brewin,

As far as the academic setting is concerned, Peterson and Barrett (1987) found that students who explained negative academic events in an internal, stable, and global way did poorly in their college courses and did not have academic goals in comparison to students who attributed negative events to external, unstable, and specific factors. Metalsky et al. (1993) showed that students who had a style to attribute negative events to stable and global causes became more hopeless and depressed upon receipt of a low grade than did students who did not show this style. On the other hand, Houston (1994) conducted three studies in which undergraduate students who attributed failure to stable and global causes performed better than students who attributed failure to unstable and specific causes.

In the occupational setting, Seligman and Schulman (1986) carried out two studies with life insurance sales agents to examine the concurrent and the predictive validity of attributional style. They measured attributional style by using both positive and negative events contained in the Attributional Style Questionnaire (Peterson, Semmel, von Baeyer, Abramson, Metalsky, & Seligman, 1982). A composite positive attributional style and a composite negative attributional style were calculated by adding up internality, stability, and globality for positive and negative events, respectively. The findings showed that negative attributional style was negatively correlated with productivity in the concurrent validity study, while the difference score between positive attributional style and negative attributional style was a highly significant predictor of productivity and survival (not quitting) in the predictive validity study.

On the other hand, Corr and Gray (1995, 1996a) showed that attributional style for positive events, and not for negative events, was a predictor of sales performance and sales effort among insurance salespeople. Moreover, Proudfoot et al. (2001) reported that attributional style for positive events was more strongly related to job motivation, intention to quit, learned resourcefulness, and psychological strain in comparison to attributional style for negative events. Furnham et al. (1992) found that attributional style for positive events was associated with job motivation and satisfaction, whereas attributional style for negative events was not a predictor of motivation and satisfaction. Finally, Silvester et al. (2003) reported that attributional style for positive job-related outcomes was a better predictor of job performance ratings and job satisfaction than attributional style for negative outcomes.

The aim of this study was to examine whether (a) positive attributional style, that is, systematically attributing positive events to stable and global factors, and/or negative attributional style, that is, systematically attributing
negative events to stable and global factors, are predictors of job motivation and (b) there is an interactive effect of positive and negative attributional styles on motivation. Positive and negative attributional styles are defined by using the dimensions of stability and globality because in this study the main aim was to examine the relation between attributional style and motivation. Carver (1989) has persuasively argued that the three components of attributional style, namely internality, stability, and globality should be measured separately since they explicitly predict different dependent measures. According to the reformulated theory of learned helplessness, as well as subsequent conceptualizations of attributional style (Abramson et al., 1989; Seligman 1990), the internality component of attributional style determines self-esteem, whereas stability and globality affect motivation. Moreover, Weiner’s (1986) attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion has explicitly suggested that stability is the attributional dimension that influences motivation, while locus of causality affects self-esteem, and controllability determines emotional reactions to events. Finally, there are in the relevant literature a number of previous studies that measured attributional style by using the dimensions of stability and globality, while excluding internality (e.g., Houston, 1994; Metalsky et al., 1993).

On a theoretical basis the interactive effect of positive and negative attributional styles may be grounded on Peeters and Czapinski (1990) approach to negativity effects. According to these authors, informational negativity effect refers to the robust finding that negative stimuli have greater informational value than positive ones. Negative stimuli seem to elicit more cognitive work and lead to more complex cognitive representations. However, negativity effects are normally allied with a positivity bias, that is, an unconditional expectation that positive, rather than negative, events will occur. People are adaptive in their dealings with the environment to the extent that they expect positive outcomes to occur but at the same time show a strongly marked sensitivity to aversive stimuli in order to be protected by possible threats. Therefore, positive attributional style can be seen as a reflection of the positivity bias, that is, an expectation that positive events are caused by stable and global factors. Positivity bias might not be related to systematically attributing negative events to unstable and specific causes, as suggested by Seligman (1990), because negative events have great informational value and elicit more cognitive work. Positive and negative attributional styles are expected to have a joint effect on motivation, and, more specifically, the detrimental effect of a negative attributional style on motivation is expected to be weakened by the presence of a positive attributional style. It was hypothesized that positive and negative attributional styles have an independent, as well as an interactive, effect on job motivation.
METHOD

Participants

One hundred and sixteen employees of various organizations, such as banks, hospitals, schools, insurance companies, covering a wide range of organizational sectors participated in the present study. There were 61 women and 54 men. 45 per cent were between 20 and 29 years old, 22 per cent were between 30 and 39 years old, another 22 per cent were between 40 and 49 years old, and 11 per cent were above 50 years old. As far as hierarchy is concerned, 56% did not hold a management position, 37% were middle managers, and 7% were upper level managers. Finally, concerning years of employment by the organization, only 8 (7%) participants reported being with the organization less than 6 months, 47 (42%) between 6 months and 4 years, and 58 (51%) more than 4 years.

Questionnaires

**Occupational Attributional Style Questionnaire (OASQ; Furnham et al., 1992).** The OASQ contains brief descriptions of hypothetical situations, which are commonly experienced by employed individuals. Respondents are asked to vividly imagine these situations happening to them and provide the major cause leading to each of these events. For each situation, respondents are instructed to rate the cause they write down on a number of attributional dimensions (e.g., internality, stability, globality). In the current study participants were provided with eight hypothetical work-related situations, and asked to write down each event’s major cause. Then, participants rated the causes on two attributional dimensions, that is, stability and globality. In accordance with the hopelessness theory of depression (Abramson et al., 1989), attributional style was assessed in the current study by measuring the dimensions of stability and globality. The combination of stability and globality is referred to as “generality” and has been empirically supported by the consistent finding that stability and globality load on the same factor (Corr & Gray, 1996b; Furnham et al., 1992; Joiner & Rudd, 1996; Kent & Martinko, 1995; Proudfoot et al., 2001). The attributional dimension of internality was not relevant to the purposes of the current study since the aim of the study was to examine the effect of attributional style on job motivation.

**Intrinsic job motivation (Warr, Cook, & Wall, 1979).** This is a measure of intrinsic job motivation that consists of six items rated on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Warr et al. reported that the scale has a high coefficient of internal consistency (alpha = .82) and that all the scale’s items load on a single factor. Significant positive correlations with
measures of job involvement and job satisfaction have demonstrated the convergent validity of the scale (Cook & Wall, 1980). The Cronbach alpha in this study was .75.

Procedure

Participants were reached at their work and they were asked to fill in a set of questionnaires concerning various aspects of work life. The questionnaire normally took around 40 minutes to be completed. Participants filled in the questionnaires either at home or at work.

RESULTS

Reliability and factor analysis of the OASQ

The means, standard deviations, Cronbach’s alphas, and the correlations among the variables are presented in Table 1. As far as reliability is concerned, positive and negative generality have acceptable levels of internal consistency since Cronbach’s alphas for both variables reached the .70 criterion set by Nunnally (1978). The positive correlations among all the subscales indicate that positive and negative outcomes are to some extent explained in similar ways as far as the stability and globality of the selected causes are concerned. This finding contradicts Seligman’s (1990) definition of an optimistic explanatory style as a person’s tendency to attribute positive outcomes to internal, stable, and global causes, and negative outcomes to external, unstable, and specific ones.

To test whether stability and globality for positive events compose the higher order factor “positive generality”, while stability and globality for negative events compose the higher order factor “negative generality” a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>a</th>
<th>Positive stability</th>
<th>Positive globality</th>
<th>Positive generality</th>
<th>Negative stability</th>
<th>Negative globality</th>
<th>Negative generality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive stability</td>
<td>21.03</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive globality</td>
<td>20.04</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.62***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive generality</td>
<td>41.17</td>
<td>9.34</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.90***</td>
<td>.90***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative stability</td>
<td>18.48</td>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.37***</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.33***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative globality</td>
<td>13.89</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.38***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative generality</td>
<td>32.37</td>
<td>8.48</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.38***</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.37***</td>
<td>.84***</td>
<td>.82***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job motivation</td>
<td>36.06</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.
factor analysis was conducted on the four scales. A principal components analysis with VARIMAX rotation was carried out. The two extracted factors accounted for 75.2% of the total variance (Table 2). Positive stability and globality loaded on the first factor with a loading of .86 and .91, respectively. The second factor contained stability and globality for negative events with a loading of .80 and .83, respectively. Therefore, the results support the proposition that stability and globality for positive events can be combined into a higher order factor labelled “positive generality”. Moreover, stability and globality for negative events compose another higher order factor, that is, “negative generality”.

Interaction analyses

Concerning the interactive effect of positive and negative generality on job motivation, two regression analyses on job motivation were conducted to test (a) the first order effects of positive and negative generality and (b) the first order effects and the two-way interaction of positive and negative generality. The variables were standardized prior to the analyses and interaction variables were formed from the cross product of standardized variables (Aiken & West, 1991). In both multiple regression analyses the “enter” method for variable inclusion was used. Table 3 presents the results for the first order effects and the interaction effect model.

The first order effects model show that negative generality was a significant predictor of job motivation in the predicted direction. That is, people who tend to attribute unfavourable events to stable and global factors are less motivated to do their jobs compared to those who tend to explain unfavourable events by using unstable and specific causes. In the interaction effect model positive and negative generality, as well as their

| TABLE 2 |
| Factor analysis of the OASQ’s scales of stability and globality for positive and negative events |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive stability</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive globality</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue = 2.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance explained</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative stability</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative globality</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue = 0.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance explained</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 116.
interaction, were shown to be significant predictors of job motivation. Both positive and negative generality have an independent effect on job motivation suggesting that different processes might be involved in the interpretation of positive and negative work-related events. This finding supports the presence of distinct attributional styles for positive and negative events. However, one should note that the effect of positive generality on job motivation reached significance in the interaction effect model, whereas it was marginally significant in the first order effects model.

The significant interaction effect of positive and negative generality on job motivation suggests that there is a joint impact of these variables on motivation. To further examine this joint effect, job motivation was regressed on negative generality (predictor variable) in low and high positive generality people (split at the median). Regressions show that high negative generality is strongly and negatively related to job motivation in low positive generality people \( (\beta = -0.32, p = 0.02) \), whereas in high positive generality people there is no significant effect of negative generality on job motivation (Figure 1).\(^1\) Therefore, the joint effect of positive and negative generality on job motivation concerns the role of positive generality as a psychological immunization against the detrimental effect of negative generality on motivation. It seems that negative generality does not impair job motivation when people tend to interpret positive outcomes in stable and global ways.

At this point one should note that the examination of the interactive effect of positive and negative attributional style on job motivation showed that there were first order as well as interaction effects, even though the correlation coefficients between job motivation and the attributional style

\(^1\)Job motivation was also regressed on positive generality (predictor variable) in low and high negative generality people (split at the theoretical mean). In both regressions the effect of positive generality on job motivation was not statistically significant.
measures were moderately low and not statistically significant. Therefore, the examination of the interactive effect model was proven to be a valuable tool in the attempt to investigate the relationship between the causal explanations for positive and negative events and levels of job motivation.

Finally, a second set of multiple regressions were carried out to explore the first order and interactive effects of positive and negative generality on job motivation having included as a third predictor variable a person’s years of employment in the organization by which he/she is currently employed. Tenure is a variable of potential interest because attributional style is considered to be a developmentally acquired personality trait and, when measured at the moderate level of specificity involving work-related events, the years one has stayed with an organization might influence the emergence of causal patterns for the interpretation of positive and negative events at work. The results of the first order and interactive effects models are presented in Table 4.

Overall the results are quite similar to those obtained by the regression analyses that did not include years of employment as a predictor, with one important exception. For the interactive effect model, the joint effect of negative generality and years of employment was shown to be statistically significant. Therefore, independently of the first order effect of negative generality and the interactive effect of positive and negative generality on motivation, there is a joint effect of negative generality and years of employment on job motivation. To further explore this joint effect, job motivation was regressed on negative generality in new (up to 4 years in the organization) and old (more than 4 years in the organization) employees (split at the median). The regressions showed that negative generality had a

![Figure 1. Regression of job motivation on negative generality in low and high scores of positive generality.](image)
statistically significant effect on job motivation only in the case of employees with more than 4 years of employment ($\beta = -.29$, $p = .03$). It seems that becoming an old employee in an organization makes people more vulnerable to the negative effect of attributing unfavourable events to stable and global factors on job motivation. Consequently, more attention needs to be paid to attributional style for negative events in the case of employees who have stayed longer with a given organization.

**DISCUSSION**

The results of the present study showed that positive and negative attributional styles were significant predictors of job motivation and that there was an interactive effect of positive and negative attributional style on job motivation. The interactive effect indicates that beyond the main effect each predictor had on the criterion, there was a joint impact of the two variables on job motivation. More specifically, a negative attributional style (systematically attributing negative outcomes to stable and global factors) impaired job motivation in the absence, but not in the presence, of a positive attributional style (systematically attributing positive outcomes to stable and global factors). In other words, a person’s positive occupational attributional style seems to minimize the negative effect of systematically attributing negative work-related outcomes to stable and global factors on job motivation.

In contrast to the hopelessness theory of depression (Abramson et al., 1989), these findings suggest that attributional patterns in the explanation of positive events do have an effect on motivation. The hopelessness theory of
depression defines attributional style as the habitual way people explain
negative events. More specifically, a depressogenic attributional style is the
general tendency to attribute important negative events to stable and global
factors. According to this theory, individuals who exhibit a depressogenic
attributional style are more likely to attribute a specific negative event to a
stable and global cause, and subsequently become hopeless and depressed.
However, the findings of this study showed that attributional style for
positive events seems to act as a shield against the potential negative effect of
negative attributional style on motivation. Therefore, the hopelessness theory
of depression might need to discuss the interactive effect of positive and
negative attributional style on motivation rather than negative attributional
style alone. Finally, one should note that the findings of this study concern
occupational attributional style and job motivation and that further research
is needed to test whether these findings generalize in clinical depression.

The inconsistent findings in the occupational attributional style literature
concerning the impact of positive and negative attributional style on job
motivation, performance, and other work-related variables might be
explained by considering the interactive effect of positive and negative
attributional style on various criteria. In this study the main effects model
showed that negative, and not positive, attributional style was a significant
predictor of job motivation, whereas in the interactive effect model positive
and negative attributional style, as well as their interaction, were shown to
be predictors of job motivation. Thus, the significant effect of positive
attributional style on motivation emerged through testing for the joint effect
of positive and negative attributional style on job motivation. On the same
lines, previous research on occupational attributional style might not have
unravelled the effect of either positive or negative attributional style on
motivation because of not testing for their interactive effect on the criterion.

A notable exception is Silvester et al.’s (2003) work on the relation between
attributional style for positive and for negative outcomes, motivation, and
work performance. These authors found that attributional style for positive
outcomes predicted job performance ratings, whereas attributional style for
negative outcomes did not. They reported an unexpected interaction between
attributional style for positive events and for negative events, which they
interpreted as an indication that the two types of attributional style have a
joint effect on performance. The current study set out to examine why these
inconsistent results exist in the relevant literature by explicitly proposing
that there is an interaction between attributional style for positive and
negative events, that is, one type of style may facilitate or inhibit the effect of
the other type of style on job motivation. However, one should note that most
previous work did not consider the interaction between the two types of
attributional style leading to the inconsistent findings that it is either a
positive or negative attributional style that is related to job motivation.
Research on the relation between attributional style and academic performance has also generated conflicting results but they concern the effect that negative, rather than both positive and negative, attributional style has on motivation and performance. Metalsky and his colleagues (1987, 1993) and Peterson and Barrett (1987) have shown that attributional style for negative outcomes impairs motivation and performance. On the other hand, Houston (1994) found that students who systematically attributed failure to stable and global factors performed better than students who tended to explain failure in unstable and specific ways. It is possible that these apparently inconsistent findings might have resulted from the fact that only attributional style for negative events was assessed in these studies. A plausible explanation of Houston’s finding is that students who participated in her experiments also had a strong positive attributional style. The positive attributional style eliminated the potential negative impact of negative attributional style on performance.

The finding that positive and negative attributional styles have an interactive effect on job motivation, as well as the results of the factor analysis on the attributional dimensions, further support the proposition that attributional styles for positive and negative events are distinct constructs. An approach-avoidance framework for explaining a person’s dealings with the external environment, as presented by Peeters and Czapinski (1990), might be useful in understanding the different functional value of positive and negative attributional style. A positivity bias, such as a positive attributional style, is related to a person’s willingness to approach the environment, not to be put off by potential threats, and to be open to new experiences. This theoretical construct might be synonymous to optimism. On the other hand, the diagnostic value of negative information attracts people’s attention and when negative events are frequently occurring in a social context, such as a particular organization, the development of a negative attributional style or pessimism might occur. Even though the negativity effect is not necessarily related to the expectation that negative events frequently occur, the accumulated experience of negative events taking place within an organization accompanied by the negativity effect and the existence of a pessimistic organizational culture might be related to the emergence of a negative attributional style. Consequently, a positive attributional style reflecting people’s need for self-actualization and fulfilment of their creative potential can coexist and interact with a negative attributional style resulting from accumulated negative experiences at work. Silvester et al. (2003) also explained the unexpected interaction they found between attributional styles for positive and negative outcomes in terms of an approach-avoidance framework. Finally, one should also note that this study is correlational in design and therefore, a causal link between positive and negative attributional styles and motivation cannot be assumed.
The results of this study have also shown that negative attributional style is related to lower levels of job motivation in the case of employees who have stayed for a longer period with a given organization (more than 4 years). This finding might indicate that during the socialization process workers become more vulnerable to the negative impact of systematically attributing bad work-related events to stable and global factors. It seems that working adults who have stayed with a particular organization for a reasonably long time are more vulnerable to be motivationally impaired by employing a negative attributional style. This pessimistic tendency might emerge as employees become participants of an organizational culture that reflects destructive behavioural styles, such as people in higher positions taking charge and controlling subordinates or overly competing with one's colleagues and sabotaging their efforts. Another explanation might be that employees with a negative attributional style are more likely to stay with a given organization than to seek alternative employment.

On a practical level, these findings suggest that the measurement of occupational attributional style needs to include attributions for both positive and negative events at work since positive and negative attributional styles can possibly coexist and serve different functions. Moreover, the joint effect of attributional style for positive and negative events on job motivation seems to be a particularly interesting finding. A negative attributional style, which might result from employees’ experiences with maladaptive organizations, does not impair job motivation provided that positive events at work are being explained by stable and global factors (a positivity bias). Organizations can possibly benefit from putting some effort into assessing their employees’ attributional styles, in particular as these attributional styles evolve over years of employment in a particular organization. The assessment of organizational members’ attributional styles for positive and for negative events at different times may provide valuable information for developing appropriate practices in order to foster job motivation. For example, job motivation can be maintained or enhanced by focusing on the generation of new positive outcomes when the elimination of negative ones is difficult or even impossible.

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