



Test of a social cognitive model of work satisfaction in teachers

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ABSTRACT

Lent and Brown [Lent, R. W., & Brown, S. D. (2006). Integrating person and situation perspectives on work satisfaction: A social-cognitive view. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 69, 236–247] recently proposed an integrative model of work satisfaction linked to social cognitive career theory. The model posits that work satisfaction is predicted by five classes of variables: work conditions, goal progress, self-efficacy, goal and efficacy relevant supports, and personality traits (e.g., positive affect). We tested this model in a sample of 366 teachers, finding good overall model-data fit. Of the five predictor classes, work conditions, self-efficacy, and positive affect were each found to explain unique predictive variance. This suggests that teachers who are most satisfied with their jobs see their work environment as supportive, are confident in their abilities to complete work-related tasks and goals, and report high levels of trait positive affect. Findings also offered support for the contention that measures of subjective person–environment fit may not be empirically distinct from work satisfaction. Implications of these findings for future research and applied efforts are considered.

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1. Introduction

Work (or job) satisfaction can be defined as the extent to which people like or dislike their jobs, including the work conditions within which their jobs are embedded (Lent, 2008; Spector, 1997). In both counseling psychology and industrial/organizational psychology, a vast amount of research has been aimed at understanding the factors that predict work satisfaction, and both of these psychological specialties have spawned theoretical models used to explain why certain individuals are more or less satisfied with their jobs. The key components of these models include person–environment fit (Davis & Lofquist, 1984; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005), goal setting (Locke & Latham, 1990), personality and affect (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002), work characteristics (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), expectations (Porter & Lawler, 1968; Vroom, 1964), and a variety of self-related cognitions, such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, and locus of control (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2002).

Lent and Brown (2006) recently proposed an integrative model of work satisfaction. This model combines many of the traditionally studied components of job satisfaction (e.g., work related fit, trait affect) into a unified, empirically-testable framework that is conceptually linked to social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). It was also designed to feature several variables that may be relatively modifiable (e.g., self-efficacy, goal participation) and, thus, may help to inform counseling interventions aimed at work adjustment concerns. Although this model has been found to be useful in predicting educational and social domain satisfaction in previous studies (e.g., Lent, Singley, Sheu, Schmidt, & Schmidt, 2007; Lent et al., 2005), it has yet to be tested specifically in samples of working adults.

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The primary purpose of this study was to test the [Lent and Brown \(2006\)](#) model within a sample of school teachers. Teachers were chosen for two main reasons. First, there is much concern with the satisfaction and retention of teachers in the US, especially given high rates of teacher dropout ([Perie & Baker, 1997](#)). Identification of modifiable precursors to their work satisfaction could, therefore, be socially useful. Second, using individuals from a single occupation provides a common referent for assessing participants' work tasks, goals, and conditions, thereby aiding efforts to generalize the findings. Moreover, it has been suggested that it is useful to employ relatively homogeneous samples when testing new models ([Weston & Gore, 2006](#)).

1.1. Central predictors of work satisfaction

Along with the outcome variable of work satisfaction, the [Lent and Brown \(2006\)](#) model contains five classes of predictor variables (see [Fig. 1](#)). These include (a) personality/affective traits (path 1), (b) participation in/progress at goal-directed activities (path 2), (c) work-related self-efficacy (path 3), (d) work conditions (path 4), and (e) goal and efficacy relevant environmental supports or obstacles (path 5). Each of these five predictor classes has been related to satisfaction within work or educational domains in previous research; we briefly review relevant findings in this section.

[Lent and Brown \(2006\)](#) posit that several types of personality or affective traits are linked to work satisfaction and most prior tests of their model in non-work domains have focused on trait positive affect, which refers to an individual's tendency to experience a positive state of emotion ([Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988](#)). There has been much research on the relation of positive affect to job satisfaction. In a meta-analysis of 27 studies, [Connolly and Viswesvaran \(2000\)](#) reported a .49 correlation between positive affect and job satisfaction. In another meta-analysis of 79 studies, [Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, and de Chermont \(2003\)](#) found a correlation of .34. These studies indicate that there is a moderate to strong relation between positive affect and job satisfaction, suggesting that individuals who generally experience positive emotion are more likely to be satisfied at work.

A second component of the [Lent and Brown \(2006\)](#) model is goal participation. Having important goals, and making progress towards these goals, has been empirically supported as a key predictor of general well-being ([Lent, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2001](#)). [Locke and Latham \(1990\)](#) extended this principle to the work domain and suggested that work-related goals would serve a motivating function and thus promote work performance and satisfaction. The [Lent and Brown \(2006\)](#) model specifically posits that work satisfaction is partly a result of making progress toward one's work-related goals. Work-related goal progress has been found to be moderately to strongly related to work satisfaction in samples of workers both in the US ([Wiese & Freund, 2005](#)) and Germany ([Maier and Brunstein \(2001\)](#)). Goal progress has also been found to relate strongly to college students' academic satisfaction ([Lent et al., 2005; Lent et al., 2007](#)).

A third component of the work satisfaction model is self-efficacy, referring to the belief that one is capable of performing specific behaviors, including those necessary to achieve particular goals. A number of recent studies with working adults (e.g., [Judge et al., 2002; Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003; Judge, Bono, Erez, & Locke, 2005](#)) have found that generalized self-efficacy relates to job satisfaction; [Judge and Bono's \(2001\)](#) meta-analysis found that the average correlation was .38

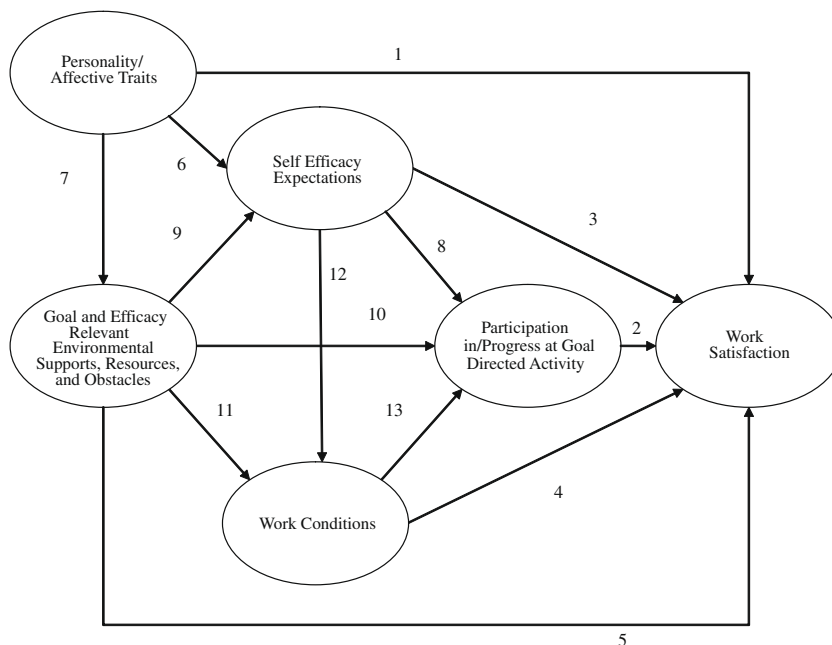


Fig. 1. Lent and Brown's (2006) model of work satisfaction.

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