A Critical Review of Goal Orientation as Three Factor Construct
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Abstract
The study aimed to provide a clear picture of goal orientation construct and summarize the debate regarding its construct. To refer and explore the past empirical and theoretical literature, data was gathered from multiple databases like JSTOR, Wiley online, Tailor & Francis, SAGE, Springer, Science Direct and emerald. The extensive review of literature pointed out that three factor construct of goal orientation is more valid and aligned with theory as compared to one factor or two factor construct. Further to clarify the attributes of each dimension, all three dimensions of goal orientation (Learning Goal Orientation, Performance Prove Goal Orientation and Performance Avoid Goal Orientation) are explained in detail. At the end, conclusion with certain limitations are given to get the attention of future research in this area.

Keywords: Goal Orientation, Learning Goal Orientation, Performance Prove Goal Orientation, Performance Avoid Goal Orientation.

1. Introduction
Goal Orientation can be termed as a tendency in achievement settings in which an individual demonstrates his/her ability (Dweck, 1986). Alternatively, it describes the way in which an individual reveals his/her reality in achievement situations (Ames & Archer, 1988; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Nicholls, 1984). It is the situations in which an individual contributes, approaches and responds to achievement tasks (Ames & Archer, 1988). Goal orientations concerned with such goals which are broader in nature and can be explained as a tendency towards goal adoption in attainment settings (VandeWalle, 1997). Silver, Dwyer, and Alford (2006) noted that goal orientation is chosen before starting a task or work, which forms a mental structure that how an individual evaluates, interprets and acts to pursue a given task or achievement goal.

Goal orientation is acknowledged with much considerations by the researchers and the practitioners interested in work motivation, and this importance can be measured by the number of research studies conducted on this construct (Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007). As DeShon and Gillespie (2005) notes that this construct has urged much attention due to the fact that its origin is in achievement motivation theory, it assumes theoretical basis and it has the capacity to provide the vision of some important questions like why some individuals set higher goals, stand long time in difficult situations, or on the contrary why some individuals try to avoid achievement situations.

Different goal orientations are suitable for different work settings and a manager can use these approaches to assign different targets to employee by viewing their mindset. For instance, a salesperson with incremental/learning oriented mindset can be assigned for high risk/low certainty targets like challenging a territory, the sale of new products, handling of difficult customer and attracting the new potential customers. On the other hand, a salesperson with the mindset of entity/performance prove goal orientation will be allocated for low risk/certainty targets like extending the sales of existing product line and will benefit the organization by reinforcing its continuous success (Novell, Machleit, & Sojka, 2016).

Many studies (A. Chen, Peng, & Hung, 2015; Gong, Huang, & Farh, 2009; Kohli, Shervani, & Challagalla, 1998; McFarland & Kidwell, 2006; Potosky & Ramakrishna, 2002; Silver et al., 2006; Sujan, Weitz, & Kumar, 1994; Terho, Kairisto-Mertanen, Bellenger, & Johnston, 2013; VandeWalle, Cron, & Slocum Jr, 2001) examined the relationship of goal orientation and its dimensions with various variables, but results showed that the direct and indirect relationship of goal orientation is inconsistent (Silver et al., 2006; Terho et al., 2013). A keen observation of the previous studies findings indicate that the relation of goal orientation with these variables remained inconsistent because the mixed evidences of these relationships partly conflict with the theory (Terho et al., 2013). Researchers suggest that these inconsistent findings are due to the fact that goal orientation was considered as two component construct as performance goal orientation and learning goal orientation (Silver et al., 2006). And by adding the performance avoid goal orientation in the construct, more research on the role of goal orientation is needed (A. Chen et al., 2015; Fu, Richards, & Jones, 2009; Rasool, Bashir, & Rauf-i-Azam, 2015; Silver et al., 2006; Terho et al., 2013).
2. Literature Review

Early work on goal orientation conducted by Dweck & colleagues was with children in achievement situations (Diener & Dweck, 1980; Dweck, 1975; Dweck & Reppucci, 1973). They described two major behavioral patterns which are adopted by the children when they countered the challenging tasks. The first pattern is maladaptive pattern of behavior which is termed as helpless pattern. Children with this pattern, showed avoidance towards a task in challenging or difficult conditions and resulted in decreased performance level. On the other hand, second behavioral pattern is adaptive and termed as mastery-oriented behavior. The children with this behavioral pattern showed seeking behavior towards the challenging tasks, remained persistent in the face of difficulty, put more effort to achieve the difficult and challenging tasks (Diener & Dweck, 1980). In order to explore and understand these behavioral patterns more closely, researchers (Dweck & Bempechat, 1983) focused on the goals which are pursued by the children in these achievement situations. On the basis of previous study attempts, researchers classified these individuals in two different categories based upon the type of goal they were perusing in achievement situation. The first category was performance goal oriented individuals, whose basic desire was to avoid the failure condition and gain favorable evaluation from others by demonstrating their ability, and the second category was learning goal oriented individuals, whose basic intent was to develop their ability level, cope up with task difficulty and seek challenging activities in order to achieve the task.

These researchers (Diener & Dweck, 1980; Dweck & Bempechat, 1983) suggested that these goals are responsible for the behavior showed by the children in achievement situations. Where performance oriented goals form helpless responses which are called maladaptive behavioral patterns and leaning goals form mastery responses which are called adaptive behavioral patterns. As noted by Dweck and Leggett (1988), goal selection by individuals can be described as how they approach a situation, with which concern they face the situation, ask different questions, and concern about different information. So, the quest of these goals affects their response to failure, amount of effort, consistency towards a goal and their expectations towards performance (Fisher & Ford, 1998).

The predisposition of individuals to adopt one goal from these types and demonstrate behavior pattern according to these goals is considered as goal orientation (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Actually these are the implicit theories of intelligence which turn individuals towards different goals. So, such individuals who believe that ability is a fixed trait, tend to adopt performance goals and on the other hand, individuals who believe that ability is malleable, tend to adopt learning goals as shown in figure 1 (Dweck, 1986).

![Figure 1: Intelligence Theories and Goal Orientation, Dweck (1986)](image)

In the early work, Dweck and colleagues considered the goal orientation as a unidimensional construct where it was conceptualized that these both goal orientations are the opposed ends of a single gauge (Diener & Dweck, 1980; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Where the individuals may have strong learning goal orientation or strong performance goal orientation or remain neutral. After her early conceptualizations, Dweck noted that both goals are independent (instead of opposite) dimensions based upon the study results that some individuals show both goal orientations but some individuals demonstrate none of the orientations (Heyman & Dweck, 1992).
In the continuation of the Dweck’s conceptualization, Button, Mathieu, and Zajac (1996) investigated the concept that learning and performance goals as the separate dimensions of personality, and established separate measures for both. Their study suggested that learning goal orientation and performance goal orientation both are completely independent constructs. So, provision found for these two constructs as two different and independent dimensions. In simple words, it can be expected that an individual may be high in learning and performance goal orientation or low in both learning and performance goal orientation at the same time. This two dimensional construct of goal orientation is largely employed by many researchers in previous literature (Fisher & Ford, 1998; Phillips & Gully, 1997).

Research suggested that learning goal orientation is related to the positive outcomes or has beneficial influences on many outcomes like knowledge (Fisher & Ford, 1998), individual performance (Butler, 1993), and self-efficacy (Phillips & Gully, 1997). Research showed consistent findings on the role of learning goal orientation but on the other hand the results regarding performance goal orientation were not consistent (Bouffard, Boisvert, Vezeau, & Larouche, 1995; G. Chen, Gully, Whiteman, & Kilcullen, 2000). As Phillips and Gully (1997) ’s results suggested that performance goal orientation has negative relation with individual’s self-efficacy and self-set goals but further research noted that no relationship existed between performance goal orientation, self-efficacy and self-set goals or it has positive relation with self-set goals (VandeWalle, Brown, Cron, & Slocum Jr, 1999).

In response to several conflicting results among the dimensions of goal orientation construct, researchers recommended three factor construct as fit for goal orientation (Elliot, 1999; Elliot & Church, 1997; A. Elliott & Harackiewicz, 1996; VandeWalle, 1997). They noted that the confusion between the prove and avoid aspects is the main factor of occurring inconsistencies in the results. So, the three dimensional construct of goal orientation established by splitting the performance goal orientation in two components as performance prove goal orientation and performance avoid goal orientation, while leaning goal orientation remained a separate and independent dimension. Learning goal orientation is concerned with the ability which is related to oneself or task and performance prove goal orientation is concerned with the ability which is related to achieve normative aspect while avoiding the appearance of inability is related to the performance avoid goal orientation.

As learning and performance prove goals motivate individuals to attain positive outcomes by seeking challenging situations and remained persistence in the face of difficulty, these both goals are considered as mastery or approach goals, even though they have different perspective about the ability that how it will be defined (Elliot, 1999). While performance avoid goal orientation is considered as an avoidance orientation due to the fact that its objective is to avoid any negative possibility. It defines the concept of the ability in a same manner to performance prove goal orientation but differs from the aspect that how the ability will be perused. And it is seen in the comparison of learning goal orientation, it gives the differences on both ends that how competence is defined (normative vs. self or task referenced) and perused (avoiding incompetence vs. attaining competence). Currently, the three factor construct is under examination and getting validation from several research studies (Cellar et al., 2011; A. Chen et al., 2015; Porath & Bateman, 2006; Silver et al., 2006; VandeWalle et al., 1999; VandeWalle et al., 2001).

### 2.1 Goal Orientation as Three Factor Construct

VandeWalle (1997) recommended that it is compulsory to separate and split the performance goal orientation into two separate components and the three factor construct supports the theory more comprehensively (VandeWalle, 1997). It must be realized that in literature, performance goal orientation involves two aspects of ability in definition. There exist the desire to attain favorable judgments regarding ability from others and desire to avoid unfavorable evaluation of ability from others (Heyman & Dweck, 1992). With the same concept, Nicholls (1984) describes ego involvement (concept same to performance goal orientation) by giving note that it consists of desire to show ability through success by avoiding the possible failure possibilities. At this point the argue is taken is that, desire to attain favorable judgments from others and desire to avoid unfavorable judgments from others construe two different, independent and separate dimensions. So, to conceptualization the construct of goal orientation more comprehensively, two dimensions are extracted from one dimension of performance goal orientation (VandeWalle, 1997).

Furthermore an important evidence that cannot be overlooked that Nicholls (1989) in his research presented such a scale to measure the same one construct, in which 5 items presenting the Ego Orientation Scale (e.g., "I feel most successful if I..."
show people I'm smart”) that are same as the performance prove dimension and 2 items to measure Avoid Inferiority Scale (e.g., “I feel most successful if I don't do anything stupid in class”) which is same as the performance avoid goal orientation. Unfortunately, this study did not provide the detail of theoretical support and statistical steps in which the scales was established. But the two items to measure the avoid inferiority leaves the questions for the researchers and established a strong source of attention.

The work of A. Elliott and Harackiewicz (1996) provides strong empirical support to favor the goal orientation construct as three factor model. Experimental research was conducted by them to investigate this construct and its relationships. The study results noted that these both dimensions, performance prove and avoid showed different intrinsic motivation levels in the exercise of problem solving task. In their study, a valuable observation was also given by citing the meta-analytic work by Elliot and Harackiewicz (1994), that as the experimental manipulation was done with performance goal orientation as two dimensions, the level of intrinsic motivation was observed significantly high rather than when it was measured as one dimension (VandeWalle, 1997).

An important but unpublished doctoral work by MacGyvers (1993) was cited by the VandeWalle (1997) in favor of his research argue. Study was conducted on the grade school adult children. Learning goal orientation was expected to have negative relation with entity theories of intelligence where the performance prove goal orientation and performance avoid goal orientation were expected to be positively related to entity theories of intelligence. The statistical findings showed that instrumental scores of this three factor model were valid. Furthermore, results also indicated clearly that the confirmatory factor analysis results for three factor construct was superior appropriate in comparison to one or two factor constructs (VandeWalle, 1997).

The sequence of the empirical results are consistent with the research results conducted by Elliott and Harackiewicz (1994) as the performance goal orientation is better to conceptualized as two different dimensions. Interesting that, feedback seeking pattern was found significant and positively related to avoid scale and had insignificant relationship with prove scale. These findings were critically important that in the previous empirical research most of the studies developed instrument which was measuring only the prove dimension (MacGyvers, 1993) and unknowingly gathering the items of two different dimension in one set (Button et al., 1996; VandeWalle, 1997).

Further, A. Elliott and Harackiewicz (1996) established the construct of goal orientation and noted by keeping in view the self-regulations, it is extremely important to split the dimension of performance goal orientation in two separate and independent dimensions as performance prove goal orientation and performance avoid goal orientation. By providing the theoretical support, they included the performance prove goal orientation in self-regulations by considering it as the achievement of positive outcomes, where the performance avoid goal orientation was included in self-regulations by considering the avoidance to possible negative outcome. Further, Elliot and Church (1997) noted that by keeping in view the concept of gaining positive outcome, self-regulations keep concentration on avoiding negative outcome, due to the factor that it produces more sensitive negative stimuli, enhance more concern for negative probabilities and create dissemination towards cognitive properties in order to avoid the possibility of such outcomes which leads towards failure.

Elliott and Harackiewicz (1994) meta-analytical work contributes in goal orientation construct by suggesting that when discrimination between performance prove goal orientation and performance avoid goal orientations is done, the predicting power of overall performance goal orientation is increased. Furthermore, VandeWalle et al. (2001) gave another important citation that as Elliot observed the fluctuation in the levels of intrinsic motivation when the experimental manipulation was done with performance goal orientation, it proved that either the manipulation done with prove or avoid category, the data was fit for hypothesized models for the 50% to more than 90% of the studies (VandeWalle, 1997) and these empirical facts prove that these two dimensions as performance prove and avoid goal orientations have different outcomes and relationship with various outcome variables. Thus it will be more beneficial for the future research to employ goal orientation as three factor construct in order to develop the theory and test different hypothesis (VandeWalle et al., 2001).

In this continuation, study conducted by Silver et al. (2006) noted that in early conceptualization of goal orientation, three dimensions exist which can be seen in the early literature of achievement motivation by Atkinson (1964) & McClelland (1951). They proposed goal orientation as three dimensional construct. These three dimensions
were named as learning goal orientation, performance approach goal orientation and performance avoid goal orientation. Silver et al. (2006) further noted that the fuzziness regarding the inconsistent results associated to the goal orientation construct, also caused by the conceptualization of this construct as two dimensional construct. Study suggests that though the performance prove and avoid goal orientations have same cognitive pattern but distinct in behavior. Individuals having performance prove goal orientation show their capability in front of others in order to attain favorable judgments while individuals with performance avoid goal orientation try to hide and escape from unfordable judgments (Elliot & Church, 1997; A. Elliott & Harackiewicz, 1996; SkaaLvik, 1997; VandeWalle et al., 2001). Silver et al. (2006) further tested and compared two and three factor models of goal orientation and results showed that the three factor model provides more comprehensive picture of goal orientation and compatible with the theory.

Empirical studies (Elliot & Church, 1997; A. Elliott & Harackiewicz, 1996; Onatsu-Arvilommi & Nurmi, 2000; Silver et al., 2006; SkaaLvik, 1997; VandeWalle et al., 2001) support this notion that in future research the construct of goal orientation must be considered as three factor model rather than two factor model. As the accurate relationship of goal orientation with other variables cannot be explained with one or two factor models (Silver et al., 2006). Thus, by adding the performance avoid goal orientation in the construct, more research on the relationship of goal orientation with other variables is needed (A. Chen et al., 2015; Fu et al., 2009; Rasool et al., 2015; Silver et al., 2006; Terho et al., 2013).

2.2 Learning Goal Orientation

Learning goal orientation can be described as “a desire to develop the self by acquiring new skills, mastering new situations, and improving one’s competence” (VandeWalle, 1997). Park and Holloway (2003) & Sujan et al. (1994) explains behavior pattern of individuals with high learning goal orientation and notes that such individual always welcome to learn new skills and believe to use new strategies in order to resolve the problems in the way of task achievement. Such individuals try to make it possible to learn all the characteristics of a product before presenting it to customers (A. Chen et al., 2015). Individuals high in leaning goal orientation concentrate to improve their ability by learning from their experiences (VandeWalle, 1997).

Individuals with high learning goal orientation accept challenging and difficult situation because they don’t be afraid to commit any mistake (Harris, Mowen, & Brown, 2005). Such experimentation at work, provide them chances to gain knowledge, learn new skills and strategies which are favorable for continuous long term performance (Terho et al., 2013). Another important fact that learning goal orientation makes capable of an individual to learn the knowledge about different customers and guide them how to deal with different customers by adopting the strategy which is appropriate to the specific customer. They show an adaptive behavior with the help of their experimental type of nature (Kohli et al., 1998; Park & Holloway, 2003; Sujan et al., 1994).

The ability to view a challenging task as an opportunity for growth and improvement is caused by learning goal orientation. Individuals having learning goal orientation, remain persistent, face challenging situation, increase effort, take self-instructions to solve the problem and comes with behavior to enjoy the challenge and very positive towards learning (Kohli et al., 1998; Sujan et al., 1994; VandeWalle et al., 1999). Especially, when the job is not as simple or just order making, the learning goal orientation becomes more important factor at that time because in such nature of job, these individuals need to match with customer service, job competencies and as well as to the product knowledge in order to get success in job and achieve high performance (VandeWalle et al., 1999). Such individuals show mastery and adaptive behavior (Nicholls, 1984) and in difficult situations, they are motivated with intrinsic motivation which make them unconcerned with performance in comparison to other’s normative performance criteria (Porath & Bateman, 2006).

2.3 Performance Prove Goal Orientation

Performance prove goal orientation can be termed as “a desire to prove one's competence and to gain favorable judgments about it” (VandeWalle, 1997). Such salespersons tend to show their ability and achieve favorable judgements from other people including senior management, colleagues or from lecturers (Steele-Johnson, Beauregard, Hoover, & Schmidt, 2000; VandeWalle et al., 2001). Under the effect of this orientation individuals feel high confidence in their ability and seek challenging situations in which they show persistence behavior in difficult situations (VandeWalle et al., 1999).

The behavioral focus of such individuals is on present moment (Harris et al., 2005) and working hard (Sujan et al., 1994). These characteristics of performance prove goal orientation leads them...
towards quick results in performance. It is also related to the more wider behavior like engagement in planning the territory and major accounts (VandeWalle et al., 1999), embrace technology application in work (Jelinek, Aheane, Mathieu, & Schillevaert, 2006), then effects which are useful in get aligned with self-regulations. As this orientation is very important for proactive behavior pattern, social competence and as well as emotional control (Porath & Bateman, 2006), most of the scholars consider positive outcomes of performance prove goal orientation on performance (Terho et al., 2013).

An another significant feature of performance prove goal orientation is worth mentioning as it is related to short term performance, so individuals under this type of goal orientation are motivated through extrinsic rewards like promotion, respect and money (Harris et al., 2005). Performance prove goal orientation is theoretically linked with high performance as the aim to be recognized push them to put more effort and select such strategies which leads them towards success (Bartkus & Howell, 1999; Kohli et al., 1998). Individuals under the effect of this orientation, tend to show capability in front of others and very less motivated through intrinsic motivation while achieving the given task. So, they attribute their success towards ability, even individuals having the high confidence in their ability lose the learning opportunities only in order to look smarter (E. S. Elliott & Dweck, 1988). So, they show high confidence in their ability, seek challenges and remained highly persistent in difficult situations (Dweck, 1986).

2.4 Performance Avoid Goal Orientation

Performance avoid goal orientation can be described as “a desire to avoid the disproving of one’s competence and to avoid negative judgments about it” (VandeWalle, 1997). Hirsh, Van Knippenberg, Chen, and Sacramento (2011) suggested that individuals under this orientation don’t like to get engaged in creative activities and have the tendency towards conservatism, so, they have the aim to sidestep such tasks which may lead them towards negative evaluations from others. They avoid such situation in which there may be a chance to expose their weaknesses, tried to hide their incompetence, so, they are not considered to perform the given task well (A. Chen et al., 2015). VandeWalle et al. (2001) described it as an aim to hide the appearance of inability and unfavorable judgments from others.

Researchers from the field of psychology and education explored the role of performance avoid goal orientation and found that it is originated from the fear of failure. The individuals under this dimension of goal orientation show the behavior to achieve goal related to this, that is to avoid the appearance of incompetence. So, such individuals tend to avoid challenging situations because in such situation failure risk is always high. Outcome of this type of goal leads individuals towards “helpless” maladaptive patterns of behavior. Maladaptive behavior includes the behavior patterns such as emphasize on failure related information, personal anxiety and task distraction behavior which leads towards job incompletion (Elliot, 1999; Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & Thrash, 2001, 2004; A. Elliott & Harackiewicz, 1996). With this pattern of behavior some other behavioral pattern, like postponement and decrease in effort levels also occur. (Silver et al., 2006). A. Elliott and Harackiewicz (1996) suggest such individuals are influenced with very less amount of intrinsic motivation in comparison to other two goal orientations.

3. Conclusion and Discussion

By reviewing the past literature, current study comes to the conclusion that goal orientation construct is more valid as three factor construct including learning goal orientation, performance prove goal orientation and performance avoid goal orientation. The inconsistent results in the relationship of goal orientation with other variables were due to the ambiguous construct of goal orientation. Because, most of the studies had tested (learning goal orientation and performance goal orientation) its two dimensions and did not employed its full construct consisting of three dimensions. Thus, the current study will help future research to solve this construct complexity and its relation with other variables. In addition to addressing the scarcity of this research stream, the study will also be a source of enrichment of goal orientation theory as this study will be a source of addressing the insufficient description of this theory. Furthermore, this study will ponder upon the mindset of employees through goal orientation theory and will guide the managers to tackle the subordinates with understanding of their cognitive and behavioral patterns.

Instead of these strengths, this study also has certain limitations. Study has presented three factor construct of goal orientation more comprehensively but did not check it empirically, so there is a need to test this construct and its relationship with other variables empirically. With the view of earlier literature, the possible variables that can be tested in relationship with this construct are salesperson performance, self-efficacy and adaptive selling.
behavior. Additionally, an exploratory qualitative study can further elaborate this construct along with the exploration of its possible antecedents and consequences in the contemporary scenario of business.

References


