OPTIMISM AND PESSIMISM AS A SOURCE OF PERSONAL POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The prerequisite to the study was the increasing importance of the problem of optimism that has become popular and in-demand in the US and Russian psychology in recent decades that largely reflects real significance of the issue. In addition, carrying out an investigation on optimism and pessimism is necessary to solve a number of practical psychological problems faced by people of the modern society, particularly in psychological practice in coping with a wide range of psychological problems. Despite considerable interest towards the psychology of optimism in Western (mainly American) psychology and great practical significance of this field, it is neglected in Russian science. Therefore, it is necessary to ascertain the need for assimilation of achievements of Western psychology of optimism and development of Russian research in this direction.

The aim of the research was studying and development of personal potential in optimists and pessimists by means of training on organisation. As the result of implementation of the training, it was found that there is no pronounced dynamics in the continuum of the pessimism-optimism against the background of qualitative changes in the studied parameters. Undoubtedly, the initiated research in this area requires a prolonged period of time.

Keywords: personal potential, motivation, motivational component, optimism, pessimism

Relevance

One of trends in development of modern psychology is a growing interest towards positive aspects of human life: self-actualisation and self-realisation, personal growth,

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happiness, vitality, etc. At first, this trend appeared in the mid-20th century in the ideas of humanistic psychology (A. Maslow, G. Allport, E. Ericson et al.) and it led to emergence of an independent school in American science at the end of the century (M. Seligman, K. Peterson, R. Biswas-Diener et al.), which was called positive psychology (Allport, 2002; Biswas-Diener, 2011; Erickson, 2002; Maslow, 2011; Peterson, 2002; Seligman, 1991). The founder and leader of this movement was M. Seligman, who devoted his life to studying of learned helplessness and optimism. It is no wonder that one of main directions of research in positive psychology was the psychology of optimism.

**State of the problem**

It is undeniable that psychological study of optimism and pessimism is truly topical. Optimism and pessimism are quite pronounced in various fields of human life: education, sports, professional activity. These features significantly affect somatic health of a person and his or her subjective level of wellbeing. Therefore, considering the level of optimism and opportunity for its development might be important for a wide range of psychological problems (Lau, Kubiak, Burchert, Goering, Oberländer, von Mauschwitz, Hiemisch, 2014; Zetsche, Rief, & Exner, 2015; Hsu, Vincent, & Waszak, 2015; Volkova, 2013; Serlachius, Pulkki-Råback, Elovinio, Hintsanen, Mikkilä, Laitinen, Keltikangas-Järvinen, 2015).

Upon analysis of scientific literature, it was found that the potential of human personality characterises internal physical and spiritual energy of the person, his or her active position aimed at creative self-expression and self-realisation (Bennett, 2015; Bateson, 2016; Zubova, 2009; Volkova, 2014).

All this led to the relevance of this study, the purpose of which was studying and development of personal potential in optimists and pessimists by means of a psychological training.

**Materials and methods**

The study sample was constituted by 120 people aged 20 to 40 years and the following outcomes were obtained.

In the course of evaluation of individual psychological characteristics with the use of multifactor standardized personality questionnaires R. Cattell 16PF, the following
characteristics of people under the examination were revealed. They were characterized by sociability, interest in people, emotional sensitivity, responsibility, stability, steadiness, persistence in goal achievement, business orientation. However, in difficult situations they may have experienced tension, instability and easily lost presence of mind.

Performance of the test for optimism by M.F. Scheier and C.S. Carver LOT (Life orientation test) revealed that the level of optimism in 26.7% of the investigated was below average (Scheier & Carver, 2013). A level of optimism higher than average was found in 10% of the subjects. Also, only 10% of the respondents showed a high level of optimism. Therefore, by the analysis of the results of the said technique, it is possible to state that most of the examined were pessimists rather than optimists.

During the process of performance analysis by means of the test of attributive styles by L.M. Rudina, it was observed that the majority of test subjects 63.3% were marked by moderate pessimism (Rudina, 2002). Only 10% of the respondents are were reasonably optimistic. Additionally, 26.7% showed an intermediate value, i.e. these respondents were not constant in their own endeavours depending on the nature of the situation. Respondents with moderate pessimism were not revealed.

As a result of the study by the method of “study of motivational personality profile” (S. Ritchie & P. Martin), the relative dominant needs of people under examination were identified: the “reward”, the “working environment” and the “structuring the work”. This suggests that, for example, the need for high wages and material reward, the desire to have a job with a good set of benefits and allowances indicates a tendency towards change in the course of working life, greater importance of needs. Certainly, the need for good working conditions and comfortable environment is not negligible in this case. The need for clear work structuring, for presence of feedback and information allows assessing results of work. This need is a measure of the need for guidance and certainty, the need, which can serve as an indicator of stress or anxiety.

Studying the motivational structure of the personality as described in V. E. Milman method, it was possible to draw a conclusion about work (business) and general life
orientation of the individual. Thus, the majority of subjects (73%) were characterised by the working (business) orientation, which attested to some stable trends of personality: total and creative activity, social usefulness. For 27% of respondents, general life orientation is inherent, which allowed to identify such stable trends of personality as social support, striving for communication, ensuring comfort and a social status.

Predominant types of motivational profile are progressive (33.3%) and impulsive (36.7%). The progressive type is characterized by a noticeable excess of the level of developing motives above motives of maintenance. This type predominates in individuals who have achieved some success in work or study. It is also typical for a person with a socially oriented position. The impulsive type of motivational profile is typical for most students and demonstrates significant differentiation and possibly confrontation of the various motivational factors within the overall structure of the individual.

It is interesting to note that these types of motivational profile are mainly characteristic of the examined with work (business) orientation. A total of 3.3% of the respondents had comprised the expressive type of motivational profile. Selective differentiation of specific motivational factors is reflected in this type separately by groups of maintaining and developing motives.

The flattened type of motivational profile of respondents was revealed in 26.7%, which reflects lack of differentiation of motivational hierarchy of personality, its poverty. There was a tendency toward reduction with increasing age.

It should be noted that this type of profile, as well as impulsive in 6.7% was typical for respondents with general life orientation.

The regressive type of the profile is not identified in any of the respondents, regardless of orientation.

In general, it is possible to state that respondents with business orientation of the personality were characterized by progressive and impulsive motivational profiles, and respondents with general life orientation had flattened motivational profiles.

Summarizing the results of the study, it is possible to state that 92% of the respondents expressed such attributive style as pessimism. The motivational component of
personal potential in respondents expressing pessimism can be characterized as follows. They were sociable, showing interest to people, emotionally sensitive, responsible, stable, however, in difficult life situations they may have experienced tension, instability and easily lose their presence of mind. Dominance of such requirements as “reward”, “working environment” and “work structuring” in the motivational structure indicates that they tended to change in the course of working life, were in need of good working conditions and a comfortable environment, but in the absence of clear guidance and certainty experiencing stress or anxiety. They were characterized by working (business) orientation, which points to some stable trends of personality: general and creative activity, social usefulness.

The predominant type of motivational profile is the impulsive type, which reflects significant differentiation and possibly confronts various motivational factors within the overall structure of the individual.

It is not possible to characterize respondents with optimistic expression within the scope of this study due to the fact that only 10% of them were found in the total sample.

The next stage of the research in connection with the obtained results was development of the motivational component of personal potential in pessimists.

An effective means to solve a variety of psychological problems are specific methods of group as support comes from other members of the group process. The method of psychological training seems to be the best.

During the training, conditions were created for development of personal potential motivational component in respondents with the pessimistic attributive style.

Results and their discussion

To evaluate efficacy of the training, a repeated diagnosis was conducted by means of the same methods.

Employment of a standardized multifactorial personality questionnaire by R. Cattell 16PF showed that caution, wariness toward people, the desire to take responsibility for mistakes of others, independence in social behaviour were inherent to the respondents. This sample of respondents was focused on a specific real activity, on social approval. These respondents were characterized by the desire to work and make decisions collectively; they were calm,
excessively satisfied and unruffled. Half of the respondents had an adequate self-esteem, but there were those who overestimated their capabilities and became overconfident in this group after the training.

Analysis of the indices of the test for optimism by M. F. Scheier and C. S. Carver LOT after the training revealed that the majority of the respondents were still more pessimistic than optimistic despite the fact that there was a change in indicators.

The results obtained were processed by methods of mathematical statistics. At that stage of this experimental study, the t-Student parametric test was used. Application of the Student t-test showed that after training parameters changed significantly (t emp. = 3.89). These differences were statistically significant, as the critical value was t = 2.617 at p <0.01.

It was followed by consideration of the test of attributive styles by L.M. Rudina. It is noticeable that all the respondents expressed pessimism. It had an intermediate value in 10% of all respondents, i.e., they were not consistent in their own endeavours depending on the nature of the situation. The number of respondents with moderate pessimism rose (50%).

Application of the Student t-test showed that parameters hanged significantly after the training (t emp. = 3.45). These differences were statistically significant, as the critical value was t = 2.617 at p <0.01.

During the re-examination by the method of “Study of motivational personality profile” (S. Ritchie & P. Martin), it was observable that the list of prevailing demands did not change significantly for the respondents. However, it should be noted that such a demand as the “relationship” was revealed among important needs during the re-examination, and “social contacts” became a markedly significant need. Perhaps, rising of these needs was associated with participation in the training.

An analysis of the motivational structure of the person according to the procedure by V.E. Milman, revealed changes in the orientation of the person participating in the training. Of note is that the majority of the tested students (70%) changed personal orientation after the training. Operating (business) orientation became an indigenous characteristic of theirs, which points to emergence of resistant tendencies of the personality: general and the creative
activity, social usefulness. Nevertheless, the customary trend was observed among 30% of respondents, which attests to steady tendencies such as social support, aspiration for communication, providing comfortable environment and social status.

Noticeable changes occurred in distribution of motivational profile types. Thus, taking into consideration the initial examination of the sample, it could be seen that the majority of respondents (70%) flattened their motivational profile which reflects lack of differentiation of motivational hierarchy of the individual, his or her poorness, but characteristics of many investigated became equally progressive (40%) and impulsive (40%) after the training. In other words, we can say that the level of developing of their motives prevails above motives of maintenance, which is typical for a person with a socially oriented position. Changing of the profile type from the flattened to the impulsive type reflects that motivational hierarchy of personality became more differentiated.

The flattened type of motivational profile was typical for 20% of the investigated.

The regressive type of motivational profile was not identified in any of the respondents, regardless of their orientation.

**Conclusion**

Thus, comparing the results of the primary and the repeated studies enabled us to come to the conclusion that the attributive style such as pessimism was still expressed in the respondents. However, after the training, a qualitative change was evident in terms of the pessimism-optimism expression. For example, a transition from “very pessimistic” to “moderately pessimistic” or from a “low” level to a “below average” level of optimism was observed.

These changes were checked by methods of mathematical statistics. It was proved that the received differences were statistically significant.

Considering the motivational component of pessimists’ personal potential, they were characterised as focused on a specific real activity, on social approval. These respondents were characterised by the desire to work and make decisions collectively, they were calm, excessively satisfied and unruffled. Half of them had adequate self-esteem, but after the training there were those who started to overestimate their capabilities and became overconfident.
Dominance in the motivational structure of such requirements as “reward”, “working environment” and “work structuring”, as well as “relationships” and “social contacts”, indicates that they were seeking a change in the process of life, had a need for relationships and social contacts, in good working conditions and comfortable environment, but in the absence of clear guidance and certainty they experienced stress or anxiety. They were characterized by focus on the business, which indicates general and creative activity, social usefulness.

Predominant types of the motivational profile were the impulsive and the progressive types. It indicates that the level of their developing motives prevails above the level of the motives of maintenance, which is typical for a person with a socially oriented position.

In general, in the course of a comparative analysis of the results of the primary and the repeated assessment, we note that the training proved to be an effective tool for development of pessimists’ personal potential. However, for a more pronounced transition of attributive style and development of personal potential there is a need for a more long-term and continuous operation of the individual him or herself.

The limitation was that it was not possible to conduct a comparative analysis of personal potential in optimists and pessimists as the pessimists prevailed among the respondents. In order to determine the content of personal potential there is a need for an additional research.

References


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