

# Self-concordance, Conditional Goal Setting, Self-esteem & Subjective Well-being: Using PLS-SEM Model

**Anjuman Arora, Auditi Pramanik & Swati Dhir**

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*This study examines quantitatively the linkages among self-concordance, conditional goal setting, self-esteem, and subjective well-being. The study also considers the moderating effect of conditional goal setting on the relationship between self-concordance and self-esteem; as well as taking into account the mediating role of self-esteem in the association between self-concordance and subjective well-being. A total number of 158 responses were gathered from an online survey by administering a standardized questionnaire. The finding shows that conditional goal setting has a positive moderating impact, whereas self-esteem positively mediates the linkage between self-concordance and subjective well-being. It is clear that self-concordance, conditional goal setting, self-esteem, and subjective well-being are integral parts of any human resource management system.*

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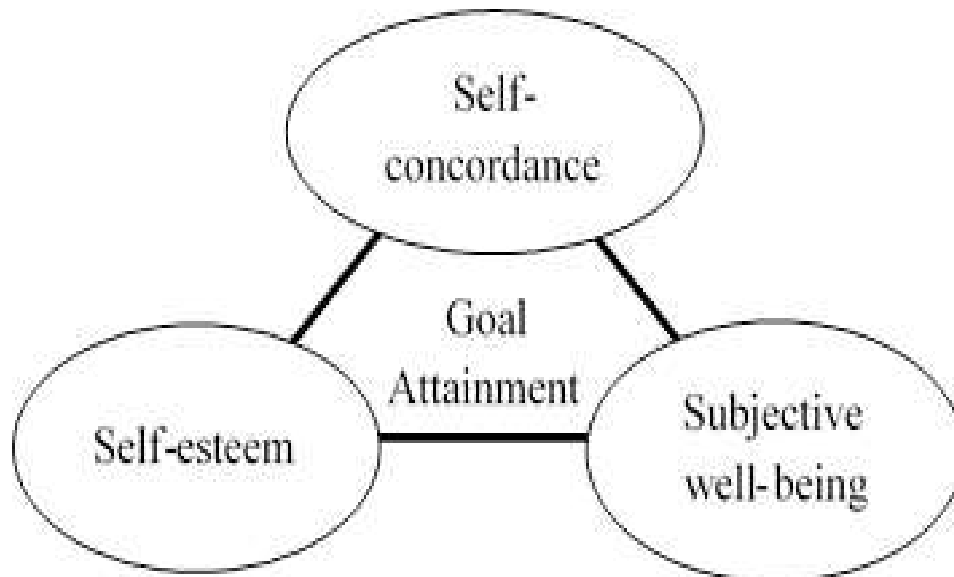
## Introduction

As work becomes the fundamental aspect of life to meet several personal needs, people are now generally spending a substantial part of their lives at the workplace. It is therefore not surprising that work relates significantly to the overall well-being of the person (Bowling, Eschleman & Wang, 2010). Henceforth, a positive link has been found between the well-being of employees and their performance. Apparently, subjective well-being has become prominent, which is also measured through happiness and life satisfaction. It is evident that the perception of progress toward goals is associated with one's subjective well-being, especially when that progress leads to increased well-being by fulfilling an individual's needs (Sheldon & Kasser, 1998). Adherence to goals that have been thought of

as intrinsic motivation rather than from external pressures is known as self-concordance (Sheldon, Goffredi & Schlegel, 2023). Goals, which are pursued in a self-concordant, are integrated with the self and therefore emerge directly from self-choice. As a result, when a person strives for this because of a strong interest, the goals are likely to receive sustainable attention and are more satisfying. Here self-concordance serves a positive affect and leads to increased subjective well-being. However, the non-concordant motives fail to promote subjective well-being because here external forces project goals and, in such cases, the person does not give full assent (Kramer & Petzoldt, 2022). Hence, subjective well-being is predominantly conditioned by goal setting. Furthermore, when an individual is able to attain the

desired goal, it gives rise to self-worth. According to social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1986), perception of self-worth, defined as self-esteem, is an essential aspect of self and the evaluation of the self in this process would contribute to subjective well-being. It pertains to an individual's perception of the quality of work life, which involves cognitive evaluation, i.e., satisfaction, and emotional reaction, i.e., positive affectivity. Literary subjective well-being is the combination of positive affect and satisfaction (Fumagalli & Fumagalli, 2022). Thus, self-esteem is directly associated with subjective well-being. From this discussion, we can interpret the triangle relationship (fig. 1) between self-concordance, self-esteem, and subjective well-being which get Goal Attainment.

**Fig. 1 Triangle Relationship Between Self-concordance, Self-esteem, and Subjective Well-being**



Self-esteem and subjective well-being have been extensively studied (Du, King & Chi, 2017) and so has been the linkage between self-concordance and subjective well-being (Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). The triangle relationship between self-concordance, self-esteem, and subjective well-being which was discussed earlier has not been empirically established regarding personal goals. The purpose of the present study is to quantitatively document this linkage. In addition, here we are considering the moderating effect of conditional goal setting on the relationship between self-concordance and self-esteem.

### Literature Review

A variety of studies have shown that workers' performance is one of the consequences of their well-being (Adam, 2019; Kundi et al., 2021). While understanding the conceptual background of well-being two approaches emerged: the hedonic tradition and the eudemonic tradition (Joshnloo & Weijers, 2019). The former comprises happiness and satisfaction which accentuated constructs such as happiness, positive affect, low negative affect, and satisfaction with life (Kumagai & Nagasawa, 2022); and the latter emphasizes positive psychological functioning and human development (Wong, 2011). However, psychological well-being and subjective well-being (SWB) sound very similar and are often used interchangeably, which is not true. Psychological well-being refers to an individual's overall state of mental health and happiness. On the contrary, subjective well-being primarily considers the

**Self-concordance involves setting and pursuing goals that are inherently meaningful and satisfying to individuals, in line with one's authentic self.**

affective state (Deiner, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). SWB comprises three important dimensions: positive affection, negative affection, and life satisfaction (Garcia, Nima & Kjell, 2014). When someone is pursuing goals that are in line with their true self, they experience a higher level of self-concordance. This alignment fosters intrinsic motivation, persistence, and a sense of fulfillment in goal pursuit. Research has shown a positive relationship between SWB and self-concordance. Self-concordance involves setting and pursuing goals that are inherently meaningful and satisfying to individuals, in line with one's authentic self. This authenticity promotes a sense of congruence and integrity, which contributes to their well-being (Sheldon, Goffredi & Schlegel, 2023). When individuals are true to themselves and are driven by intrinsic motivation, which arises from personal interest, enjoyment, and a sense of competence, they experience greater satisfaction and happiness. Thus, when individuals pursue self-concordant goals, they are more likely to make progress and achieve them. This progress and goal accomplishment are linked to increased self-esteem, self-efficacy, and a sense of competence, which contribute to well-being (Patrasc-Lungu & Iliescu, 2022). Contrarily, pursuing goals that are incongruent with one's values or interests can lead to internal conflict and stress (Chan & Hedden, 2023).

### **Self-concordance & Self-esteem**

Self-esteem is the psychological aspect that reflects a person's overall evaluation of his/her worth (Earl, 2023). It is the human tendency to compare and differentiate oneself from others and also make assumptions to value oneself. This is a voluntary aspect of our personality to always do self-scrutiny and self-evaluation. It is often also found that if one perceives himself as competent in one domain, generally he will be found weak in others. Here people not only judge themselves in comparison to others but also assess their value by assessing their job performance. Earlier studies have revealed that people who possess higher achievement motives generally look for moderately difficult goals and usually make decisions that have a lower risk of failure. Considering these, they are also preoccupied with those kinds of tasks, which boost their self-esteem (Chen, Sun & Wang, 2018). Finally, it is found that people with high self-esteem have higher performance expectations than those with low self-esteem. They are intrinsically triggered to work hard to achieve desired value in their own perception. No wonder, self-concordant people are more concerned about their performance and always evaluate their performance with another. Thereby, self-concordant people secure their self-esteem.

H1: Self-concordance is positively related to the self-esteem of a person at the workplace.

### **Conditional Goal Setting as Moderator**

Pursuing intrinsically motivated goals is not the same as being pushed by external forces in terms of successful performance, goal attainment, and well-being (Sheldon, 2014). Self-generated goals or intrinsic goals have deep links with core self. These goals represent people's real values and natural tendencies to grow and develop. Goals which contain sanctions and introjection are integrated with self. On the other hand, goals which are externally controlled are called non-concordant. Persuasion of such goals increases the risk of failure (Sheldon & Kasser, 1998) and thereby leads to negative emotions. Thus, goal attainment influences well-being considerably. Researchers have shown that successful goal attainment leads to better adjustment, increased satisfaction and makes us happier (Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). Moreover, self-concordance for this reason is considered as a strong predictor of an individual's well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction (Suchkov, 2016). This is because a sense of control and mastery, which is brought by pursuing self-concordant goals (lower order goals) to reach higher order goals would enhance overall health of an individual and thus, improve the quality of life (Sheldon et al., 2022).

H2: Conditional goal setting positively moderates the relationship between self-concordance and self-esteem.

## Self-esteem & Subjective Well-being

Subjective well-being is commonly associated with positive thought and feelings about one's life (Kundi et al., 2021; Sudeck, Thiel & Strohacker, 2023). It can be measured through three main dimensions, namely, positive affect, negative affect, and satisfaction with life. Here, positive and negative affects are the emotional aspects and satisfaction with life reflects the cognitive process of subjective well-being. Since subjective well-being is the overall evaluation of one's life, its dimensional measurement would give us an overall perspective about the very construct (Diener et al., 1999). Evidence shows that individuals who have scored high on positive affect often experience acute and recurrent feelings of pleasure, while individuals with high scores on negative affect experience severe displeasure. Thus, the emotional component of subjective well-being throws light on the intensity and frequency with which people experience these (Sudeck, Thiel & Strohacker, 2023). Further, self-esteem includes both emotions and beliefs of a person. A person might feel worthy and accomplished or have emotions like guilt and despair which would indicate an attitude of approval or disapproval about oneself. The judgment quality of an individual about himself/herself will influence their be-

**People with high self-esteem believe in their ability to obtain the results they desire and have a greater hope of achieving them.**

lief of achieving the goals. People with high self-esteem believe in their ability to obtain the results they desire and have a greater hope of achieving them. High self-esteem also correlates with high optimism, as it provides a greater sense of worthiness and increases the possibility of successful experiences (Heinonen, Raikkonen & Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 2005). Furthermore, it helps individuals to experience a greater number of positive events in life as they believe they deserve them. All these experiences help in enhancing the subjective well-being of a person. When a person achieves the desired goals, it is not only one's self-esteem that is enhanced but also various elements of one's well-being like his/her sense of achievement, feeling of mastery, feeling of satisfaction, and progress (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This also brings a positive impact on subjective well-being. In the present study, subjective well-being has been evaluated through the measurement of positive affectivity, negative affectivity, and life satisfaction. The hypotheses would be:

H3a: Self-esteem is positively related to positive affectivity.

H3b: Self-esteem is negatively related to negative affectivity.

H3c: Self-esteem positively influences one's satisfaction with life.

### Self-esteem Mediates

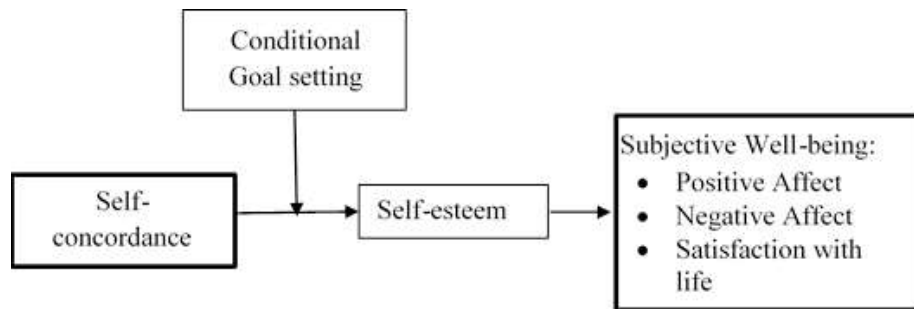
When individuals have high self-esteem, they tend to have positive self-perceptions and a strong sense of self-worth. This positive self-perception can

be influenced by their ability to pursue self-concordant goals. When individuals set and achieve goals that align with their core values and interests, it reinforces their sense of competence, efficacy, and self-worth (Palenzuela-Luis et al., 2022). Achieving these goals would bring about positive thoughts and satisfaction and would enhance subjective well-being. This, in turn, contributes to higher subjective well-being. Further, self-esteem plays a crucial role in emotional well-being. People with higher self-esteem generally experience more positive emotions, lower levels of negative emotions, and greater emotional resilience. Self-esteem influences an individual's coping mechanisms and ability to deal with challenges and setbacks. High self-esteem individuals are more likely to view setbacks as temporary and specific to the situation rather than as a reflection of their worth as a person. When individuals encounter obstacles in the pursuit of self-concor-

dant goals, their higher self-esteem allows them to bounce back, persist, and find alternative ways to achieve their goals. When individuals have self-concordant goals and values, they are more likely to experience a sense of purpose and fulfillment in their pursuits. This, in turn, can contribute to higher self-esteem, leading to increased subjective well-being (Kupcewicz, 2022). When individuals have high self-esteem, they are more likely to validate their choices, actions, and accomplishments. Pursuing self-concordant goals and values provides a sense of authenticity and alignment with one's true self, which reinforces their self-esteem. The self-validation process contributes to greater satisfaction, contentment, and overall subjective well-being. Hence, we hypothesize that:

H4: Self Esteem mediates the relationship between Self Concordance and Subjective well-being.

**Fig. 2 Conceptual Model**



### Sample & Measurement

Data were collected from 158 individuals. Among them 67% are males and 33% are females working in different organizations from sectors like education, electronics, agriculture, chemicals, bank-

ing, information technology, and automobiles.

In the current study, existing scales were used to measure the proposed constructs. These scales were taken from published articles and were arranged to

form the final questionnaire. For the measurement of Self-concordance “Personal-Striving Assessment scale proposed by Emmons (1989), Conditional goal setting “Linking Inventory” given by McIntosh and Martin (1992), Self-esteem with the scale given by Rosenberg (1965) were used. To measure an individual’s subjective well-being, two different scales namely Positive and Negative Affectivity scales or PANAS (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988) and Temporal Satisfaction with Life scale (TSWLS) (Pavot, Deiner & Suh, 1998) were used. Responses were collected using a five-point Likert scale.

SmartPLS3.0 software is used to assess the hypothesized model. Further, the study has applied the PLS-SEM approach to assess the relationships among variables. Harman’s single-factor test was conducted to validate the common method bias. The result shows more than one factor with an Eigenvalue greater than one extracted from the factor analysis. This means the common method variance is not a concern.

To test the hypotheses of our proposed model, structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis is performed. In PLS bootstrap output, all *t* values above 1.96 are significant at the .05 level, which is the case for all *t* values for the model proposed (fig. 2). Table 2 demonstrates the results of the path model, and the fit indices hence reveal the relationships among self-concordance, conditional goal setting, self-esteem, and subjective well-being. There is a positive significant relationship between self-concordance and

self-esteem ( $\beta = 0.300$ ,  $p < .001$ ) hence supporting H1 hypothesis. There is a positive significant relationship between conditional goal setting and self-esteem ( $\beta = 0.256$ ,  $p < .001$ ). There is a negative significant moderating relationship of self-concordance and conditional goal setting with self-esteem ( $\beta = 0.077$ ,  $p < .001$ ), thus rejecting H2 hypothesis. H4 is supported by a positive significant relationship between self-esteem and subjective well-being ( $\beta = 0.602$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Subjective Well-being is made up of three Formative Indicators; positive affect, negative affect and satisfaction with life. This positive significant relationship is supported by the values as shown in the bootstrapping output (Table 2).

## Data Analysis & Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the sample.

**Table 1 Descriptive statistics: Mean, Standard Deviation (SD) & Range**

Construct	Mean	SD
SC	33.89	30.675
CGS	34.89	3.7
SE	30.77	5.615
SWBp	32.68	8.701
SWBn	17.56	7.687
TS	19.28	8.006

SC: Self-concordance, CGS: Conditional Goal Setting, SE: Self-Esteem, SWBp: Subjective Well-being Positive, SWBn: Subjective Well-being Negative, TS: Temporal Satisfaction

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**Table 2 Path Coefficients Validity & Reliability of Constructs**

Hypotheses	Path Coefficient	Result
H1	Self-Concordance '! Self Esteem	0.300** Supported
H2	Conditional Goal Setting '! Self-Concordance + Self Esteem	0.256** Supported
H3a	Self-concordance + Self-esteem '! SWP	0.247** Supported
H3b	Self-concordance + Self Esteem '! SWN	0.436** Supported
H3c	Self-concordance + Self Esteem '! TS	0.496** Supported

Path Coefficients are standardized Beta Coefficients  
 \*\* $p < 0.001$ , \* $p < 0.05$

**Table 3 Correlations, Reliability & Validity**

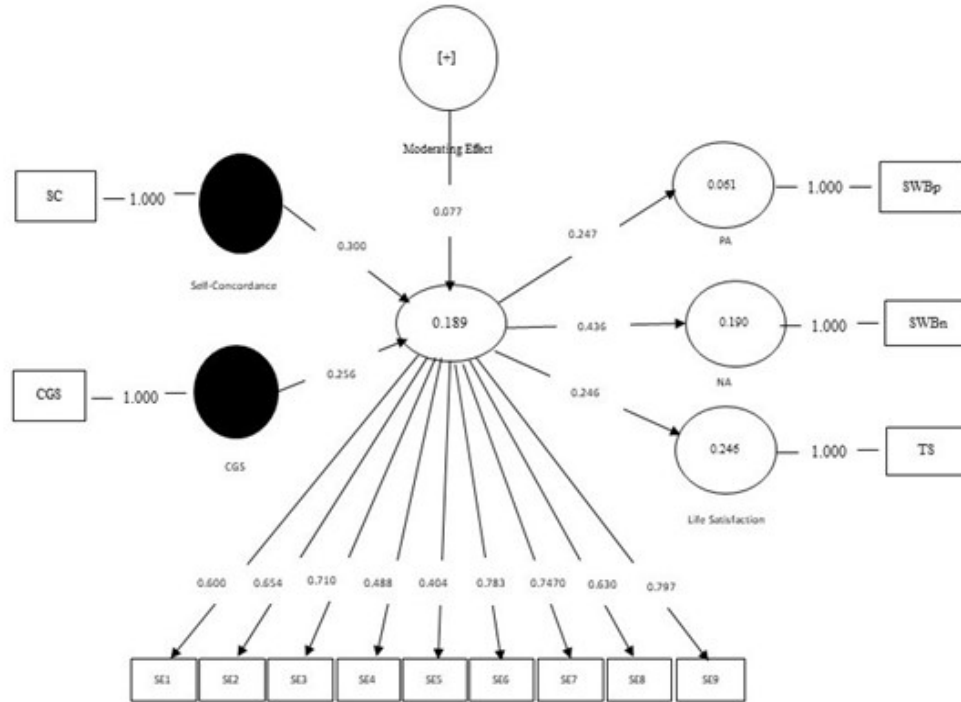
Variables	CGS	Self- Concordance	Self-Esteem	SWB
Conditional Goal Setting	1			
Self-Concordance (SC)	0.193	1		
Self-Esteem	0.329	0.352	1	
SWB	0.296	0.282	0.602	1
Composite Reliability	1	1	0.883	1
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	1	1	0.523	1
Cronbach's Alpha	1	1	0.846	1

SC: Self-concordance, CGS: SWB: Subjective Well-being

The initial bootstrapping results also show that there are some manifest variables for self-esteem, which are not significant for the given population. Hence those items (SE3, SE4, SE7) were removed from the final analysis. Table 3

reports the reliability, including the coefficient alpha, average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability for each construct. The convergent validity has been captured by average variance extracted (AVE), which is more than 0.50.

Fig. 3 Path coefficients



According to Fig. 3, self-esteem has the strongest positive effect on temporal satisfaction with life with a weightage of 0.496. Conditional goal setting and self-concordance too have a positive impact on self-esteem but of lesser magnitude. There is a positive moderating effect of conditional goal setting in the relationship between self-concordance and self-esteem with a value of 0.077.

**Mediation Effect of Self-esteem:**

Bootstrapping was run on the models with and without self-esteem as a mediator to get the significance values.

**Self-esteem fully mediates the relationship between self-concordance and subjective well-being.**

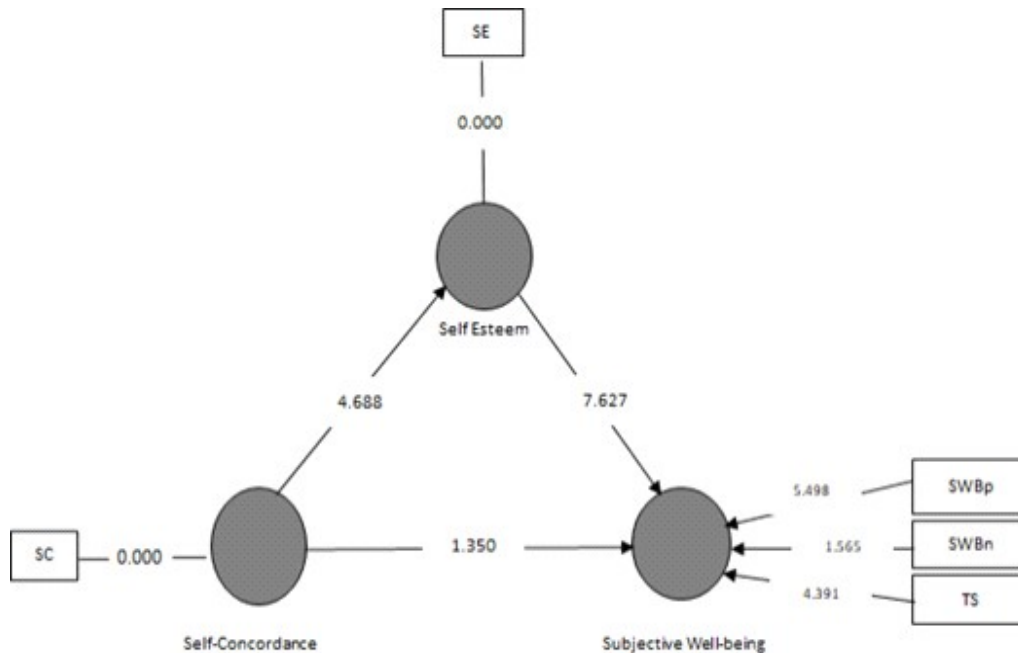
Table 4 Mediation Analysis by PLS SEM

C	c' (Direct Effect)	Ab(Indirect Effect)	ab + c'(Total Effect)	% ofMediation (ab/ ab+c')
0.302	0.113	0.179	0.292	61.3

The value of c is significant (4.151>1.96) and c' is insignificant (1.350<1.96) which shows self-esteem

fully mediates the relationship between self-concordance and subjective well-being.

Fig. 4 Mediation Effect of Self-esteem Between Self-concordance & Subjective Well-being



### Discussion & Conclusion

A person who is intrinsically motivated and sets his/her goals that are aligned with the self would not be affected by external reasons (society, peer pressure etc) or would not desire social acceptance for what she/he wants to achieve. The person becomes highly determined and puts more effort towards the achievement of the goals. This would further increase the goal progress and the likelihood of achieving success (Downes et al, 2017). Alongside would bring a feeling of autonomy, competence, positive emotional experience, etc., and subsequently boost one's self-esteem. Self-esteem depicts an attitude of a person's approval or disapproval of self-worth and shows the extent to which he/she believes in own ability. People with high self-es-

teem believe in their ability to obtain the results they desire and have a greater hope of achieving them (Benevene, Ittan & Cortini, 2018). Therefore, self-concordant goals (pursued because of intrinsic motivation) are related to greater happiness and satisfaction in life; placing conditions on these goals may put happiness on hold. The results of the study also support this claim. As it is evident from the results that the moderating effect of conditional goal setting has been insignificant in the relationship between self-concordance and self-esteem. As per the results of this study, people putting conditions on happiness will not be able to contribute towards their self-esteem in the long term. They will always be judgmental of themselves. Their subjective evaluation of their self-worth will be negative if they are not able to achieve their set conditional goals.

However, if they set self-concordant goals, disregarding conditions, they will certainly have a positive impact on their self-esteem and hence will facilitate their subjective well-being (Milyavskaya & Werner, 2018). The results of the study also show evidence that lower self-esteem leads to lower life satisfaction whereas higher self-esteem would inculcate a sense of confidence in an individual which would bring a positive impact on his/her life by bringing greater satisfaction (Shim, Wang, & Cassady, 2013; Wang, Zhang, & Wan, 2022). The mediation result exhibits that self-esteem has a positive mediating effect on the relationship between self-concordance and the proposed aspects of subjective well-being, namely, positive affect, negative affect, and temporal satisfaction.

In this research, the conceptual model incorporates self-concordance, conditional goal setting, self-esteem and establishes a link with subjective well-being. An essential contribution of this research is that it addresses the questions regarding the factors that are at play for making employees learn, perform, and have satisfaction at work. These themes have remained in existence for a long time in organizational research. However, one of the important theoretical contributions of this study can be aligned with Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Further, the study is impactful to enhance employees' satisfaction and overall well-being, increased goal striving behavior and creativity, and influence leadership behavior (Converse, Juarez & Hennecke, 2018; Unsworth & Mason, 2016; Zhang, Chen & Schlegel, 2018;

Zheng, Xie, & Ding, 2018). A leader can promote goal striving behavior and self-concordance by providing the vision and justification regarding the goal. Hence an organization should emphasize building the self-esteem of employees by providing the necessary support through its leaders. The leaders would help in searching for meaning and giving autonomy for self-expression. So that the employees are more self-directed or self-motivated and committed to their job (Unsworth & Mason, 2016).

**An organization should emphasize building the self-esteem of employees by providing the necessary support through its leaders.**

Another important implication of this study can be seen in developing a positive organizational culture, which allows employees to come up with self-concordant goals to develop their esteem and well-being. This will further contribute to organizational achievements by enhancing employees' commitment and performance. In this context, the degree of goal internalization is responsible for individuals' level of job commitment (Carsrud et al., 2017; Oettingen et al., 2009). This is not only affected by the attractiveness and value of the target goal but also influences an individual's perception and motivation to pursue it. Thus, commitment and performance are dependent on each other (Atmojo, 2015). Moreover, individuals who feel that they can freely choose a goal on their own, usually are more committed to their job than those who are given a goal without consensus.

## Limitations & Future Scope

The study has considered all the data at one point in time. Therefore, there might be a chance of common method bias, on which the longitudinal future research can be conducted to have a better understanding of the concept. Instead of looking at temporal life satisfaction, researchers can consider the overall satisfaction through a longitudinal study. Because a longitudinal study is helpful to understand the impact of human resource planning and management on organizational outcomes, believing that human resource planning or strategic planning in particular, is focused on the long-run sustainability of an organization (Koy, 2001). Also, a demographic study can be done for further testing (by gender, age) on the proposed conceptual model to observe variations across these variables. There might be a possibility that the model would change with age as the level of maturity increases with age and hence traits like self-concordance and linking tendency might also vary.

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