# The Effects of Optimism and Openness to Experience on Employees' Happiness

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## ABSTARCT

Considering the importance of happiness in a working context, the aims of the present study were to examine impacts of optimism and openness to experience on employees' happiness in public sector. One hundred and seventy employees in public sector completed questionnaires measuring optimism, openness to experience and employee' happiness that respondents consisted of 84.1% male and most percentage of age were between 31 and 51. The results of structural equation modeling showed that both optimism and openness to experience were positively related to employees' happiness.

**KEYWORDS**: Happiness at work, positive organizational behavior, Optimism, Openness to Experience, Public Sector.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Although happiness has been attracted philosophers since the beginning of written history appearance, only recently it is focused in psychological researches. With appearance of positive psychology movement in previous decade, it has been authorized to deal with happiness and other positive states in opposite of the previous prevailing model which in the focus was on the illness, depression, stress and the same other negative experiences[1].

Following the lead of positive psychology, that is, what is good about life is as genuine as what is bad and therefore deserves equal attention is the recently emerging field of positive organizational behavior, or simply POB[2]. The object of positive psychology and positive organizational behavior is development and improvement of strategies that help people in experience of emotions such as happiness, both at individual level and at broader levels such as the society that they live and work there[3].

From the view of scholars, try to made a happy workplace has four main reasons:1)The happiness is worthy in itself. 2)Work alone can't cause to person's happiness, but when a person isn't happy at a workplace so he can't be happy in real. 3)the happiness relates to performance and efficacy, and 4)the happiness relates to virtuous acts such as forgiveness, kindness, reason and wisdom and it is one of the main factors of "good life and good society". Therefore it is not surprising that ever increasing scholars try to detect effective factors on happiness of employees[4].

Strong evidences show that individual differences are important inner indexes for predicting of happiness degree. Studies show that regardless to life situations, some persons experience more happiness and satisfaction than others, today it is believed that happiness of persons is predicted by their personality traits up to 50 percent[5]. Boehm & Lyubomirsky argue that 50 percent of happiness relates to genetic factors, 10 percent to environmental factors and the rest 40 percent relates to development and improvement of personal skills[6].

The object of this study is examination of impact of two psychological strengths on happiness degree of employees who work in one of the Iran's governmental organization. One of these that was dealt more but less known is optimism[7]. And the other is openness to experience that is generally less focused to its relation to happiness[8].

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## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2-1 Happiness:

Happiness as a lay construct, when is applied by every person has a specific and personal meaning. Thus recently scholars tend to use the term of "well being" in order to more academic study of happiness and its more accurate definition[9].

arguably, every theory derived makes an inherent assertion as to the nature of happiness. There are many lay conceptions of happiness, so it has been appeared many disagreements about it. As such, "happiness" applies to an extremely wide range of phenomena and has many varying definitions[10].

However one of the most agreeable of these definitions is proposed by Dinner and his colleagues, they prefer to use the term of "subjective well-being" and they see "happiness" as a combination of life satisfaction and balance between positive and negative emotions[5].

This matter is true in the case of definitions of happiness at workplace. For example Pryce-Jones defines happiness at work as "a mindset which allows you to maximize performance and achieve your potential. You do this by being mindful of the highs and lows when working alone or with others" [11].

Or in another definition Alexander Kjerulf defines happiness at work as "a feeling of happiness derived from work" [12].

Generally it is agreed that although situational factors(age, income, health, marriage) influence on persons' happiness, but the happiness is finally an innate and mental thing that relates more to feelings, opinions, perceptions and evaluation of situations[5].

### 2-2 Optimism:

Optimism is a personality trait that its academic definitions mainly focus on persons' expectations about the future[13]. Seligman defines optimism as an attributional style in which the person attributes pleasing events to personal, permanent and pervasive factors, and attributes unpleasing events to external, temporary and situational factors[2].

Heritability of optimism is estimated about 25 percent, though this percent in comparison with many other personality traits is lower, but indicates the substantial nature of optimism[13].

Optimism implies the general tendency of person to desired outcomes in life. Perhaps persons who think that their works end with desired outcomes, more struggle in their works, in contrast persons who see defeat as an inevitable thing, less struggle in doing their works and in keeping their set objects get disappointed. Thus because the expectations of optimist persons cause to behaviors that close them to success, such persons experience more success and more pleasing events[14]. Persons' expectations influence on persons' approaches in opportunity and threat conditions and be effective on their success. Optimism both in intrapersonal and interpersonal domain has several advantages, in intrapersonal domain, optimism relates to emotional well-being, effective coping strategies and even persons' somatic health. In interpersonal domain, it is seemed that optimist persons are livelier than pessimist persons, and they mainly use strategies for solving their problems with others that cause to keep their relations. In total, evidences show that optimism plays an important role in human experiences[13].

### 2-3 Openness to Experience:

During two last decades, "five–factors model of personality" has been proposed as the most reliable and famous personality model. Although in the most of researches there is an agreement about the first four factors of this model(Extraversion, Neuroticism, Conscientiousness and Agreeableness), but the fifth factor(openness to experience) has a controversial nature[15].

Openness to experience refers to person's tendency to adapt his behaviors and views in the face of new ideas and situations[16].

Like other personality traits, openness to experience has some genetic origin. A study on 123 pairs of identical twins showed that these twins even in situations that they grew in different families and different environmental conditions, obtained the same privileges about openness to experience. This study estimates that the heritability of openness to experience is about 65 percent[17].

Such persons are characterized with curiosity, strong imagination, artistically sensitiveness and broad-mind, and their tendency to try new things to understand new ideas, makes a distinction between them and others who prefer routines[8]. persons with high level of openness to experience has less dogmatism about their beliefs, pay more attention to others beliefs and show greater flexibility in different situations, and there is a small probability that they deny conflicts[18]. Open people are characterized with need to enlarge

of experience and search for finding of personal growth and development, thus openness to experience can lead to experiences in life that facilitate happiness and success[8].

## 3  METHODOLOGY

### 3-1  OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHIZES:

As we said, this research aid to investigate impacts of optimism and openness to experience  on employees' happiness in public sector.

On the basis of the existing related theory summarized, we derive the study hypothesizes as follows and our hypothetical model is graphically displayed in Figure 1.

H1: *Optimism* will be positively related to *employees' happiness*
H2: *Openness to experience* will be positively related to *employees' happiness*

Figure 1. Hypothetical model
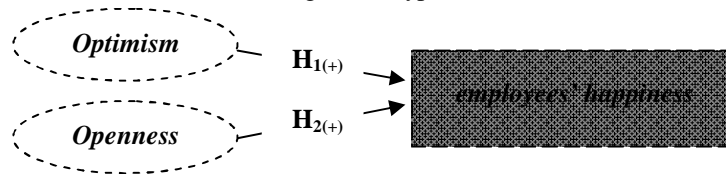


### 3-2  SAMPLE:

In this research, the population includes 300 employees of General Inspection Office of Iran (GIO) in Tehran city, that is from public sector. The sample size was calculated using the table devised by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), which shows that the ideal sample size for a population of 300 is 169. Also, the sample was selected through simple random sampling method.

We distributed 190 questionnaires, of which, 170 usable paired responses were received with a response rate of 89%. The respondents consisted of 84.1 % male and most percentage of age were between 31 and 51 (64.1%) and tenure of 1 to 10 (60.6%) and with education levels of bachelor (65.9 %).

### 3-3  INSTRUMENT AND RELIABILITY:

To measure employees' happiness, the 12-item questionnaire developed by Buckingham & Coffman(1999) was used. Openness to Experience was measured using 10 items drawn from the Big Five Inventory (BFI) and Optimism was measured using 6 items drawn from Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ).

The responses for questionnaire were taken on 5-point likert-scale with anchors ranging from 1 = strongly disagree', 2 = Disagree', 3 = not disagree and not agree ', 4 = Agree', to 5 = strongly agree'.

Table (1) shows the result of the internal consistencies (Cronbach's α) of the study variables. Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.92 employees' happiness and 0.92 for optimism and 0.96 for openness to experience can be considered a reasonably high reliability coefficient. Based on this, it can be assumed that all items used are measuring the same construct.

Table (1). results of Cronbach alpha.

| Construct | Items | Cronbach Alpha |
|---|---|---|
| *Happiness at work* | 1. I know what is expected of me at work. | 0.929 |
| | 2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right. | 0.926 |
| | 3. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day. | 0.926 |
| | 4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work. | 0.927 |
| | 5. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person. | 0.927 |
| | 6. There is someone at work who encourages my development. | 0.925 |
| | 7. At work, my opinions seem to count. | 0.927 |
| | 8. The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important. | 0.927 |
| | 9. My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work. | 0.928 |
| | 10. I have a best friend at work. | 0.929 |
| | 11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress. | 0.929 |
| | 12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow. | 0.929 |
| *Optimism* | 1. When things are uncertain for me at work, I usually expect the best. | 0.924 |
| | 2. If something can go wrong for me work-wise, it will. (R) | 0.918 |
| | 3. I always look on the bright side of things regarding my job. | 0.918 |
| | 4. I am optimistic about what will happen to me in the future as it pertains to work. | 0.926 |
| | 5. In this job, things never work out the way I want them to. (R) | 0.926 |
| | 6. I approach this job as if "every cloud has a silver lining." | 0.937 |
| *Openness to experience* | 1.I see Myself as Someone Who Is original, comes up with new ideas. | 0.946 |
| | 2.I see Myself as Someone Who Is curious about many different things. | 0.947 |
| | 3.I see Myself as Someone Who Is ingenious, a deep thinker. | 0.920 |
| | 4.I see Myself as Someone Who Has an active imagination. | 0.921 |
| | 5.I see Myself as Someone Who Is inventive. | 0.919 |
| | 6.I see Myself as Someone Who Values artistic, aesthetic experiences. | 0.919 |
| | 7.I see Myself as Someone Who Prefers work that is routine.(R) | 0.920 |
| | 8.I see Myself as Someone Who Likes to reflect, play with ideas. | 0.919 |
| | 9.I see Myself as Someone Who Has few artistic interests.(R) | 0.921 |
| | 10.I see Myself as Someone Who Is sophisticated in art, music, or literature. | 0.921 |

## 4   RESULTS

LISREL, structural equation modeling (SEM) software, was used to analyze the survey data. SEM is a very general, largely linear, typically cross-sectional statistical modeling technique. A LISREL model begins with a specification of a causal relationship between unobservable constructs represented by latent variables, which are empirical measures of the constructs. Each latent variable is measured by one or more observable indicator variables. These indicator variables are assumed to be measured with error. Researchers strongly recommended using a two-step approach to SEM. The two-step approach of SEM refers to a process in which the measurement model is first estimated and then, it is fixed in the second stage when the structural model is estimated[19]. Following this recommendation this study performs two stage approach, analyzing measurement model and structural model respectively.

In this study, model adequacy was evaluated by the comparative fit index, the normed and non-normed fit index[20], the root-mean-square error of approximation, standardized root mean square residual and the $\chi 2$ test statistic [21]. When significant, the $\chi 2$ statistic is indicative of a lack of fit. However, the $\chi 2$ test being particularly sensitive to sample size, the use of relative fit indices such as the CFI, NNFI, and RMSEA is strongly recommended. Models whose RMSEA is smaller than the threshold value of .05 are indicative of a close-fitting model, whereas values up to .08 represent acceptable errors of approximation, and values above .10 are indicative of poor fit [22]. This means that the model is an adequate representation of the sampled data. As for the NNFI and the CFI, values above the criteria value of .90 are also indicative of a good fit.

*Preliminary analyses.* A measurement model was tested prior to the estimation of the structural model. In this confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), relations between latent variables and their corresponding indicators were estimated, with no specified structural relations. After a series of purification, based standard residuals, three indicators were deleted. The purification results of CFA revealed that the goodness-of-fit of the model and the overall statistics both achieved the best appropriateness and could not be further improved. The results can be seen in table 2 below.

Table 2. The overall fit of the modified measurement model

| χ2 | 2423.53 |
|---|---|
| χ2/df | 1.86 |
| CFI | 0.96 |
| NFI | 0.92 |
| NNFI | 0.96 |
| RMSEA | 0.071 |
| SRMR | 0.045 |

As it can be seen in the table above, the fit of the model was good, χ2= 2423.53; NFI= 0.92; NNFI = 0.96; CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.071 and SRMR=0.045. Within each latent construct, the manifest indicators were intercorrelated, with loadings ranging from 0.75 to 0.96. Table 3 shows average variance extracted (AVE) and the reliabilities; As it can be seen in Table 2, the variance extracted values for the main constructs exceeded the cut-off of 0.50 (ranging from 0.51 for Optimism to 0.57 for Hope) and the reliability of all construct exceeded the 0.7 threshold. In addition, the Cronbach's alpha for all the constructs are above 0.7. Generally, the present findings indicated that all constructs have achieved a range of fairly good to very good reliabilities among indicators to measure the latent constructs.

Table 3. Cronbach's alpha, average variance extracted and constructs reliability for the measurement model

| Constructs | Cronbach's alpha | Composite Reliability | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Happiness at work* | 0.92 | 0.95 | 0.69 |
| *Optimism* | 0.92 | 0.97 | 0.86 |
| *Openness to experience* | 0.96 | 0.97 | 0.86 |

We also assessed discriminate validity. The researchers argued that the AVE of each constructs should be greater than its squared correlations with other constructs. As it is shown in table 4, this criterion is met for all the constructs. We thus proceeded to test the proposed model.

Table 4. Discriminate validity analyses

| | *Optimism* | *Openness to experience* | *Happiness at work* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Optimism* | 0.86 | | |
| *Openness to experience* | 0.08 | 0.86 | |
| *Happiness at work* | 0.16 | 0.14 | 0.69 |

Structural equation modeling. Having satisfied the various measurement issues such as measurement model fit and necessary reliability and validity tests, the structural model was analyzed to investigate hypothesized relations among the three constructs. Path Estimates for Proposed Model is shown in table 5.

Table 5. Path Estimates for Proposed Model

| Path | | sign | path Coefficients | Results |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Optimism* ⟶ | *Happiness at work* | + | 0.27 | Supported |
| *Openness* ⟶ | *Happiness at work* | + | 0.26 | Supported |

Fit indices were satisfactory (χ2 = 2423.53, CFI = 0.96; NFI = 0.92; NNFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.071 and SRMR = 0.045). Results indicate a significant positive path connecting optimism and happiness at work (β = 0.27; t= 4.20, p < .01), supporting H1. H2 is also supported by data since the path coefficient from openness to happiness at work is statistically significant (β = 0.26; t= 4.15, p < .01).

## 5 CONCLUSION

The objectives of this study was to examine the effects of optimism and openness to experience on employees' happiness in public sector in Iran. Structural equation modeling results show that, as hypothesized, both optimism (0.27) and openness to experience (0.26), were positively related to employees' happiness. The result of present research on optimism is consistent with previous studies, which indicate that more optimism lead to more happiness[2, 14], and regarding openness, this findings is consistent with one previous research [24], but inconsistent with one anothers [6].

So from the results of presented study it can concluded that the ability to be optimistic in addition of having an open mind about new experiences, can give employees a real chance of tapping into long lasting happiness in working context.

Some limitations to this study should be noted, and efforts to resolve them would serve as avenues for future researchs in this field. In particular three caveats for the current study are evident. First, the sample of study is limited to the employees of General Inspection Office of Iran (GIO) in Tehran city, which may reduce the generalizabilty of the results. It would be more meaningful if the same findings hold consistent in different types of organizations.

Second, we should say that this study has been done in public service sector thus future researches must evaluate in difference categories such private and production. In fact, Future research should concentrate on sectors types. thirdly, demographic variables may have influential role in mediating the impact of personality traits on happiness. In the present study the role of demographic variables is not studied so it can be taken into consideration in the future researches.

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