

What Kind of People are the Happiest? An Empirical Study

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This research aims to study the relationship between personality traits and happiness. In research analytical model, extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, Openness to experience and conscientiousness are independent variables and dependent variable is happiness. To clarify the relationships among the research variables, structural equation modelling (SEM) was conducted to examine the model fit and hypotheses. Findings show that extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness impact positively on happiness, while Neuroticism and openness impact negatively on happiness. Present research was conducted from winter to summer 2010 at University of Tehran.

Keywords: Personality, Happiness, Big Five Model, Oxford Happiness Inventory.

Field of Research: Management / Organizational Behavior

1. Introduction

Happiness can be defined as a sustainable desirable sense. Mental health involves feelings such as pleasure and comfort. The feelings of satisfaction and pleasure in various life aspects are called happiness (Yang 2008). Research findings show that happiness can improve mental and physical health (Meyers 2000; Peterson 2000). Overall, happy people respond to events and conditions more positively and compatible; their stress level is less and their immunity system is stronger than unhappy ones (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005).

Today, happiness is become a valuable target in societies. Although happiness has been considered by philosophers for a long time, it is recently located in top ranks of psychological researches. In previous psychological studies, illness-oriented models were more focused. It means that such researches provided methods to treat depression, stress and other mental diseases while now psychology addresses to happiness and positive states further (Fisher 2009).

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It should be noted that happiness is not limited to one special area of life such as work, private life, or physical health. Rather, it shows that how much an individual is satisfied with his/her life overall (Yang 2008). An important mental – emotional feature of a healthy individual is the feeling of well-being and satisfaction. Well-being feeling is defined as: "positive feeling and general satisfaction of life in various aspects of family, work, etc" (Myers & Diener 1995).

Researches show that positive and negative emotions aren't correlated and are independent. It means that the lack of one does not ensure the existence of another one, that is, satisfaction is not created just by the lack of negative feelings; so, the lack of negative emotions does not necessarily leads to positive emotions. Rather, positive emotions are dependent to other conditions (Diener 1984). Therefore, to define well-being (happiness), three separated factors should be studied: the relative existence of positive emotions, the lack of negative emotions and the existence of some cognitive variables such as life satisfaction (Hills & Argyle 2001).

People need to work in a good organization to achieve a good life. Sirota (2005) believes that three factors lead into happiness in organizations: (1) equality (in reception and treatment); (2) organizational success; and (3) friendly ambience with colleagues and counterparts (Sirota et al. 2005). Happiness relates to success in work. For instance, happiness relates to income (Diener & Biswas-Diener 2002), favorable evaluations by a superior (Cropanzano & Wright 1999), helping fellow workers (George 1991) and social supports by colleagues and superiors (Iverson et al. 1998).

Through creating positive feelings, happiness leads to success. The existence of positive feelings shows that life is good and there is no threat. People with more positive feelings tend more to be in novel situations and more involved in their works. As a result, they are healthier and more successful in their jobs. They also live more years and manage their challenges better. Happy individuals are looking for those behaviors which guarantee their success. Overall, people with higher levels of positive feelings have more fruitful outcomes for organization (Boehm & Lyubomirsky 2008).

Fowler and Christakis have shown that happiness is an epidemic phenomenon in long term; so that a person would tend toward happiness if he/she lives with a happy friend or neighbor for six months or more (Fowler & Christakis 2008).

Boehm & Lyubomirsky indicated that happiness is created genetically (50%), environmentally (10%) and by enhancing personal skills and activities (40%). One can promote personal skills and activities by practicing gratitude sense, kindness, and forgiveness, nurturing social relationships, spirituality, mediation and physical exercise (Boehm & Lyubomirsky 2008). Cognitive and attitudinal factors such as optimism and pessimism influence satisfaction and happiness. Also, self-control leads to happiness (Kobasa 1982). Mitigating mental pressure and eliminating negative affections are among other happiness creating factors which should be considered. In workplaces, those individuals who have passed training courses on stress control and methods of eliminating negative affections have experienced increase in job satisfaction (Murphy 1994).

There are other factors such as age, gender, marital status, religion, educational level and income which have relationship with happiness. (Peir'o 2006; Haring et al. 1984; Easterlin 2006; Lelkes 2006; Mookerjee & Beron 2005; Dehejia et al. 2007; Easterlin, 1995).

Studies indicate that the existence of a friendly relationship among colleagues in a kind space is effective in the growth of positive emotions (Koivumaa 2004). It is claimed that the job attachment of those persons who have a close friend in organization is seven times more than others and, as a result, they are happier (Fisher 2009). Mangers' leadership model also relates to happiness. Charismatic leadership is highly related to job satisfaction. In the meantime, the extent of trust to leader relates to organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Fisher 2009). Wage and salary systems also impact on individuals' happiness in organization. Avoiding improper comparisons by supervisors is another effective factor on employees' happiness. Some researchers have proved positive effect of recreational activities on satisfaction and happiness (Gavin & Mason 2004). Happy workers are more engaged with their jobs, more satisfied and obtain more achievements compared to their counterparts. Happy employees are less isolated in workplace and have low tendency to leave their job (Boehm & Lyubomirsky 2008).

Positive and happy feelings are related to burnout, turnover and absenteeism negatively. Considering this relationship is highly crucial since burnout, turnover and absenteeism are too costly for an organization and decrease productivity; therefore, organizations should look for employing happy people and make effort to increase the happiness of their current staff (Credé et al. 2005).

Happiness impacts on life quality directly. As researches show, happy people are more successful in many aspects of life such as familial life, relations to friends, income, health, and job performance. The reason is not only that success guarantees happiness but also because happiness has a causal relationship with success (Fisher 2009).

There are evidences which show that happiness experience has important outcomes in organization such as increase in creativity and level of activities. It seems that positive senses and states decrease inter-personal conflicts and increase collaboration and cooperation among employees. In studies on job satisfaction and performance in organizational behavior arena, happiness as a positive state is considered as a job success predictor (Fisher 2009).

This research aims to study the impact of personality variables on individuals' happiness in organization. So the research question is that how is happiness related to personality traits (extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, Openness to experience and conscientiousness)?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Personality Aspects and Happiness

Personality factors play an important role in happiness occurrence. So far, numerous models are developed to measure personality such as Big Five model. Many conducted researches on personality are based on this model (Costa & McCrae 1992). The Big Five model includes five aspects: neuroticism, extraversion, openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness.

Extraversion refers to individuals' tendency to conversableness, sociability and assertiveness. Agreeableness refers to warmth, friendly behavior, kindness and sympathy in social interactions which prevent interpersonal conflicts. Conscientiousness points out trustworthiness as well as willfulness. Neuroticism shows individuals' differences on the extent of anxiety, depression, anger, shame, feelings, worry and insecurity. Finally, openness refers to individuals' differences in intelligence, interests and creativity (Kim *et al.* 2007).

Evidences show that there is positive relationship between happiness and extraversion. In researches on 131 undergraduates in Oxford (Argyle & Lu, 1990), 101 students in London (Furnham & Brewin 1990), 114 individuals in Oxford (Lu & Argyle 1991), 95 students in Australia (Brebner *et al.* 1995) and 1076 students in UK, USA, Canada and Australia (Francis *et al.* 1998), a positive relationship between happiness and extraversion was found (Francis 1999).

Extraverts' responses to positive stimuli are stronger than introverts'; thus, when extraverts are in pleasure situations, they express more positive feelings. The person can choose or avert situations. Extraverts choose special types of situations which are pleasurable for them and are adaptable to their personality; for instance, extraverts spend most of their time in social activities (Larsen & Ketterlaar 1991). Having Good relations in a period of time increases extraversion level and it makes prosperity sense afterwards (Headey *et al.* 1985). To some extent, extraversion and other personality traits are recognized to be hereditary. A survey on 1400 similar/dissimilar twins who live with each other and/or separately indicates that inheritance affects negative affections, prosperity and positive affections 55%, 48% and 40% respectively. Therefore, negative affections are inner and positive ones are impacted by familial ambience (Lykken & Tellegen 1996). Researches show that extraversion correlates prosperity sense and happiness positively (Costa & McCrae 1980); this correlation is so strong that extraversion can anticipate happiness in next 17 years (Costa *et al.* 1981).

Due to their brain structure, extraverts respond more to incentives so they are happier than introverts (Gray 1982). Although researches indicate a strong relationship between happiness and extraversion, there is still a minority of introverts who are happy. It is because of the fact that happy extraverts have more serious inner life and less but deeper social relations than extraverts and unhappy introverts (Hills & Argyle 2001).

Neurotic people respond more to punishment so they are more exposed to unhappy feelings (Gray 1982). Neuroticism has a strong negative relation with happiness (Costa & McCrae 1980). Another research reveals that neuroticism has a negative relation with happiness; extraversion and openness are related to happiness positively (Furnham & Petrides 2003). A research by Spangler & Palrecha (2004) indicates that neuroticism and extraversion variables have significant relationship with happiness so that the relationship between neuroticism and happiness is negative and the relationship between extraversion and happiness is positive (Spangler & Palrecha 2004).

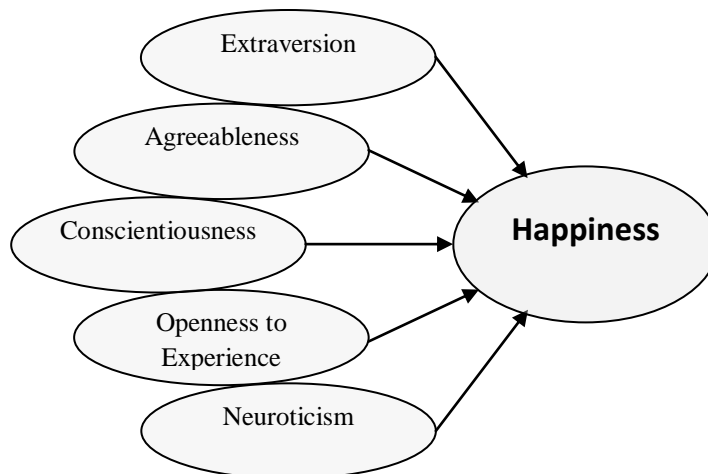
Hence, the purpose of present research is to study the role of personality variables in individuals' happiness in organization because many evidences show that there is a significant relationship between some personality traits and happiness (Myers 1993). In this regard, Big Five personality model which is highly paid attention by researchers is used to measure individuals' personality traits.

According to the literature, research hypotheses include:

1. Extraversion has a positive and significant impact on happiness.
2. There is a significant relationship between agreeableness and happiness.
3. There is a significant relationship between conscientiousness and happiness.
4. Neuroticism has a negative and significant impact on happiness.
5. Openness has a positive and significant impact on happiness.

Considering research literature and mentioned hypotheses, research conceptual framework is drawn as follows: happiness in one hand and extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness and neuroticism as the aspects of Big Five personality model on the other hand. Figure 1 shows research model.

Figure 1. The Framework of Research



3. Methodology

The purpose of present research is to determine the relationship between the personality traits and happiness; so a Structural Equation Model (SEM) is proposed to analyze this relationship. In research analytical model, happiness is dependent variable and independent variables include extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness. The research is conducted in winter to summer 2010 at University of Tehran.

3.1 Scale

There are several scales to measure happiness of which the most famous one is Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI). It consists of 29 items with 4 choices for each one. The meanings of each item are different. OHI is a criterion to measure individuals' happiness which was first made in the late of 1980s to be utilized in organizations by Department of Experimental Psychology of the University of Oxford .(OHI, Argyle, Martin & Crossland, 1989). The measures of the questionnaire were revised and developed by Argyle, Martin and Lu in 1995. The questionnaire's reliability is confirmed in Great Britain (Furnham & Berwin 1990), Spain and USA. OHI is also used to compare the cultural differences of students in varied cultures of Australia, Canada, Great Britain and USA (Francis et al. 1998).

In this research, questionnaire is used to measure the variables. Questionnaire consists of 73 items and respondents' general (demographical) information. The first 29 questions address to happiness which is in fact Oxford's standard questionnaire to measure happiness. In the second section, there is 44 items on Big Five personality model (Costa & McCare 1989) in which 8 items are on extraversion, 9 items on agreeableness, 9 items on conscientiousness, 8 items on neuroticism and 10 items on openness. Chronbach's alpha is used to determine questionnaire reliability which was 92% in a preliminary test for the happiness variable. For other five variables namely extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness and conscientiousness, the results were 73.3%, 72.1%, 89.7%, 69.2% and 83.5% respectively. To determine the validity of various variables in mentioned questionnaire, second-order confirmatory factor analysis was used for exogenous and endogenous variables.

3.2 Participants

Statistical population in this research includes all of the students of University of Tehran. Using random sampling method, 274 students were selected as the sample. Among distributed questionnaires, 57% of respondents were male and 41.9% of them were female. Noteworthy, 1.1% of respondents did not announce their gender. In the meantime, 9% of respondents were married, 90.3% were single and 0.7% did not express their marital status. In terms of educational level, 61.7% were Bachelors, 32% were postgraduates, 4.5% were doctorate students and/or had PhD and 1.8% had not shown their education. The questionnaires were filled and returned in summer 2010 at University of Tehran.

4. Findings

4.1 Studying Happiness Rate among UT Students

Initially, one sample t-test was used to study the rate of happiness among UT students. The hypotheses of this section are categorized as follow:

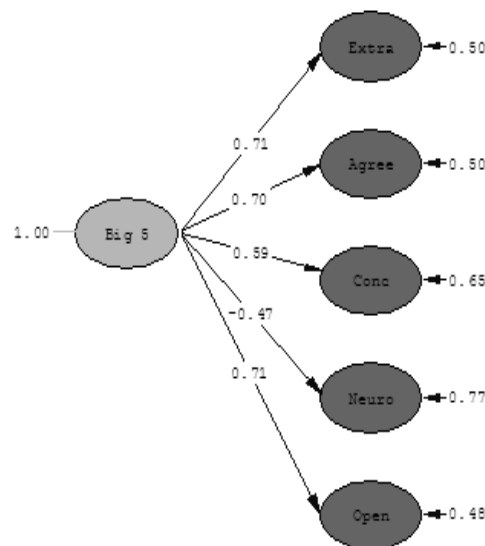
H0: the rate of happiness among University of Tehran students \leq mean level.

H1: the rate of happiness among University of Tehran student $>$ mean level.

Regarding significance rate of 0.00, it was concluded that in confidence level of 95%, H0 is rejected while H1 (the rate of happiness among UT student $>$ mean level) is supported.

4.2 Studying the Measurement Models of Endogenous and Exogenous Variables

Figure2. Measurement model of Big Five



Chi-Square=1536.85, df=897, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.081

As indicated in figure 2, based on standard estimation model, there is a positive correlation between Big Five model and its first aspect namely extraversion (0.71). There are also correlation between Big Five model and agreeableness (0.70), conscientiousness (0.59), neuroticism (-0.47) and openness (0.71).

The results of t-value models indicate that all parameters of the model are significant because the significant t-value of all measurement models routes are higher than 1.96 or less than -1.96. Ultimately, fitness indices show the goodness of Big Five measurement model.

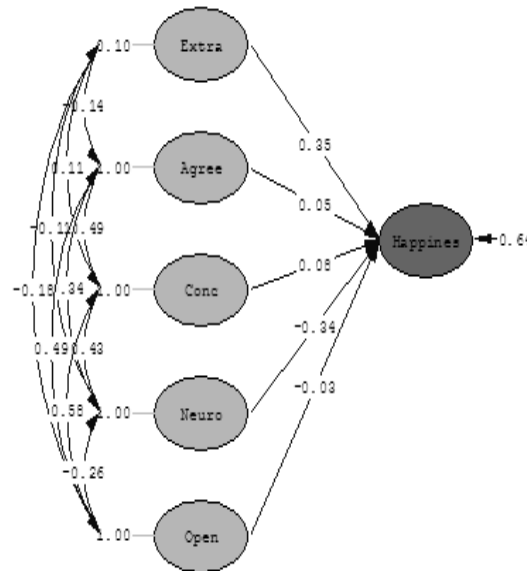
$$\frac{\chi^2}{df} = \frac{1536.85}{897} = 1.71 < 3 \text{ Means good fit}$$

RMSEA = 0.081 < 0.1 Means good fit

Noteworthy, RMSEA equals with 0.081 which is less than 0.1 and shows model goodness. In the meantime, $\chi^2 = 1536.85$ and freedom degree = 897. Hence, the ratio of χ^2 to freedom degree is 1.71 which is less than 3. So, it is concluded that obtained model has sufficient and proper goodness.

4.3 Studying the Results of Structural Equations Model (SEM)

Figure 3. The standard estimation model



Chi-Square=2105.72, df=930, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.061

The results of structural equation model show that extraversion (0.35), agreeableness (0.05) and conscientiousness (0.08) impact on happiness positively and neuroticism (-0.34) and openness (-0.03) impact on happiness negatively. In the meantime, the results of t-value model show that all five causal paths of Big Five model have significant impact on happiness because their t-values are 6.12, 0.75, 1.49, -6.76 and -0.05 respectively. According to t-value model, it is obvious that more extraversion means more happiness. There are similar results on agreeableness and conscientiousness: more agreeableness and conscientiousness lead to more happiness or, in other words, such people are happier. More neuroticism leads into less happiness. The results also show that people with more openness have less happiness. Therefore,

first, second, third and fourth hypotheses are accepted while the fifth hypothesis is rejected.

The results of fitness indices show proper goodness of structural model.

$$\frac{\chi^2}{df} = \frac{2105.72}{930} = 2.26 < 3 \text{ Means good fit}$$

RMSEA = 0.061 < 0.1 Means good fit

It should be noted that RMSEA = 0.061 which is less than 0.1 and shows model goodness. In the meantime, $\chi^2 = 2105.72$ and freedom degree = 930. Hence, the ratio of χ^2 to freedom degree is 2.26 which is less than 3. So, it is concluded that obtained model has sufficient and proper goodness.

4.4 Studying Research Variables

Finally, we address to study the appropriateness of research variables by using one sample t-test. The outcomes are shown in table 1.

Table1. One Sample t-test

Variables	N	Mean	SD	t	Situation
Happiness	278	2.090	0.433	22.749	Appropriate- Greater than 2
Extroversion	269	3.537	0.414	21.297	Appropriate- Greater than 3
Agreeableness	278	3.365	0.413	24.820	Appropriate- Greater than 3
Contentiousness	274	3.565	0.392	23.836	Appropriate- Greater than 3
Neuroticism	277	3.341	0.519	10.928	Inappropriate- Greater than 3
Openness	275	3.112	0.497	3.742	Appropriate- Greater than 3

5. Discussions

5.1 Conclusion

The results of present research on extraversion and neuroticism are compatible to previous researches (Costa & McCrae 1980; Argyle & Lu 1990; Brebner et al. 1995; Francis 1999; Furnham & Petrides 2003; Spangler & Palrecha 2004). Regarding openness, the results are in contradictory to previous researches (Furnham & Petrides 2003). In terms of agreeableness and conscientiousness, the research provides new findings which make it necessary to study in future researches.

In reviewing the literature, we pointed that openness refers to individuals' differences in intelligence, interests and creativity (Kim et al. 2007). The findings of present study show a significant relationship between openness and happiness. It means that people with more openness are less happy. Due to conflicts between the results of present research with previous researches, authors interviewed with some respondents. The results showed that since people with openness have an open and creative attitude toward phenomena, they look for new experiences and testing their ideas by modern tools and techniques. However, dominated circumstances on the universities in Iran are not in such a manner they expect and such circumstances are preventive rather than motivational. Although correlation extent between openness and happiness is low in present research, one can risk providing this assumption that low level of happiness among students with open personality is due to wide gap between their expectations and available facilities in environment. Obviously, when a free atmosphere is not even available in scientific and academic places to provide creative and emerging ideas, those students who look for new experiences will be disappointed.

Regarding the relationship between agreeableness/conscientiousness and happiness, no research was found in the literature. It was recognized in present study that agreeableness (+0.05) and conscientiousness (+0.08) have positive impact on individuals' happiness. The correlation between mentioned variables is low. So, any stronger claim on repeatability of research findings should be confirmed in next researches.

Meanwhile, the results show that extraversion (+0.35) has positive impact and neuroticism (-0.34) has negative impact on happiness. As pointed, these findings are compatible with previous researches. Extravert people participate in recreational and social activities dynamically while introvert people tend to be independent and are not interested in sharing their opinions. Extravert people always look to accompany others, communicate them easily, and affect and being affected by them, need someone to talk, are interested in physical and happy activities and participate in many collective activities. One can consider all such factors as creators of happiness among extravert people (Hills & Argyle 2001).

In analyzing the relationship between neuroticism and happiness, an important point is that neurotic people are easily affected by feelings and moods such as anger, anxiety, shame and depression (Kim et al. 2007). Obviously, such people cannot be highly happy due to their instability and always there is a problem to make them anxious and create the feeling of insecurity within them.

5.2 Recommendations

Iranian organizations' managers can enhance happiness among their employees and even costumers by being aware of their employees' personality traits and using proper behavioral strategies based on their individual characteristics.

As mentioned, achieving a good life depends on working in a good organization. So, maybe it can be claimed that in the special matter of universities, having a better life is strongly correlated with studying in a good university. Among happiness creators in organizations, one can point equality, organizational success, friendly ambience and close relations with colleagues (Fisher 2009).

Hence, managers are recommended to attempt to enhance their employees' and customers' happiness based on their personality traits. It is necessary, for instance, that managers' relational approach toward introvert people, who are naturally unhappy, differs from their relational approach toward extravert individuals. Overall, managers should create a happier workplace since even aside from ethical considerations, more organizational productivity and profitability still depends on the amount of worker's and customers' happiness. This research has some limitations and it can be revisable and pursuable in some dimensions. Firstly, the sample of study is limited to the students of university of Tehran, so the research can be followed in future with a bigger sample size by other researchers. Secondly, 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. Finally the research has been done in an educational organization. Other researchers can study the hypotheses of this study in various other industries. Thus, the subject of present research has a high capacity to be followed-up and developed in future researches.

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