Optimism Syndrome in Business Life: A Research of Optimism About Academicians in Turkey

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Abstract

In recent years the optimism which paid importance by the firms has been most examined. It is a simple definition of optimism is a generalized expectancy for positive future outcomes that seems to have adaptive and beneficial effects. This study aims to describe the level of optimism of academicians who have been working at Faculty of Economics and Administrative Science, Dumlupınar University. The study also analyzes the differences in optimism level according to demographic factors. Descriptive research model has been used in the study. Firstly, sample characteristics and optimism level of participants were exposed and T-test was used to analyze mean differences according to demographic factors for testing hypotheses of study. According to results, it can be stated that optimism level of academicians is high degree. The results of the study were coherent with the literature.

Keywords: Optimism, Life Orientation, Academicians.

1. Introduction

Optimism is the antithesis of helplessness. Optimism is a way to enlarge personal control (Seligman, 2006); it underscores hope, responsibility, and a general positive disposition to life (Hoy, Hoy, Kurz, 2008:822). Scheier and Carver (1987), suggest that optimism as a personality disposition may be beneficial to health through a more general interest in the processes that underlie the self-regulation of behavior. In other words, people’s actions are greatly affected by their beliefs about the probable outcomes of those actions. In general it is claimed that an individual having an optimistic outcome expectation in a problematic situation is stronger to the difficulties of life. And then, optimism is discussed as a general anticipation about life events. As an important aspect in human life, life orientation or optimistic evaluation of human life is a critical variable and adolescence, as an important period in human life, may be evaluated as a critical period to develop this orientation (Gündoğdu, 2010:193).

Optimists may pay attention to different aspects of a situation compared to more pessimistic persons, which in turn may lead to different adaptation processes. One study that is supportive to this assumption was conducted by Aspinwall and Brunhart (1996). These researchers investigated the role of optimism in reading time and recall for risk information versus no risk information of individuals who did or who did not practice the risk behavior in question. The major finding was that if a person practiced a behavior for which the risk information was important (for instance information on the dangers of sun-tanning read by persons who practiced sun-tanning)
optimism (assessed both as domain specific health-related optimism and as dispositional optimism) was correlated with reading time and recall. For people who did not practice the respective behavior optimism showed no relationship with these measures. Another relevant study was conducted by Segerstrom (2001). She analyzed optimism and unconscious information processing in an emotional Stroop task. In this study more pessimistic people showed a strong attention bias towards negative words whereas optimistic persons showed an attention bias to both positive and negative words. These studies thus indicate that there is a relationship between optimism and information processing. The Segerstrom (2001) data suggest that pessimists are more likely to attend to negative than positive aspects of their environment, whereas optimists attend to both equally.

Moreover, the Aspinwall and Brunhart (1996) findings suggest that optimists are more likely to attend to information if this information pertains to a risk behavior that they are currently practicing (Abele, Gendolla, 2007:1126).

There are a lot of definitions of optimism in general positive view of point to the life make positive relationships in working environment. The optimism that we always use in our life is a fatal thing for academicians because we can say social and mental main features are deep lying causes in this job. It is a simple definition of optimism is a generalized expectancy for positive future outcomes that seems to have adaptive and beneficial effects. Optimism may be related to attention and information processing and may so have an influence at an already very early level of self-regulation. Optimists may pay attention to different aspects of a situation compared to more pessimistic persons, which in turn may lead to different adaptation processes. Optimists are more likely to attend to information if this information pertains to a risk behavior that they are currently practicing.

In this working the main purpose is to define academicians are optimist or not and determine the relationships between the level of optimism and demographic factors. In this research, academicians' optimist behavior patterns about the general conditions are investigated instead of works, students, and contractions with the family or social life. Furthermore, another aim of the study is to indicate the relationship between the main features of the academicians that are gender, marital status, age, academic title, working year and situation of being administrator and the level of optimism.

2. Literature Review And Hypotheses

2.1. Literature Review

Optimism, as conceptualized by Scheier and Carver (1985), is the generalized expectancy that the future will be positive. Like hope, it is a positive anticipatory state; thus, it is not surprising that hope and optimism have been portrayed as similar constructs in the psychological. However, distinctions between the two states have also been reported. In Snyder’s theory on hope, optimism is viewed as a focus on outcome expectancies determining goal-directed behavior, whereas hope involves a reciprocal action between efficacy expectancies and outcome expectancies. Averill et al. (1990) suggested that the difference between the two states resides in hope being an emotion. Thus, people will hope for things that are important to them despite a low likelihood of realizing that outcome, whereas optimism is more closely attuned to the probability of an outcome occurring. People will also hope for things that are more personally relevant, whereas they will be optimistic for a broader range of outcomes (Bruinink, Malle, 2006:330).

Positive psychology, the theoretical frame guiding this study, explores and explains optimal environments (Seligman, 2000, 2002). Analysing positive emotions (especially optimism), traits, and institutions, positive psychologists identify situations where humans thrive and flourish. Such an environment is precisely what most educators would like the classroom to be. An optimistic classroom would emphasize the opportunities and possibilities (Wethington, 2003), resilience (Ryff & Singer, 2003), altruism (Piliavin, 2003), and trust (Hoy et al., 2006). When looking at the classroom context, optimistic instructors focus on the positive qualities of students, classrooms, schools, and communities (Pajares, 2001). Optimism is the antithesis of helplessness. Optimism is a way to enlarge personal control (Seligman, 2006); it underscores hope, responsibility, and a general positive disposition to life.

Optimism has been conceived and studied as a personal disposition—a tendency to believe that one will generally experience good outcomes in life and avoid bad outcomes (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). As a measure of dispositional optimism (Andersson, 1996; Vautier, Raufaste, & Cariou, 2003). Andersson’s meta-analytic review of 56 studies using the LOT found that optimism is highly significantly associated with measures
of coping and stress, reports of psychological symptoms such as depression, self-reports of negative affect as well as health and recovery from disease. Thus it appears that optimism is a measurable personal characteristic.

There is not already any study about the optimism level of the academicians in the whole literature. On the other hand, there are lots of studies about the behaviours of the academicians to students, their families and schoolboard. The point of this research is to determine the level of the optimism individually and the changes in our lives if people take a bright view of life. Therefore, academic optimism is not researched in this study and instead of the academic optimism the works and researches that are related to optimism is scanned in literature and results of the researches we already have will be discussed.

Fischer, Chalmers (2008), A meta-analysis of dispositional optimism levels as measured by the life orientation test across 22 countries. Using mixed effect modeling, overall culture differences were small. Greater individualism was associated with greater optimism. Greater egalitarianism was consistently associated with higher optimism. Claims of fundamental cultural differences were not supported.

Wenglert, Rosen (2000), optimism-pessimism was defined in terms of an expectancy-value model based on subjective valve model on subjective probabilities and subjective values for positive or negative future events in students personal life and for positive or negative future general World events. 177 of 183 students were classified as optimistic about the personal future and six students as pessimistic. Considering the world’s future, 155 students were optimistic and 28 pessimistic.

Sharpe, Martin, Roth (2011), the purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between the Big Five factors of personality and dispositional optimism. Results indicated strong positive relationship between optimism and four of the Big Five factors: Emotional Stability, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness.

Palgi, Shriara, Ben-Ezra, Fridel, Bodner (2011), examined whether daily optimism and pessimism differently related to each other among young adults and old people. Findings Show that Daily optimism and pessimism were less strongly related to each other among old people.

Hayes, Weathington (2007), the purpose of the study was to examine the relationships among dispositional optimism, life satisfaction, stress, and job burnout in a sample of restaurant managers. Restaurant managers who reported having higher levels of dispositional optimism reported lower levels of stress and job burnout. Managers who ranked higher in levels of dispositional optimism reported higher life satisfaction. Higher levels of stress were also related to increased job burnout and a decreased life satisfaction.

Langabeer II, Dellifraine (2011), the purpose of the study is to examine if optimism serves as a cognitive bias that short-circuits the strategic process, or more specifically results in a greater use of incrementalism versus a comprehensive rational process. They were found that at the time of the study, executives were more optimistic than average. It was further found that higher optimism is associated with less rational (and more incremental) strategic decision-making processes. Organizational size also had an interaction effect on the optimism-strategic process relationship.

Jensen, Luthans, Lebsack S. Lebsack R. (2007), explores the linkage between bank employee levels of optimism and performance outcomes. Results indicated a significant positive relationship between the midlevel managers’ measured state of optimism and their supervisors’ rating of their overall work performance. Findings also indicated a positive correlation between self-rated optimism, job satisfaction and self-rated performance for both midlevel managers.

Jackson, Weiss, Lundquist (2002), the results of the study indicate that there are fundamental differences between persons with more and less optimistic views of idiosyncratic, goal-oriented activities. Compared with their less optimistic peers, optimists rated their personal projects as more congruent with and fulfilling of their values and identities. Projects generated by optimists reflected positively on their sense of self and other goals. In contrast, and perhaps paradoxically, pessimists perceived self-generated goals as more alien to the fulfillment of their identities.

2.2. Hypotheses

Hypotheses of the study are:

● H1: According to gender of academicians, there are meaningful differences in optimism level.
- H2: According to age group of academicians, there are meaningful differences in optimism level.
- H3: According to marital status of academicians, there are meaningful differences in optimism level.
- H4: According to academic title of academicians, there are meaningful differences in optimism level.
- H5: According to working year of academicians, there are meaningful differences in optimism level.
- H6: According to situation of being administrator of academicians, there are meaningful differences in optimism level.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Goal

The main aim of the study is to determine the level of optimism of academicians. To test the propositions, a questionnaire was conducted and used a field survey.

3.2. Sample and Data Collection

The main aim of the study is to reveal the level of optimism of academicians. To these ends, it was determined personnel of Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences (including 98 personnel) of Dumlupinar University as a population of study. 80 personnels were selected by utilising the stratified sampling method, composed a questionnaire form by searching various studies (Scheier, Carver, 1985) and respondents were asked to fill in the form.

3.3. Analyses and Results

Level of optimism was measured with a 12-item scale by using a 5-point scale with labels “I strongly disagree”, “I disagree”, “I am not sure”, “I agree”, “I strongly agree”. As to implementing this scale, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was used to determine the internal consistency reliability of the scale and it was determined that alpha value of the scale was 0,831. It can be said that the scale has a high alpha values and it is available to statistical analyze.

Descriptive research model has been used in the study. Firstly, sample characteristics and optimism level of participants were exposed and T-test was used to analyse mean differences according to demographic factors for testing hypotheses of study.

Respondents in the study were asked several demograp hic questions, including gender, age group, marital status, academic title, working year and situation of being administrator. Demographic characteristics of sample are shown in table 1. It was found that most of participants are male academicians. On the other hand, results indicated that large majority of participants (% 75,0) are not an administrator. Besides, it was found that % 60 of participants were in 26-40 age group, %53,8 of participants were associated professor, % 36,3 of participants had been working for 11-15 years.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Academic Title</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Working Year</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>77,5</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5,0</td>
<td>Research Assis.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11,3</td>
<td>0-11 months</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22,5</td>
<td>26-40</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>60,0</td>
<td>Lecturers</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17,5</td>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>41-55</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>33,8</td>
<td>Assis.Prof</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5,0</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>56+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,3</td>
<td>Assoc.Prof</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>53,8</td>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>36,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12,5</td>
<td>16+ years</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26,3</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>73,8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25,0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>75,0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>75,0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings about optimism level of academicians were presented in table 2 along with the mean scores. The findings in this table indicate that means of optimism vary from 3,25 to 4,57. “I enjoy my friends a lot” has the highest mean. Besides, “It’s important for me to keep busy”, “Overall, I expect more good things to happen to
me than bad” and “Things never work out the way I want them to” items have a high mean score. As for the items which have the least mean score, it can be seen that the item stated as “It’s easy for me to relax” has the lowest mean. On the other hand, considering whole optimism items, results indicated that mean of it is a high (not usurious) level.

Table 2: Means of Optimism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I enjoy my friends a lot.</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>It’s important for me to keep busy.</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Things never work out the way I want them to.</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I’m always optimistic about my future.</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I always look on the bright side of things.</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I hardly ever expect things to go my way.</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I rarely count on good things happening to me.</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>If something can go wrong for me, it will.</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>In certain times, I usually expect the best.</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I don’t get upset too easily.</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>It’s easy for me to relax.</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whole Optimism</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(-) Reverse code items

After state mean of optimism of participants, it has turned to come analysing mean differences according to demographic factors for testing hypotheses of study. The findings and results of hypotheses of the study have been taken place in table 3. As we know, the research has six hypotheses. Two hypotheses of them (H5 and H6) have been approved.

Table 3. Findings and Results of Hypotheses of Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HYPOTHESES</th>
<th>TEST TYPE</th>
<th>TEST VALUE</th>
<th>SIGNIFICANCE</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1: According to gender of academicians, there are meaningful differences in optimism level.</td>
<td>T-Test</td>
<td>1.381</td>
<td>p&gt;0.05</td>
<td>REJECTED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2: According to age group of academicians, there are meaningful differences in optimism level.</td>
<td>ANOVA</td>
<td>0.623</td>
<td>p&gt;0.05</td>
<td>REJECTED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3: According to marital status of academicians, there are meaningful differences in optimism level.</td>
<td>T-Test</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>p&gt;0.05</td>
<td>REJECTED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4: According to academic title of academicians, there are meaningful differences in optimism level.</td>
<td>ANOVA</td>
<td>0.770</td>
<td>p&gt;0.05</td>
<td>REJECTED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5: According to working year of academicians, there are meaningful differences in optimism level.</td>
<td>ANOVA</td>
<td>2.221</td>
<td>p&lt;0.05</td>
<td>APPROVED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6: According to situation of being administrator of academicians, there are meaningful differences in optimism level.</td>
<td>T-Test</td>
<td>-2.429</td>
<td>p&lt;0.05</td>
<td>APPROVED</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to table 3, there are meaningful differences in optimism level according to working year of academicians. The result of Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons Test (Tukey) showed meaningful differences between groups of 0-11 months and 1-5 years. Namely, optimism level of academicians who have been working for 0-11 months has the highest score (4,23) whereas this score is 3,51 in 1-5 years group (p<0.05). However, optimism level vary from 3,64 to 3,84 in other working time group. In other words, H5 has been approved.

Secondly, it was found that there was meaningful difference in optimism level according to situation of being administrator of academicians and H6 was approved. Optimism level of academicians who are not administrator is higher than level of administrator academicians.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, it was given place to various definitions about optimism and then presented the findings of a research which used a descriptive research model. This study aimed to describe the level of optimism of academicians who had been working at Faculty of Economics and Administrative Science, Dumlupinar
University. The study also analyzes differences in optimism level according to demographic factor such as gender, marital status, age etc. According to results, it can be stated that optimism level of academicians is high degree. Two of six hypotheses of the study have been approved. There are significant differences in optimism level according to working year and situation of being administrator of academicians. Investigated the findings, it appears that the academicians who has been working only 0-11 months the most optimistic group whereas academicians who has been working between 1-5 years the least optimist group. One of these findings may be interpreted as that high optimism level when starting to work life at university rapidly decreases in five years and then returns to normalcy. Secondly, it should be accepted normally that optimism level of academicians who are not administrator is significantly higher than level of administrator academicians because optimism level is decreases in the event of increasing the roles and responsibilities of personnel.

In this study, optimism level was examined as mention before. The most important limitation is that this research has been carried out on academicians instead of huge and heterogeneous sample (e.g. a lot of faculty and university, different segments of society). In other words, this study with narrow window can be detailed and covered with huge and different segments of society and proved its findings because this study is a preliminary study.

Previous research has shown that optimists are more likely to formulate a plan of action for difficult situations, are less likely give up, and have a more positive outlook on stressful situations. These findings lend strong support for the notion that optimism can be closely linked with workplace performance. Therefore, optimistic (as opposed to pessimistic) academicians tend to be more creative in academic research, and are more proactive than reactive. Optimists are more likely to envision greater opportunities and are more eager to face challenges. However, optimistic academicians are more successful about relationship than the other academicians who are the pessimists.

References


