

Is Happiness the Key to Success?

Sonali Singh¹ and Ambrien Ahmed²
Research Scholar¹, Associate Professor²
Galgotias University, Greater Noida, India

Abstract

The purpose of this literature review was to explore the relationship between happiness and success. More specifically, whether happiness leads to success or not. This review has nine relevant studies that showed the positive relation between happiness and success. The studies consisted of three cross-sectional, three longitudinal and three experimental studies. Cross-sectional studies provided the evidence that happy people are better decision makers and are more optimistic in tough situations. Longitudinal studies provided evidence that happy people are more likely to find employment, be satisfied with their jobs, be productive, receive social support, be evaluated positively, engage in fewer withdrawal behaviours, and obtain higher income at a later point in their life. Experimental studies provided the evidence that happy people are less likely to get burned-out than their less happy peers. Positive affect is the cause of success in all these studies. The reason behind this has been thoroughly explained by Fredrickson in her broaden-and-build theory. The theory suggests that positive emotions broaden an individual's momentary mindset, and by doing so, these help an individual in building up enduring personal resources. It allows an individual to take more risks, be more goal-approach oriented, be creative and an optimist; all of the things that guarantee success in pretty much every aspect of their life.

Keywords: *happiness, success, career success, and positive affect.*

Introduction

Every person, at some point in their lives, has heard the phrase “once you become successful, then you’ll be happy”. It has been taught from an early age that success is a sure way to gain happiness. While the statement may be true, many research studies are in support of the hypothesis- happiness causes success (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008). Researchers believe that there is a causal relationship between happiness and success. Not only does success leads to happiness but happiness leads to success as well. Being happy in the first place may cause the person to achieve success in various domains of life. Many researchers have focused their attention on the topic of happiness and success in the past few years. In this paper, researches are reviewed to study does happiness leads to success and the reasons behind it.

Martin Seligman (2002) has defined happiness as “experiencing frequent positive emotions, such as joy, excitement and commitment, combined with deeper feelings of meaning and purpose”. Happiness, in positive psychology, is used interchangeably with subjective well-being. Subjective well-being refers to how people evaluate their lives - both at the moment and for longer periods. These evaluations include people’s emotional reactions to events, their moods, and judgements they form about their life satisfaction, fulfilment, and satisfaction with domains such as marriage and work (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Happiness focuses on notions such as subjective well-being, positive emotions and so on, whereas success is mostly defined as accomplishing the goals set out by one’s society. Society leads us to believe that happiness is solely gained through success - that you’ll end up an unhappy person if you don’t become successful. However, researchers have consistently found that being happy in the first place leads a person to become more successful in life. Happiness and success are both inextricably linked.

Why is happiness linked to career success? Lyubomirsky proposed that this is not merely because success leads to happiness, but because positive affect engenders success (Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005). According to Watson (1988), positive affect "reflects one's level of pleasurable engagement with the environment." High positive affect is characterized by high levels of enthusiasm, energy, mental alertness, and determination, while low positive affect reflects lethargy and depression (Watson, 1988; Watson, Clark, & Carey, 1988). Positive affect determines that life is going well which allows the person to pursue new goals and be approach oriented (Cantor et al., 1991). Fredrickson (2001) proposed broaden and build theory which provides an overview of how positive emotions help build physical, psychological and social resources. These resources enhance skills and abilities, make relationships stronger and restore the energy. Positive emotions broaden an individual’s momentary mindset, and by doing so these help an individual in building up enduring personal resources.

There are a few characteristics that set the happy people apart from the unhappy ones. The characteristics related to happiness or positive affect include confidence, likability, positive constructs of others, activity, energy and prosocial behaviour, effective coping with challenge and stress (Lyubomirsky, Diener et al., 2005). Accordingly, these characteristics help happy individuals gain success in important domains of life. Happy people are inclined to perceive and interpret their environment differently and more positively from their less happy peers (Brickman, Coates et al., 1978). They tend to take more risks and be more goal oriented which increases their likelihood to be more successful. Many researchers suggest that happy people

are more likely to pursue important goals (Carver, 2003; Elliott & Thrash, 2002; Lyubomirsky, 2001). Furthermore, many researchers suggest that happy people are more likely to exhibit prosocial organizational behaviour (Borman, Penner, Allen, & Motowidlo, 2001; Crede, Chernyshenko, Stark, Dalal, & Bashshur, 2007; Dalal, Baysinger, Brummel, & Lebreton, 2012). They tend to go out of their way to help coworkers and consumers (George, 1991), give charities (Priller & Schupp, 2011), and spread goodwill (Borman et al., 2001).

Method

In this paper studies were located using several search strategies to find the correlation between happiness and success. Studies were searched using several databases, including Google Scholar, PsycNET and PsycINFO. The combinations of the following keywords were used to find relevant studies: happiness, success, career success, and positive affect. Earliest study on the link between happiness and success that was found for this article was conducted in 1986. Reference sections of obtained papers were examined for additional studies. The search yielded a total of 17 potentially relevant studies, including published journal articles and book chapters, and each was then reviewed for selection. Nine studies were finally selected for this literature review that were found to be most relevant. Studies included three cross-sectional, three longitudinal and three experimental research which provided an insight into how happiness promotes success. Cross-sectional studies exhibit that a correlational relationship presents between happiness and success, but they cannot suggest whether happiness causes success or not. Longitudinal research provides evidence by creating the time-based order of the happiness and success in real world situations. Lastly, experiments can provide strong evidence for the direction of causality between two variables through random assignment and precise emotion inductions methods. Though, any one type of investigation (cross-sectional, longitudinal, or experimental) individually cannot sufficiently substantiate our hypothesis, but jointly all three types of investigations can robustly support our hypothesis that happiness can lead to success.

Results

Table 1: Information and result of different studies (Cross-sectional, Longitudinal and Experimental)

Type of Research	Study	Title	Result
Cross-sectional	Staw & Barsade, 1993	Affect & managerial performance: a test of the sadder-but-wiser vs. happier-and-smarter hypotheses.	Positive emotions help in better performance under dire circumstances.
Cross-sectional	Seligman & Schulman, 1986	Explanatory style as a predictor of productivity and quitting among life insurance sales agents.	Optimistic agents were more likely to succeed in their tasks and less likely to quit.
Cross-sectional	Langelaan, Bakker, Van Doornen & Schaufeli, 2006	Burnout and work engagement: Do individual differences make a difference?	Happy people are less likely to get burned out.
Longitudinal	Roberts, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2003	Work experiences & personality development in young adulthood.	Positive affect indicated high job satisfaction and financial independency at later stage.
Longitudinal	Cote, Saks & Zikic, 2006	Affect and performance in organizational settings.	Positive affect associated with greater clarity of what kind of a job an individual want.
Longitudinal	Miner & Glomb, 2010	State mood, task performance, and behaviour at work: A within-persons approach.	Pleasant moods engenders a state of cognitive flexibility and efficiency of problem solving.
Experimental	Carnevale, P.J., & Isen, A.M., 1986	The influence of positive affect and visual access on the discovery of integrative solutions in bilateral negotiation.	Happy people showed less argumentative behaviour and more cooperation.

Experimental	Hom & Arbuckle, 1988	Mood induction effects upon goal setting and performance in young children.	Children with positive emotions set higher goal for themselves
Experimental	Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005	Positive emotions broaden the scope of attention and thought-action repertoires.	Participants with positive emotions had a broader sense of attention and thought-action repertoires.

Cross-sectional studies

In the first cross sectional study (Table 1), one hundred and eleven first-year M.B.A. students (64 men and 47 women) participated in an assessment centre weekend. The assessment consisted of behavioural exercises, a decision simulation, in-depth interviews, and an extensive number of personality inventories. These students were assessed by a 12-member personality staff and a six-member managerial staff. The mean age of the subjects was 27.6 years, ranging from a low of 21 to a high of 40 years of age. The study examined the relationship between affect and managerial performance. A positive affectivity scale was constructed to evaluate their performance. High positive affect reflects high levels of enthusiasm, energy and alertness whereas low positive affect reflects lethargy and depression. Decision making was assessed through a managerial simulation which is 3-hour exercise that includes 21 different decision items. The subject must assume the role of plant manager and deal with - in written form- numerous accumulated problems to ensure the plant runs smoothly. To assess interpersonal performance, a leaderless group discussion (LGD) exercise was used. Each participant was asked to represent a subordinate's interest in getting a pay raise, as well as the best interests of the company. There were neither sufficient resources to meet all requested raises nor enough time to evaluate fully all the possibilities for allocating funds. The students participated in the LGD in groups of six. Participants were given ten minutes to study the case and then thirty minutes to reach a consensus decision on the allocation of pay raises for each of six candidates. Thus, like many managerial tasks in which both distributive and integrative solutions are possible, participants were asked to work for their own as well as joint interests. It was found that happy M.B.A. students received better performance ratings from faculty evaluators than unhappy students. The high-positive affect group was more accurate in its decisions, getting more of the items correct than those in either the low or mid-level affect groups. People who

were high in positive affect also scored better on several measures of interpersonal behavior (Staw & Barsade, 1993). It can be concluded that positive emotions help an individual make better decisions and perform well even in dire circumstances as opposed to people with negative or neutral emotions.

In table 1, the second cross-sectional study was conducted on 94 experienced life insurance agents whose work performances were measured on the basis of Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ). The study was actually conducted to predict learned helplessness theory which claims that the tendency to explain bad events by internal, stable, and global causes potentiates quitting when bad events are encountered. Life insurance agents were chosen since they frequently experience bad events. Explanatory style, as measured by the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ), correlated with and predicted the performance of life insurance sales agents. ASQ yields scores for explanatory style for bad events and good events using three causal dimensions—internal versus external, stable versus unstable, and global versus specific causes. The subjects were asked to generate their own cause for a series of hypothetical events, and then to rate that cause along 7-point scales corresponding to the internality, stability, and globality dimensions. Results declared that agents who scored in the optimistic half of explanatory style sold 37% more insurance than agents scoring in the pessimistic half. (Seligman & Schulman, 1986). These findings suggest that happy people are optimistic in tough situations which makes them a better performer and thus more likely to succeed. Cote (1999) concluded that there is a bidirectional relationship between happiness and job performance - positive affect leads to strong performance, and strong performance leads to positive affect.

In the third cross-sectional study as mentioned in Table 1, 572 employees participated in a study that aimed to examine whether burnout and its positive antipode - work engagement - could be differentiated on the basis of personality and temperament. Most participants were men (83%). The mean age was 42 years ($SD = 8.0$). Burnout was measured with Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey and work engagement was measured with the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. The burnout employees were classified by a combination of high scores on neuroticism and low scores on extraversion. Results concluded that burnout was negatively correlated with high levels of positive affect and work engagement was positively correlated with high levels of positive affect (Langelaan, Bakker, van Doornen, & Schaufeli, 2006). It is

evident in the study that happy people are less likely to get burnout than unhappy peers. These correlational data continue to suggest that happiness is mostly associated with career success.

Longitudinal studies

In the first longitudinal study (Table 1), an analysis of the relationship between personality traits and work experiences with a special focus on the relationship between changes in personality and work experiences in young adulthood was provided. 1037 children participated in the assessment and formed the base for the longitudinal study. As part of 18 to 26 age assessment, participants completed a modified version of MPQ (Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire). It was to test whether adolescent personality traits predicted work experiences in young adulthood. Then this MPQ was correlated with age-26 work variables such as earnings, power, work satisfaction, work involvement and financial security. The study confirmed that personality traits assessed in late adolescence are helpful in understanding young adults' subsequent work experiences. It was found that positive affect measured at 18 predicted outcomes such as obtaining a job, high job satisfaction, and feeling financially independent at 26 (Roberts, Caspi & Moffitt, 2003).

Furthermore, in second longitudinal study as shown in Table 1, it was hypothesized that positive affect is positively related with job search clarity. One hundred and fifty-three graduating university students completed the questionnaires at Time 1 session which consisted of a questionnaire that measured positive affectivity, negative affectivity, conscientiousness, job search self-efficacy, job search clarity, and job search intensity. At Time 2, 123 participants completed the questionnaire which measured job search intensity, the number of job interviews attended and job offers received, and if participants had accepted a full-time job offer. The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule was used to measure positive and negative affect, International Personality Item Pool for conscientiousness, Saks and Ashforth (1999) for job-search self-efficacy, a five item-scale for job search clarity and Saks and Ashforth (2002) for job search intensity. It was found that positive affectivity is related to job search outcomes through job search clarity. Individuals with high positive affectivity were more likely to achieve job search clarity than their counterparts. The direct relationship between positive affectivity and job search clarity was significant. Positive affectivity leads to job search clarity, job search clarity leads to job search intensity, job search intensity leads to job offers, and job offers lead to employment status (Cote, Saks, & Zikic, 2006). Positive affect is associated with a greater clarity of what kind of job a person wants and how to look for that job.

In the third longitudinal study (Table 1), the intra-individual relationship between state mood and the primary components of the individual-level criterion space (task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and work withdrawal) was examined. 67 individuals in a call centre were selected as participants. A quasi-random interval experience sampling approach was adopted. Each participant filled out one morning and 4 or 5 randomly scheduled surveys per day on palmtop computers at random intervals 4–5 times each day for 3 weeks. The palmtop computers signalled participants to respond to randomly timed surveys, administered questions, collected and stored responses, and ensured that responses were recorded in close temporal proximity to signals using a custom software application. Participants could choose to “start” or “skip” a survey; they had 20 min to complete a skipped survey. It was found that positive moods were greatly associated with prosocial behaviour. When participants experienced a positive mood, they reported more frequently engaging in voluntary organizational citizenship behaviour. These studies show that happy people tend to display behaviours that promote success, thus making them more successful in a workplace. It was found that when their mood was more pleasant, participants solved their customers’ problems more quickly and moved onto other calls. Results were consistent with research suggesting that more pleasant moods engender a state of cognitive flexibility and efficiency of problem solving. (Miner & Glomb, 2010).

Experimental studies

In the first experimental study as shown in Table 1, 80 males participated in a task described as “negotiation between two simulated companies.” Two subjects were employed as negotiators in each session, making 40 dyads. Subjects, as negotiators, played the roles of buyer and seller in a wholesale appliance market. They were instructed to try to reach agreement on the prices of three commodities: televisions, vacuum cleaners, and typewriters. Each subject was given a profit schedule with the instruction that it could not be shown to the other. In the buyer’s schedule, TVs had the highest, and typewriters the lowest, profit potential. These priorities were reversed for the seller. Hence, the task permitted “logrolling,” in the sense that both parties could achieve high profits by exchanging concessions on their low-profit items. The basic experimental design involved positive-affect induction vs none (a control condition for the affect manipulation). Before the actual task, the subjects were shown some funny cartoons and were given a scratch pad as a gift. The subjects in the affect control conditions did not see the cartoons nor receive the gift. Subjects who were randomly assigned to a positive

emotion manipulation (reading cartoons and receiving a gift) demonstrated less argumentative behaviour, were more cooperative, and were better able to find mutually beneficial solutions than participants who received no such manipulation (Carnevale, P.J.D., & Isen, 1986).

In the second experimental study (Table 1), thirty-one pre-schoolers, 17 females and 14 males with a mean age of 4.6, were randomly assigned to one of two (happy or sad) mood induction groups. The children were presented with a Digit Substitution Task. After task instructions, the mood induction procedure was initiated. For the happy (or sad) group, the experimenter told the children to think of something that made them happy (or sad). After the appropriate mood was induced, the children were informed that they would have 5 minutes to do as many of the digit substitutions as they could. They were then asked to choose a goal. Goal level was assessed by having the children point to the number of lines they expected to complete. It was found in the results that children who experienced positive emotions had set higher goals for themselves. A happy mood state produced higher goals and performance than a sad mood. (Hom & Arbuckle, 1988).

In the third experimental study as shown in Table 1, two experiments with 104 college students tested the broaden and build theory (Fredrickson, 1988) hypothesis in a study. Participants were shown films. Subjective experiences were assessed using Emotion Report Forms. Participants rated the greatest amount felt of the following nine emotions: amusement, anger, anxiety, contentment, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and serenity. Ratings were made on 9-point Likert scale. Five videotaped films served as the experimental manipulation in this research. Two clips elicited distinct positive emotions, another two elicited negative ones and the final clip served as neutral control condition. In experiment 1, participants were randomly assigned to view one of the five clips after which they immediately had to complete "Similarity Judgement Task". In experiment 2, after viewing another film clip, participants had to complete "Imagery Task". It was found in the results that positive emotions led to a broader scope of attention and interests. Participants who felt positive emotions had a broader sense of attention and thought-action repertoires. The results support the broaden and build hypothesis (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005).

All of the above studies suggest that happy people are more likely to succeed in their careers as opposed to unhappy people because they have some crucial characteristics that are extremely important in the work field such as having a high level of enthusiasm towards their work,

energy and alertness to stay on top of things, being highly accurate in decision making and exhibiting good interpersonal behaviour towards their peers.

Discussion

After reviewing the cross-sectional, longitudinal and experimental research it can be said that the hypothesis, happiness leads to career success is approved. First, the cross-sectional studies suggest that happiness is positively associated with job autonomy, job satisfaction, job performance, prosocial behavior, social support, popularity, and income. People who are high in positive affect tend to be better decision makers as well good at interpersonal behaviour. (Staw & Barsade, 1993). Happy people are more desired in a workplace than the unhappy ones. They also tend to be more optimistic in tough situations and know how to handle it best (Seligman & Schulman, 1986). Happy people are less likely to get burnout and they have a high level of work engagement.

Second, the longitudinal studies provided the evidence that happy people are more likely to find employment, be satisfied with their jobs, be productive, receive social support, be evaluated positively, engage in fewer withdrawal behaviors, and obtain higher income at a later point in their life. (Roberts, Caspi & Moffitt, 2003). It happens because happy people tend to have high positive affect which helps them to clear their mind and think strictly about what they want in life and how they're going to get it. They're aware of their capabilities and their goals.

Finally, experimental studies proved that people with high positive affect are better negotiators and better problem-solvers (P. J. D. Carnevale & Isen, 1986). They tend to set higher goals for themselves and try their hardest to perform as best as they can (Hom & Arbuckle, 1988). Positive emotions also help broadening the scope of attention which is a huge factor in work performance and gaining success.

The explanation for these findings lies in the conceptual model of positive affect. Fredrickson (2001) has described it best through broaden-and-build theory. The theory says that positive emotions do much more than just cause us happiness, joy and contentment in the moment we experience them. They also broaden behaviour such as awareness, play, discovery and curiosity. The happier we are, the more flexible and creative we are in the way we work. Fredrickson proposed that positive emotions broaden an individual's momentary mindset, and by doing so these help an individual in building up enduring personal resources. Happy people gain success because of positive effect - they are not afraid to pursue new goals and challenges which increases their chances to succeed in all aspects of life.

Conclusion

We are conditioned by our society to believe that we must chase success in order to gain happiness. This meta-analysis study focuses on providing evidence for the hypothesis that happiness precedes success. It provides evidence that happy people are more likely to get a desirable job because they are aware of their capabilities and choices, they commit to their goals and perform accordingly, are more curious and hence more creative and tend to perform better in the workplace than their unhappy peers. After reviewing many literatures, it can be concluded that happiness does, indeed, lead to career success.

References

- Brickman, P., Coates, D., & Janoff-Bulman, R. (1978). Lottery winners and accident victims: Is happiness relative? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36(8), 917-927.
- Boehm, J. K., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). Does happiness promote career success? *Journal of Career Assessment*, 16, 101-116.
- Borman, W. C., Penner, L. A., Allen, T. D., & Motowidlo, S. J. (2001). Personality predictors of citizenship performance. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 9, 52-69.
- Cantor, N., Norem, J., Langston, C., Zirkel, S., Fleeson, W., & Cook-Flannagan, C. (1991). Life tasks and daily life experience. *Journal of Personality*, 59, 425-451.
- Carnevale, P. J. (2008). Positive affect and decision frame in negotiation. *Group Decision and Negotiation*, 17, 51-63.
- Carver, C. S. (2003). Pleasure as a sign you can attend to something else: Placing positive feelings within a general model of affect. *Cognition and Emotion*, 17, 241-261.
- Cote, S. (1999). Affect and performance in organizational settings. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 8, 65-68.
- Cote, S., Saks, A. M., & Zikic, J. (2006). Trait affect and job search outcomes. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 68, 233-252.
- Crede, M., Chernyshenko, O. S., Stark, S., Dalal, R. S., & Bashshur, M. (2007). Job satisfaction as mediator: An assessment of job satisfaction's position within the nomological network. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 80, 515-538.
- Dalal, R. S., Baysinger, M., Brummel, B. J., & Lebreton, J. M. (2012). The relative importance of employee engagement, other job attitudes, and trait affect as predictors of job performance. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 42, 295-325.
- Diener, E., Suh, E. M., Lucas, R. E., & Smith, H. L. (1999). Subjective well-being: Three decades of progress. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125, 276-302.
- Elliot, A. J., & Thrash, T. M. (2002). Approach-avoidance motivation in personality: Approach and avoidance temperaments and goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82, 804-818.

- Fredrickson, B. L. (1998). What good are positive emotions? *Review of General Psychology*, 2, 300–319.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*, 56, 218–226.
- George, J. M. (1991). State or trait: Effects of positive mood on prosocial behaviours at work. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 76, 299–307.
- Hom, H. L., & Arbuckle, B. (1988). Mood induction effects upon goal setting and performance in young children. *Motivation and Emotion*, 12(2), 113–122.
- Langelaan, S., Bakker, A. B., van Doornen, L. J. P., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2006). Burnout and work engagement: Do individual differences make a difference? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 40, 521–532.
- Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin*, 131, 803–855
- Miner, A. G., & Glomb, T. M. (2010). State mood, task performance, and behavior at work: A within-persons approach. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 112, 43–57.
- Priller, E., & Schupp, J. (2011). Social and economic characteristics of financial and blood donors in Germany. *DIW Economic Bulletin*, ISSN 2192–7219, 1, 23–30.
- Roberts, B. W., Caspi, A., & Moffitt, T. E. (2003). Work experiences and personality development in young adulthood. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 582–593.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Schulman, P. (1986). Explanatory style as a predictor of productivity and quitting among life insurance sales agents. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50, 832–838.
- Staw, B. M., & Barsade, S. G. (1993). Affect and managerial performance: A test of the sadder-but-wiser vs. happier-and-smarter hypotheses. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38, 304–331.
- Watson, D., Clark, L. A., & Carey, G. (1988). Positive and negative affectivity and their relation to anxiety and depressive disorders. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 97(3), 346–353.