

The Dispositional Sources of Job Satisfaction: A Comparative Test

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This study related three personality taxonomies—positive affectivity and negative affectivity (PA and NA), the five-factor model (the “Big Five”), and core self-evaluations—to job satisfaction in an integrative test. In a longitudinal design with multi-source data, results indicated that the traits from all three taxonomies generally were significantly related to job satisfaction, even when the traits and job satisfaction were measured with independent sources. However, when all three typologies were examined concurrently, the core self-evaluations typology was the only typology that was significantly related to job satisfaction. The study extends research on the validation of these frameworks by assessing convergent and discriminant validity issues, and shows that core self-evaluations adds to our understanding of the dispositional source of job satisfaction.

Cette étude a rapproché trois échelles de personnalité, l'échelle de l'affectivité positive et de l'affectivité négative (PA et Na), le modèle de personnalité en 5 facteurs (le “Big Five”) et le coeur des auto-évaluations, de la satisfaction au travail dans un test intégratif. Dans une conception longitudinale qui croise de multiples sources de données, les résultats indiquent que les traits provenant des trois échelles sont généralement reliés significativement à la relation au travail, même quand les traits et la satisfaction au travail sont mesurés avec des sources indépendantes. Cependant, quand les trois typologies sont examinées en parallèle, le coeur des auto-évaluations est la seule échelle reliée significativement à la satisfaction au travail. L'étude se prolonge par une recherche sur la validation de ces structures en évaluant la validité convergente et la validité discriminante, elle montre que le coeur des auto-évaluations nous permet de saisir l'origine dispositionnelle de la satisfaction au travail.

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INTRODUCTION

The literature investigating the dispositional source of job satisfaction has a rich and diverse history. Studies investigating personality–job satisfaction relations have utilised disparate research designs, methodological approaches, measurement strategies, and statistical analyses. Increasingly, research has coalesced around three theoretical approaches: positive affectivity (PA)/negative affectivity (NA), the five-factor model of personality (FFM), and, most recently, Judge, Locke, and colleagues' core self-evaluations (CSE) taxonomy.

Each of these approaches has its merits. As noted by Brief (1998), the PA/NA framework is advantaged by its affective nature, making it well suited to the affective nature of job satisfaction. The FFM has the advantage of being the most popular and widely investigated personality taxonomy, whose traits have proven their relevance to many criteria in organisational psychology, including job performance, leadership, and work motivation. Although CSE is the newest taxonomy, each of the core traits comprising the taxonomy—self-esteem, locus of control, generalised self-efficacy, and emotional stability—have been shown to be conceptually and empirically relevant to job satisfaction (Judge & Bono, 2001).

In addition to these advantages, each taxonomy has proven its worth empirically. Specifically, meta-analytic data have supported the predictive validity of all three frameworks. In a large meta-analysis, Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, and deChermont (2003) found that PA and NA had the same ($.34$) absolute relationship with job satisfaction. In another meta-analysis, Judge, Heller, and Mount (2002) found that four of the Big Five traits—Neuroticism, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, and Agreeableness—were related to job satisfaction. Furthermore, as a set, the Big Five traits had a multiple correlation of $.41$ with job satisfaction. Finally, Judge and Bono (2001) found that all four core traits evince non-zero correlations with job satisfaction, with an average correlation of $.32$.

These theoretical frameworks have provided important support for the dispositional source of job satisfaction. At the same time, it is hard to know what to make of the results cumulatively, as researchers who test one framework rarely mention the other, much less formally compare the frameworks. Arvey, Carter, and Buerkley (1991) commented over a decade ago, "There is confusion regarding which person variables should be examined" (p. 377). This statement is even more germane today. Accordingly, in this study we provide the first comparative test of the convergent and discriminant validities of the three typologies in explaining the dispositional source of job satisfaction. Our analysis will reveal the extent to which the traits overlap with other traits as well as which traits or trait taxonomies predict unique variance in job satisfaction, controlling for the influence of the other traits.

METHOD

Setting

Approximately 500 university employees—working in a diverse set of occupations—were randomly selected to participate from the e-mail directories of three state universities (similar in terms of undergraduate student population: $M = 17,100$, $SD = 5,336$ and per cent women: $M = 53.7\%$, $SD = 8.7\%$) in the midwestern United States.

Procedure

Participants received an e-mail requesting their participation in the study in exchange for personal feedback and a small honorarium. One hundred and ninety-three individuals (39%) indicated their willingness to participate. A comparison of respondents versus nonrespondents revealed no significant differences with respect to gender ($z = 1.49$, ns), but there was a significant difference between respondents and nonrespondents with respect to university ($\chi^2[2,484] = 54.63$, $p < .01$). Individuals recruited from one particular university were significantly more likely to participate than individuals recruited from the other two universities.

Personality and job satisfaction surveys were mailed to these 193 individuals along with a cover letter assuring the participants that individual responses were confidential. Included in the mailing was a second survey assessing the participant's job satisfaction, to be completed by a "significant other". Significant others were instructed to complete the survey away from the focal person and to return it directly to the researchers in a separate postage paid envelope that was included with the questionnaire. Questionnaires were numbered so that significant other responses could be matched with those of respondents. One hundred and fifty-nine surveys were returned by respondents, representing an 82 per cent response rate. One hundred and fifty-six significant other surveys were returned, indicating a response rate of 81 per cent. In order to realise the advantages of a longitudinal design, including the benefits of temporal aggregation and stronger causal inference, we collected data over a 6-month interval. Accordingly, approximately 6 months later, the same self-report survey was sent to these employees. One hundred and twenty-two surveys were returned by respondents, representing a 77 per cent response rate.

Measures

Big Five Traits. The Big Five personality traits were measured using the 60-item NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae, 1992), which consisted of 12 items

per trait. The internal consistency (α) reliabilities for emotional stability, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness at Time 1 were as follows: .85, .82, .79, .69, and .83, respectively. The internal consistency reliabilities for these scales at Time 2 were as follows: .87, .82, .77, .73, and .80, respectively. The emotional stability scale was also used for the computation of the core self-evaluations trait.

Core Self-Evaluation Traits. Self-esteem was measured with Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item scale. The scale had a reliability of $\alpha = .88$ at Time 1 and $\alpha = .90$ at Time 2. Generalised self-efficacy was measured using Judge, Locke, Durham, and Kluger's (1998) eight-item generalised self-efficacy measure. The reliabilities at Time 1 and Time 2 were $\alpha = .87$ and $\alpha = .90$, respectively. Eight items from Levenson's (1981) locus of control measure were taken. We chose the eight items (six from his internality sub-scale, two from his chance sub-scale) based on the degree to which the items measured self-evaluations (versus views of the world, perceptions of powerful others, etc.). Reliabilities were $\alpha = .70$ at Time 1 and $\alpha = .64$ at Time 2.¹

Positive and Negative Affectivity. Dispositional affect was measured with the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The PANAS assesses both PA and NA by asking the participant to indicate how often they *generally* experience 10 positive and 10 negative emotions (e.g. determined, enthusiastic, jittery, afraid). The reliability of the PA Schedule was $\alpha = .87$ (Time 1) and $\alpha = .88$ (Time 2). The corresponding reliabilities for the NA Schedule were $\alpha = .85$ and $\alpha = .88$.

Overall Job Satisfaction. Overall job satisfaction was measured with the five-item Brayfield-Rothe (1951) measure and three items from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1979). This overall measure had a reliability of $\alpha = .89$ at Time 1 and $\alpha = .92$ at Time 2. At Time 1, significant others used the same eight items to rate the job satisfaction of their significant other ($\alpha = .91$). The correlation between the self and significant other reports was $r = .55$.

¹ To investigate whether the relatively low reliability estimates for our locus of control scale were anomalous, we examined all relevant studies in the PsycINFO database from 2002 to 2006. We found: (a) the average reliability of Levenson's IPC scale (based on 19 studies) was $\alpha = .69$; (b) the average reliability of Rotter's scale (based on 14 studies) was $\alpha = .68$; and (c) the average reliability of Levenson's internality sub-scale (from which six out of eight of our items were drawn) was $\alpha = .64$ (based on nine studies). Thus, though the reliability of our locus of control measure was not ideal, it is on a par with reliability estimates from the literature. This adds further weight to the argument that locus of control should be treated as an imperfect indicator of core self-evaluations, where the reliability of the composite is nearly always greater than $\alpha = .80$ (e.g. Judge et al., 1998).

RESULTS

Correlations among the variables, as well as internal consistency reliability estimates, are reported in Table 1. For simplicity of presentation, the correlations involving the traits included in Table 1 were based on those measured at Time 1. The intercorrelations among the traits, and reliabilities, were very similar at Time 2. For example, only two reliabilities differed by more than .04 from those reported in Table 1, one higher (agreeableness [Time 2], $\alpha = .73$) and one lower (locus of control [Time 2], $\alpha = .64$). The correlations among the Big Five traits are quite similar to what is normally reported (Costa & McCrae, 1992). As for core self-evaluations, of the Big Five traits, the core traits correlate most highly with emotional stability (average $r = .59$), and their correlations with emotional stability are similar to the correlations among themselves (average $r = .61$). Furthermore, the correlation of the core traits with extraversion and conscientiousness, though moderately strong (average $r = .41$), is almost identical to the correlation of emotional stability with these two traits ($r = .40$). Positive affectivity (PA) correlates somewhat more strongly with extraversion ($r = .61$) than with emotional stability ($r = .55$), and negative affectivity (NA) displays the opposite pattern ($r = -.31$ and $-.72$, respectively). Somewhat surprisingly, the correlation between positive affectivity and self-esteem ($r = .75$) was larger than the correlation between PA and extraversion ($r = .61$) and the average correlation between self-esteem and the other CSE indicators ($r = .67$). In addition, PA evinced stronger correlations with the CSE traits (average $r = .61$) than NA with the CSE traits (average $r = .51$). However, across both time conditions, the correlation between PA and self-esteem ($r = .69$) was lower than the correlations between generalised self-efficacy and self-esteem ($r = .82$) and the correlation between emotional stability and self-esteem ($r = .72$). Finally, the correlation between the self-report and significant other report of job satisfaction ($r_{11} = .55, p < .01; r_{12} = .46, p < .01$) compares favorably to the average correlation between self and significant other reports of personality (McCrae & Costa, 1987).

Turning to the correlation of the individual traits with job satisfaction, both observed correlations and correlations corrected for unreliability (Schmidt & Hunter, 1996) are provided in Table 2. Of the individual traits, the two most consistent correlates of job satisfaction were self-esteem and emotional stability. What is perhaps most noteworthy is that several traits were significant correlates of job satisfaction under two rigorous situations—over time (6 months later) and when the results were immune to concerns over common method variance (significant other report of job satisfaction). When the traits and job satisfaction were aggregated over the two time periods, the correlations increased substantially. Specifically, when personality and job satisfaction scores were computed to reflect the average

TABLE 1
Correlations among Time 1 Measures of Personality and Multiple Assessments of Job Satisfaction

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Emotional stability	.85												
2. Extraversion	.40**	.82											
3. Openness to experience	-.07	.04	.79										
4. Agreeableness	.28**	.20**	-.08	.69									
5. Conscientiousness	.40**	.26**	-.14	.22**	.83								
6. Self-esteem	.71**	.48**	-.07	.31**	.49**	.88							
7. Locus of control	.41**	.30**	-.06	.08	.32**	.51**	.70						
8. Generalised self-efficacy	.65**	.45**	-.02	.29**	.40**	.80**	.52**	.87					
9. Positive affectivity	.55**	.61**	.14	.21**	.51**	.75**	.47**	.65**	.87				
10. Negative affectivity	-.72**	-.31**	.16*	-.36**	-.35**	-.50**	-.33**	-.48**	-.35**	.85			
11. Job satisfaction-self	.35**	.31**	-.11	.13	.29**	.49**	.20*	.39**	.45**	-.20*	.89		
12. Job satisfaction-sig. other	.25**	.10	-.20*	.03	.13	.24**	.10	.14	.18*	-.17*	.55**	.91	
13. Job satisfaction-Time 2	.34**	.24**	-.23*	.11	.22*	.35**	.28**	.27**	.30**	-.24*	.68**	.46**	.92

Notes: N = 120-158. Reliabilities (coefficient α) are on the diagonal in bold. * $p < .05$ (two-tailed); ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

TABLE 2
Correlations of Personality Traits with Job Satisfaction

	<i>Job Satisfaction Self-report (Time 1)</i>	<i>Job Satisfaction Self-report (Time 2)</i>	<i>Job Satisfaction Significant other report</i>
Emotional Stability	.40 (.35)**	.38 (.34)**	.28 (.25)**
Extraversion	.36 (.31)**	.28 (.24)**	.12 (.10)
Openness to experience	-.13 (-.11)	-.27 (-.23)*	-.24 (-.20)*
Agreeableness	.17 (.13) [†]	.14 (.11)	.04 (.03)
Conscientiousness	.34 (.29)**	.25 (.22)*	.15 (.13) [†]
Self-esteem	.55 (.49)**	.39 (.35)**	.27 (.24)**
Locus of control	.25 (.20)*	.35 (.28)**	.13 (.10)
Generalised self-efficacy	.44 (.39)**	.30 (.27)**	.16 (.14) [†]
Positive affectivity	.51 (.45)**	.34 (.30)**	.20 (.18)*
Negative affectivity	-.23 (-.20)*	-.27 (-.24)**	-.19 (-.17)*

Notes: Correlations are corrected for measurement error based on internal consistency reliabilities reported in Table 1. [†] $p < .10$ (two-tailed); * $p < .05$ (two-tailed); ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed). Uncorrected correlations are reported in parentheses. Because corrected correlations cannot be tested for significance, significance levels are for uncorrected correlations.

of the Time 1 and Time 2 scales, and then correlated, the correlations were on average 33 per cent higher, when compared to “single shot” correlations reported in Table 2.

Usefulness Analysis of Trait Typologies

In order to test the unique variance in job satisfaction accounted for by each trait or taxonomy, we conducted several usefulness analyses, using sets of the independent variables following Cohen and Cohen (1983). To simplify the regression results, and to remove the biasing effects of transient error (Schmidt & Hunter, 1996), the traits and self-reported job satisfaction scores were averaged over Time 1 and Time 2 prior to entering the traits in the regressions. Turning to the results in Table 3, the first three rows of the table show R^2 statistics when job satisfaction was regressed on each trait typology independently. In terms of convergent validity, all three typologies explained a significant amount of variance in job satisfaction, across both criterion measures. Furthermore, the core self-evaluations typology explained the most variance in self-reported job satisfaction while the five-factor model explained slightly more variance in self-reported job satisfaction.

The next series of results provide partial R^2 values (Cohen & Cohen, 1983), which are used to estimate incremental R^2 values. Specifically, to

TABLE 3
Variance Decomposition of Trait Typologies in Explaining Job Satisfaction

	<i>Self-report</i>	<i>Significant other report</i>
<i>R</i> ² : Traits alone		
Big Five (BF)	.233**	.142**
Core self-evaluations (CSE)	.311**	.135**
Positive/Negative Affectivity (PA/NA)	.219**	.061*
<i>R</i> ² : Partial combinations		
BF + CSE	.335**	.178**
BF + PA/NA	.283**	.147*
CSE + PA/NA	.316**	.140**
<i>R</i> ² : All traits combined		
	.343**	.179**
<i>R</i> ² : Unique		
Big Five	.027	.039
Core self-evaluations (without neuroticism) [†]	.060*	.032
Core self-evaluations (with neuroticism) [†]	.079*	.072*
Positive/negative affectivity	.008	.001

Notes: Table entries are squared multiple correlations (*R*²). * *p* < .05. Traits and job satisfaction (self-report) were aggregated over Time 1 and Time 2. [†] The uniqueness estimates for the CSE framework were performed twice. First, neuroticism was considered as part of the Big Five framework (and thus not unique to CSE). Neuroticism was then considered unique to CSE.

compute incremental variance estimates (*R*² unique to each typology), it is necessary to subtract the appropriate partial *R*² value from the overall *R*² for all traits combined. For example, the *R*² unique to the Big Five traits can be computed by subtracting the partial *R*² for core self-evaluations and PA/NA from the overall *R*². Cohen and Cohen (1983, p. 145) provide a formula for testing the significance of these incremental estimates. The results in Table 3 reveal that the core self-evaluations trait explains significant unique incremental variance for self-reported job satisfaction. By contrast, the FFM and the PA/NA typologies did not explain significant incremental variance in job satisfaction.²

² The astute reader will notice that, of the four core traits, self-esteem has the highest correlation with job satisfaction (at both Time 1 and Time 2, and for the significant other measure). Indeed, if one conducts the variance decomposition analysis in Table 3, but with only the four core traits, self-esteem is the only trait that adds beyond the other three traits for self-reported job satisfaction (unique *R*² = .04 [*p* < .05]). However, none of the individual core traits explained significant unique variance in significant other reported job satisfaction, including self-esteem (unique *R*² = .01 [ns]).

DISCUSSION

In the past 15 years, research on the dispositional source of job satisfaction has progressed from a peripheral to a central area of inquiry in the job satisfaction literature. Judged from the perspective of today, however, in some ways the literature has been a victim of its own success. Because three partially overlapping typologies—the five-factor model, PA/NA, and core self-evaluations—have proven to be useful predictors of job satisfaction, it has led to a confusing state in the literature. Accordingly, the present study sought to compare the validity and unique validities of these frameworks.

In terms of convergent validity, our results supported previous research in that each of the trait typologies was significantly related to job satisfaction, generally even when the traits and job satisfaction were measured independently or 6 months apart. In addition, the pattern of trait correlations (Table 1) was generally consistent with the three personality frameworks, with the exception of PA, which showed as strong or stronger correlations with the CSE traits as NA. Furthermore, one may notice that the correlation between self-reported and significant other-reported job satisfaction was moderate ($r = .55$) and that the validity coefficients for the relationships between the personality traits and the significant other-reported job satisfaction were consistently lower than the validity coefficients linking self-reported personality to self-reported job satisfaction. One explanation for this is that the self-reported data suffered from percept-percept inflation. However, as pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, another explanation for this “inflation” is that the relationships between self-reported personality and significant other-reported job satisfaction were “deflated” by the inaccuracies of the significant other reports of job satisfaction. To the extent that significant others were unable to report the true level of the focal individual’s job satisfaction, one may expect to see less valid relationships than may be reported through introspected self-report (Frese & Zapf, 1988).

Regardless of whether same source or multiple source methods are used, and regardless of which typology is assessed, personality matters in job satisfaction. In and of itself, this is not a great revelation. This issue becomes, then, whether the typologies provide a unique contribution to the prediction of job satisfaction. Thus, a major contribution of this study lies in the comparison of the three typologies. Indeed, we are aware of only two studies that explicitly compared these typologies. Judge, Erez, Bono, and Thoresen (2003) compared the unique contributions of CSE and the FFM to job satisfaction and Judge et al. (1998) assessed the unique contributions of CSE and the PA/NA typology to job satisfaction. The results of the previous comparison suggest that, when examined two at a time, all three typologies are uniquely related to job satisfaction. Our results, however, suggest that when all three typologies are examined at the same time, only the CSE

typology is uniquely related to job satisfaction. This is in contradiction to past literature reviews, in which it has been proposed that these other frameworks would likely better predict job satisfaction than core self-evaluations (see Brief, 1998). One implication of this finding is that any attempt to assess the relationship between personality and job satisfaction that does not include CSE is essentially leaving potentially explainable variance "on the table". Thus, being the first study to show that when assessed concurrently, only the core self-evaluations typology predicts job satisfaction beyond the others, this study makes a contribution to the personality literature in general and the core self-evaluations concept in particular.

That the PA/NA typology fails to predict job satisfaction over and above the Big Five and CSE may not be very surprising. In fact, Brief (1998) flatly states, "Neuroticism is termed negative affectivity (NA); extroversion is termed positive affectivity (PA)" (p. 98). Furthermore, researchers have used the measures NA and neuroticism interchangeably (e.g. Moyle, 1995). In terms of PA and extraversion, Watson and Clark (1997) argue that positive emotionality is the core of extraversion. Indeed, they use the two labels (extraversion and positive emotionality) synonymously.

However, that CSE predicted job satisfaction over and above the Big Five and PA/NA typologies does deserve further consideration. In particular, emotional stability is common to both the Big Five and the CSE typologies and, of the Big Five traits, it was the trait that correlated most strongly with job satisfaction. Thus, one might wonder whether the other core self-evaluation traits are needed beyond emotional stability. The results in Table 3 suggest an answer to this question. Though emotional stability was the best Big Five correlate of job satisfaction, it was not the best core self-evaluations correlate of job satisfaction. Across both Time 1 and Time 2 measures of self-reported job satisfaction, self-esteem displayed the strongest correlation. We do not believe that these results suggest that only self-esteem should be studied in relation to job satisfaction, as other studies have found that other core traits correlate more strongly with job satisfaction (i.e. in two of the three samples in Judge et al. [1998], self-esteem was not the strongest correlate of job satisfaction). Some sampling error from study to study will always occur. Indeed, it is precisely because of this sampling error that the overall construct has an advantage, as overall constructs should display more consistent relations with broad criteria compared to their more specific indicators (Ones & Viswesvaran, 1996).

Second, it might be argued that since neuroticism or emotional stability is one of the oldest constructs in personality psychology, and since other researchers have considered some of the core traits to be indicators of neuroticism (e.g. Eysenck, 1990), it would be better to label core self-evaluations as emotional stability. This point has some merit. The issue is not whether the other core traits are needed for the construct to best predict

job satisfaction (they are), but rather what the nature of the construct is— is it core self-evaluations as originally labeled by Judge and colleagues, or is it a broader conceptualisation of emotional stability? This issue needs to be resolved for cumulative knowledge to advance further.

Though further construct validity evidence is needed, it seems likely that core self-evaluations could be integrated into the emotional stability construct, but in such a case, emotional stability would need to be measured more broadly than it has in past research if the maximum possible prediction is to be realised. That being said, as pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, some operationalisations of neuroticism are broader and may tap into the evaluative indicators of CSE more than Costa and McCrae's (1992) NEO-FFI scale used in this study. For instance, the Hogan Personality Inventory (Hogan, 1983) assesses one subfacet of neuroticism (adjustment) which may capture one's self-esteem. Future construct validity research should address the generalisability of these findings across personality construct operationalisations.

Finally, future research should attempt to integrate the three typologies into higher order dispositional clusters that may better capture the relationship between personality and job satisfaction. By combining the similar facets across typologies (for instance, PA and extraversion may represent one dispositional cluster; NA, neuroticism, and CSE another; etc.) it may be possible to alleviate (or at least expose) construct ambiguity and more effectively decompose the effects of personality.

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