

## Examination of Personality Traits as Predictors of Career Success

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### Abstract

This study was designed to investigate the relationships between personality traits (Big Five Personality Traits) and career success and aimed to determine if the personality traits can predict career success variables. Personality traits are measured by five characteristics: neuroticism, extroversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness, whereas career success comprise of objective or extrinsic (e.g., pay) and subjective or intrinsic (e.g., job satisfaction and career satisfaction) 118 employees from the general sector located in Damascus are given questionnaires and their responses are analyzed by SPSS program. Results show that, all personality dimensions are significantly related to career success but with different levels.

**Keywords:** Personality Traits, Career Success.

### Introduction

In the field of management, both personality traits and career success have been popular and important objectives of investigation in many literatures which researchers tend to find whether personality traits have an effect on the career success.

Research on career success is very important to both the individual and organization. For individuals spending about a third of their time at work, career success is a logical expectation. On the other hand, to organizations, employees' attainment of career success implies that employees have achieved organizational goals and thus may be leveraged for sustained competitive advantage.

To achieve career success, both the individual and the organization invest time, effort, and resources on career development activities. Ideally, career development is a joint responsibility of the individual and the organization. However, business activities such as downsizing, reengineering, and restructuring, which result in fewer workers and lesser opportunities for them in the organizations, render career development more challenging. Such diminished growth and opportunities present challenges as well for the individual to take a more proactive role in his career development (Judge et al.,2002).

### **Problem of the Study**

The problem of this study was based on the fact that there was a lack of knowledge about the relationship between employee's personality traits and career success.

### **Research Objectives**

Based on the problem of the study, the main objectives of this paper were listed as follows:

1. To identify the direct effect from five personality traits of neuroticism, extroversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness on job satisfaction.
2. To identify the direct effect from five personality traits of neuroticism, extroversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness on career success.
3. To identify the direct effect from five personality traits of neuroticism, extroversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness on life satisfaction.
4. To argue the moderating impact of gender difference on the relationship between personality traits and job satisfaction.

### **Research Questions**

- a) Is there a relationship between employees of general sector personality traits and their perceived career success?
- b) Can an employee's personality trait predict his or her perceived career success?
- c) How the five personality traits of neuroticism, extroversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness directly related to career success for employee in general sector?

### **Importance of Study**

This study is expected to provide basic data in terms of the aspects of five personalities and their relationships with the intrinsic career success containing job, career and life satisfaction among employee in general sector.

### **Literature review:**

There has been extensive research on personality traits and career success in the management and psychology literature (Rasdi et al., 2009) with several studies investigating personality traits as a predictor of job performance and job satisfaction (Salgado, 1997) Other researchers, (Aryee et al., 1994) examined the effects of demographic, industry, and organizational variables on career success

More recently, (Monson, 2000) reviewed the relationship between the "Big Five" personality dimensions and career success in general management. The Big Five dimensions include extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and emotional stability (Costa & McCrae, 1988; Barrick & Mount, 1991).

(Seibert & Kraimer, 2001) noted that few studies had investigated the role of personality on career success. While their study's findings were consistent with prior research, they called for further research to expand knowledge on the role of personality on career success. The problem of this study was based on the fact that there was a lack of knowledge about the relationship between project managers personality traits and career success.

Objective measures of career success pertain to those that can be observed and verified by others, Several researchers have studied career success using objective measures such as total compensation (Judge et al., 1999, Seibert & Kraimer 2001; Whitely, Dougherty & Dreher,

1991) number of promotions (Dreher, 1990) current pay grade (Daley, 1996), and size of most recent merit increase (Salgado, 1997).

Subjective measures of career success (Judge et al., 1999) pertain to the individuals' own judgment of their career attainment. Studies on subjective career success used measures such as career satisfaction (Mount & Barrick, 1995; Seibert, Kraimer &, 2001), job satisfaction (Becker, 1999), advancement satisfaction (Boudreau et al., 2001), and perceived career success (Poon, 2004), among others.

While objective measures of success are important, they may not be the only measures an individual wants to achieve. As individuals define career success based on their assessment of career prospects (Mount & Barrick, 1995)

Individuals expect a lot more from their careers other than compensation, promotion, and other objective measures. Individuals also expect to learn new skills, challenge, and work life balance, among others (uthrie et al., 1988). Several authors have also pointed out that when relationship between objective and subjective career success is found it is influenced by different factors. Also relationship may be found in males but not in females (Weiss, 2002) or that objective and subjective career success may not be related at all (Zweig & Webster 2002).

### **Definition of Personality**

Personality refers to the characteristics of the person that account for consistent patterns of feeling, thinking and behaving Is it necessary to consider the huge number of traits to fully understand the role of personality in organization behavior? In fact, five dimensions considered as these dimensions have emerged in so many different studies conducted in different ways. They are referred to as the Big Five dimensions of personality (Goldberg, 1990).

### **Extraversion**

Extraverts are highly motivated, energetic, and assertive individuals. These traits are typically highly regarded and rewarded particularly at higher levels and in leadership positions.

This trait is characterized as these people belief on social ability, assertiveness in nature, tends toward actions and want to experience toward action. So the individual who have extraversion trait are makes central position in their work environment and maintain their bossy position at their work place. So if the individual have extraversion trait then they will be at work place and their involvement have good scored. These traits portray extraverts as individuals who are eager and ready to take up new, exciting, and bold challenges

### **Openness to Experience**

Openness to experience indicates the extent to which individuals are imaginative, curious, and creative Individuals who score high on openness to experience exhibit flexibility, creativity, and intellectual prowess while those who score low may be described as unreflective, uncreative, unintelligent, and unimaginative.

### **Conscientiousness**

This trait is related to the industriousness and sense of duty. conscientiousness have correlation with job performance of all type of jobs and occupation. Individual who show high conscientiousness have high positive significant affect toward work environment because they have sense of duty toward work. said that he studies huge researches on job involvement

identify the positive significant relationship between job involvement and the feature to individual work ethics.

### **Agreeableness**

Agreeableness defines as self-sacrifice, friendliness and humility, while ill feeling and selfishness is traits of low agreeableness. People involvement in work enhancement and maintenance of their feelings for their worth and esteem when they view their work and career achievement.

Agreeable individuals are characterized by good nature, generosity, cooperativeness, and gentleness. People who seek to be low agreeableness have more work involvement because they are impression seeking in their nature that serves as self-esteem which creates advancement and acknowledgement in work environment.

### **Emotional Stability**

Emotional stability is characterized by anxiousness, depression, and instability. High levels of emotional stability in individuals demonstrate more success. Conversely, low levels of emotional stability (neuroticism) indicate high levels of anxiety and depression. Neurotic employees portray a diminished level of motivation to achieve results as they tend to be unstable, discontented, and tense.

Neuroticism have extreme of worry, suspicion, and low confidence and propensities to control negative emotions because its measures process under negative light, in which individuals who scored high in neuroticism is low level of attitude towards his work.

Summarized the five dimensions from (McCrae & Costa, 1987) as following:

1. Neuroticism represents the tendency to exhibit poor emotional adjustment and experience negative affect such as anxiety, insecurity and hostility.
2. Extroversion represents the tendency to be sociable, assertive and experience positive affect such as energy, zeal and excitement.
3. Openness is the disposition to be imaginative, unconventional and autonomous.
4. Agreeableness is the tendency to be trusting, compliant, caring and gentle.
5. Conscientiousness comprised two related facets, achievement and dependability, and has been found to be the major component of integrity.

### **Career Success**

A career is defined as a sequence of jobs an individual holds during one's work history (Gattiker & Larwood, 1989)

While success in one's career is a natural expectation of individuals, the nature of that success depends on what one expects from it, also individuals have different definitions of career success based on their assessment of their career prospects (Greenhaus & Callanan, 1994). Career success includes both the psychological and work-related outcomes from work role changes. Thus career success has been operationalized by objective and subjective measures. Career success reflects career development and advancement over many job assignments. Studies on career success constructs and dimensions have established that compensation, work requirements, responsibility level, job satisfaction, recognition, project opportunities, and advancement factors influence an individual's career success (Seibert, et al., 1999)

Career success can be assumed to comprise of objective or extrinsic (e.g., pay) and subjective or intrinsic (e.g., job satisfaction and career satisfaction) elements, and the variables that lead

to objective career success often are quite different from those that lead to subjectively defined success (Judge et al., 1999).

### **Career Success Dimensions**

Many research from organizational literature supports the fact that career success dimensions contain both intrinsic as well as extrinsic factors, where extrinsic factors (such as pay and promotion) are objectively observed and intrinsic factors (such as job and life or career satisfaction) are subjectively measured (Aryee et al. 1994; Judge et al. 2002, Judge et al. 1999).

### **Compensation**

Considerable empirical evidence exists that indicates positive relationship between a employee's compensation (wages, salary, and bonus) and career success. Success is typically associated with receiving higher compensation and promotion.

(Seibert & Kraimer, 2001) underscored the important role financial compensation plays in enhancing the morale and motivating employees.

(Seibert, et al., 1999) also noted that highly motivated individuals tend to perform at high standards. With this „external stimuli“ the employees may be motivated to set goals, which once attained, may contribute to career success. Other studies have found that salary is a dimension of career success (Korman et al., 1981) arguing that as pay increases, so does one's career.

### **Promotion**

Advancement and promotion are significant factors in measuring career success (Korman et al., 1981). Similarly, (Nabi, 2001) argued that promotion based on merit is positively related to job satisfaction.

Most recent studies provide evidence of consistent findings that there is a relationship between promotion and career success: thus promotion affects career success. According to (Turner, 2002), a project employee who exhibits exceptional performance “receives promotions and gains a profitable and fulfilling career.

### **Awards/recognition**

Individuals receive awards and recognition as a result of their positive contribution to the organization. On the same token, achievement-driven individuals are likely to set goals and define how to attain them (Tharenou, 1997) Tharenou points out that awards and recognition do not only enhance morale for project employees to achieve more but also motivates them to find the job satisfying.

Many scholars and researchers have cited evidence that individuals with certain characteristics tend to be more satisfied with their careers. For instance, Stewart and (Nabi, 2001) observed that “individuals who are highly open to experience tend to leave to seek out new adventures. In contrast, conscientious employees tend to feel a higher sense of obligation” (p. 254), thereby heightening their job satisfaction. Moreover, awards and recognition play into the emotion and self-esteem of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

### Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to a positive evaluation of one's job (Seibert, et al., 1999) Meta-analytic results indicate that job satisfaction has an impact on performance (Judge et al. 2002), commitment, turnover intentions, and turnover (Tett and Meyer 1993).

Job satisfaction has been used by some researchers as an indicator for subjective success (Thomsett, 2002; Greenhaus et al., 1994).

Research has also found that career satisfaction and job satisfaction are distinct constructs Job satisfaction is influenced by a variety of characteristics related to the job, the organization, and the employee (Tharenou, 1997).

The meta-analytic results regarding person-environment fit support the notion that when the characteristics of the job or the organization match the characteristics of the employee, greater job satisfaction is likely to result Greenhaus et al. (1994).

### Hypotheses

The proposed study seeks to answer these questions empirically by testing the following hypotheses

- Hypothesis 1: Extraversion is positively related to career success.
- Hypothesis 2: Agreeableness is negatively related to career success.
- Hypothesis 3: Conscientiousness is positively related to extrinsic career success.
- Hypothesis 4: Neuroticism is negatively related to career success.
- Hypothesis 5: Openness to experience is positively related to career success.

### Methodology

The research sample comprised of employee working in general sector located in Damascus in Syria.

Respondents were asked to respond to self-administered questionnaire comprising of three sections: personality traits, career success, and socio-demographic detail

Table 1:  
Socio-Demographic Details

Demographics	N	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	39	47
Female	44	53
<b>Age</b>		
25 and below	18	22.2
21-30	40	48.1
31-40	18	22.2
Above 40	7	8.5
<b>Education</b>		
High school	32	38.5
Institute	39	36.9
University	12	14.6

### Test of hypotheses:

The hypotheses were tested by using the multiple regression analysis from SPSS software program and the results are showed in table 2

Table 2:  
means, standard deviations, and correlations

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Neuroticism	2.98	1.2	79%						
Extroversion	3.52	0.98	0.41*	82%					
Agreeableness	3.45	1.3	0.37*		75%				
conscientiousness	3.76	1.5	0.68**	0.44**	0.48*	81%			
Openness	3.22	0.89	0.22*	0.55**	0.51*	0.39*	75%		
Objective Career success	3.65	0.85	0.15*	0.55*	0.42*	0.26**	0.24*	76%	
Subjective Career success	3.45	0.94	0.09	0.29*	0.36*	0.44*	0.52**	0.38*	88%

Note. \*p <05, \*\*p<01

Table 3:  
Hypothesis results

Hypothesis	result
Hypothesis 1: Extraversion is positively related to career success.	accepted
Hypothesis 2: Agreeableness is positively related to career success.	accepted
Hypothesis 3: Conscientiousness is positively related to extrinsic career success.	accepted
Hypothesis 4: Neuroticism is positively related to career success.	accepted
Hypothesis 5: Openness to experience is positively related to career success.	accepted

### Results and Discussion

*Based on the table 3 there is a significant relationship at the .05 confidence level between employee's level of extraversion and career success.*

Evidence of the relationship between extraversion and extrinsic career success (compensation, promotion, recognition, satisfaction) was consistent with previous research (Seibert & Kraimer, 2001; Bray & Howard, 1994; Judge, et al., 1995; Cox & Harquail, 1991). Perhaps the highly motivated, energetic, and assertive nature of extraverted employee invigorates them to take bold challenges leading them to receive more awards, recognition, promotions, and higher compensation.

*Based on the table 3 there is a significant relationship at the .05 confidence level between employee's level of Conscientiousness and career success.*

Prior studies found a positive relationship between conscientiousness and career success (Judge et al., 1999; Barrick & Mount, 1991) For instance, in their study of sales representatives, found that individuals who scored high on conscientiousness were more likely to set and be committed to goals, which in turn translated to a positive relationship between conscientiousness and career success. Conscientious individuals tend to advance their career through promotions (Poon, 2004).

*Based on the table 3 there is a significant relationship at the .05 confidence level between employee's level of Agreeableness and career success.*

Empirical evidence shows a negative relationship between Agreeableness and career success (Judge et al., 1999).

Several studies corroborate that Agreeableness is positively related to career success (McDonald, 2008). (Costa & McCrae, 1992) study found a positive correlation between agreeable person and job, life satisfaction. Likewise, (Judge et al., 1999) reported a positive relationship between only extrinsic career success (salary and occupation) and Agreeableness.

*Based on the table 3 there is a significant relationship at the .05 confidence level between employee's level of Openness to Experience and career success.*

(Mcoetzee & Schreuder, 2002) noted that few studies have examined the association between openness to experience and career success. On their study on "model of personality and career success" Seibert and Kraimer (2001) found a negative relationship between openness to experience and extrinsic career success. Judge et al. (1999) attributed these results to the tendency that open individuals are likely to be unhappy in conventional jobs leading them to move from one job to another. (Nabi, 2001)

*Based on the table 3 there is a significant relationship at the .05 confidence level between employee's level of Neuroticism and career success.*

(Salgado, 1997) concluded that there was a positive correlation between Neuroticism and extrinsic career success. Likewise, Barrick, Mount, and Strauss" (1993) study determined that Neuroticism was a valid predictor of career success. A meta-analysis research (Tokar, et al., 1998) showed positive correlation between Neuroticism and compensation.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

There are several limitations of this study that can be addressed in future research.

**First**, the demographics of this study limit the external reliability of the findings specifically due to the uniqueness of the public radio stations in Syria.

**Second**, Career success must necessarily be studied using self-reports, non-self-report measures of objective and subjective career success that would have enhanced the validity of the findings.

**Finally**, factors such as years of experience and employee benefits were not considered for the very important impact of these factors in generating the idea of leave in comparative with other places.

### **Prospects for future Research**

Future studies should test the relationships with many factors such as organizational, personal, occupational and cultural elements apart from personality traits that may influence career success and should be explored for further research.

As job characteristics leads towards the intrinsic satisfaction of the employees on work so more research should be conducted to identity the extrinsic factors which leads towards the job satisfaction of the employees and then both extrinsic and intrinsic factors may be combined together to determine the overall satisfaction of the employees.

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