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# Higher-order Traits and Happiness in the Workplace: The Importance of Occupational Project Scale for the Evaluation of Characteristic Adaptations

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#### ABSTRACT

This study attempts to explain the relationship between job satisfaction and the Big Two, Stability and Plasticity, which are the higher-order traits of Big Five. Occupational Project, a narrative construct, was considered a mediator variable in this relationship. Occupational Project consists of affective and cognitive evaluations of an individual's work life as a project in terms of the completed (past), the ongoing (present) and the prospective (future) parts. The survey method was applied to a sample of 253 participants. The results supported the proposed model, in which Occupational Project mediated the relationship between the Big Two and both job satisfaction and affect in workplace. Discussion is focused on applying Occupational Project as a practical tool for management. Consideration of an employee's Occupational Project could provide management with a means to question, understand, intervene with and redefine the narrative quality of his/her occupational project that influences job satisfaction.

#### **ARTICLE HISTORY**

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#### **KEYWORDS**

Characteristic adaptations; narrative identity; personality; performance indices

THE AIM OF THIS ARTICLE IS TO OFFER A NEW PERSPECTIVE on the relationship between personality and job satisfaction. Even though several traits (i.e. positive affect & negative affect, core-self evaluations, emotional intelligence, etc.) have been used in the studies of personality and job satisfaction, the Big Five has become one of the most commonly used taxonomy in the current literature since it has been thought to describe the most salient aspects of personality (Hahn, Gottschling, König, & Spinath, 2016; Lounsbury, Sundstrom, Gibson, Loveland, & Drost, 2016; Berglund, Sevä, & Strandh, 2015). Moreover, it was proved that the Big Five traits had a multiple correlation of 41% with job satisfaction (Jugde, Heller, & Mount, 2002). However, Digman (1997) showed that the Big Five was not the broadest possible level of personality after analyzing factor correlations from 14 studies, which indicated that the five factors were intercorrelated, and two higher-order factors emerged consistently. Later studies, using multi-informant sample (DeYoung, 2006) or multigroup multitrait-multimethod confirmatory factor analyses (Şimşek,

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Koydemir, & Schütz, 2012) also confirmed the existence of the two higher-order factors. The two higher-order factors, namely the Big Two, are the most abstract level of personality. They also explain behavior with regard to classical and contemporary personality theories. Therefore, in our model we utilize the Big Two in relation to job satisfaction both because they represent personality in the simplest and broadest level, and they also render a theoretical explanation of this relationship.

Yet, the theoretical explanation of job satisfaction in relation to the Big Two would have limited practical implications in a work setting because dispositional traits show long-term stability, meaning that it is very difficult to change the personality traits of employees (McAdams & Pals, 2006). In our model, thus, we include the evaluation of both characteristic adaptations and work-life narratives as a mediating factor between the dispositional traits and job satisfaction. Characteristic adaptations are goals, strategies and interpretations specific to particular situations (DeYoung, 2015). Although they are influenced by traits, they are more flexible and dynamic. Life narratives are defined by McAdams and Pals (2006) as the narrative of the self that incorporates the reconstructed past and the imagined future into a rather coherent whole to provide the person's life with purpose and meaning. Compared to the dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations and work-life narratives are more likely to be modified once they are analyzed and measured with an appropriate construct. Our model utilizes a new construct, the "occupational project" that incorporates the evaluation of both characteristic adaptations and work-life narratives. We propose that occupational project mediates the relationship between the Big Two and the cognitive and affective dimensions of job satisfaction (Figure 1).

# Big Two in relation to job satisfaction and affect in workplace

Digman (1997) stated that the Big Two, not only reflected the broadest hierarchical level of personality constructs, but also reflected theoretical constructs of classical and contemporary personologists. He labelled these two factors "Alpha" and "Beta," arguing that Alpha represented "socialization process" explained by the psychoanalysts and behaviorists, while Beta represented "personal growth" explained by growth theorists. Digman (1997) also added that contemporary theorists, like Bakan and McAdams used this dichotomy to explain personality dimensions. Bakan's



Figure 1. Proposed structural model concerning the relationship between higher-order personality and job satisfaction with the mediator role of occupational project.

concept of *agency* referred to striving for mastery, power, self-assertion, and selfexpansion, all of which were associated with factor Beta and *communion*, associated with factor Alpha, referred to the urge toward community. Similarly, McAdams' two motives, *intimacy* and *power*, reflected much of the content of Alpha and Beta. Likewise, Hogan's (1982) socioanalytic approach to personality assumed that human social life was organized through two prime dimensions, which were social acceptance (getting along) and status (getting ahead). Furthermore, DeYoung, Peterson, and Higgins (2002), commented on the biological predictability and inheritability of the two higher order traits and linked them to the serotonergic and dopaminergic functioning of the brain system. Deriving from computer modeling of neural networks, they labelled the two metatraits as Stability and Plasticity instead of Alpha and Beta.

According to DeYoung et al. (2002), Stability, the higher-order factor of "Emotional Stability" (reverse of Neuroticism), "Agreeableness," and "Conscientiousness," appears to reflect consistency, composure, and balance in emotional, social, and motivational domains. In other words, Stability provides humans with processes through which they maintain orderly functioning of the organisms. From Digman's (1997) theoretical point of view, Stability is compatible to the socialization process and Adler's (1939) concept of social interest. The socialization process emphasizes impulse restraint, reduction of hostility, aggression, and neurotic defense, as well as development of conscience. Social interest involves the ability to cooperate, to show empathy, to be in harmony, and to contribute to the welfare of the community (Adler, 1939).

Plasticity, on the other hand, is the higher-order factor of "Extraversion" and "Openness," reflecting the tendency to explore and engage with novelty (DeYoung et al., 2002). Plasticity is associated with resilience, malleability, and flexibility of cognition and behavior. It includes being outgoing, adventurous, expressive, active, assertive taking risks, thinking out of box, using intellect, being creative and imaginative, being open to experiences, ideas, and change (Feist, 1998). From the theoretical point of view of Digman (1997), these traits are related to Adler's (1939) concept of "striving for superiority." Striving for superiority is a movement toward self-preservation, procreation, victorious contact with the surrounding world in order not to perish. The basic notion "to live means to develop," which refers to a continuous active adaptation to the demands of the external world, is integrated in Plasticity. Likewise, Rogers' (1961) theory of personal growth, stating that organism has one basic tendency and striving, which is to actualize, to maintain, and to enhance the experiencing organism, is exposed through the trait of Plasticity.

DeYoung (2015) stated that Stability and Plasticity were the basic mechanisms designed to operate in environments of both order and chaos, the known and unknown, the predictable and unpredictable, the expected, and the anomalous. Work environment is typical of such environments. In order to have a satisfactory work life, one is expected to have both Stability and Plasticity. They are not opposite poles, but rather they are complementary, in spite of the fact that extreme Plasticity may challenge Stability and vice versa. The work environment requires inhibition

of emotional and motivational impulses that would disrupt goal pursuit, such as losing temper, losing focus, getting bored, etc. Stability in emotional, motivational, and social dimensions causes the orderly functioning of an individual in work environment. Low Stability, on the other hand, could bring people down into chaos, dysregulated behavior, stress, and disruption even at small deviations. The work environment would, on the other hand, require ad hoc adaptations because of sudden change, chaos, or entropy. One should generate new solutions, strategies, interpretations and goals to respond to anomaly flexibly and eagerly. Plasticity is necessary not only in these situations, but also to explore unforeseen rewards, opportunities, or to tackle with threats in everyday life. Plasticity is associated with curiosity and innovation besides leadership, assertiveness, and enthusiasm. Low Plasticity could restrict one with limited behavioral repertoires that would make it difficult for the individual to adapt to new situations. Consequently, we expect both Stability and Plasticity to correlate positively with job satisfaction and affect in workplace.

Herein, it is important to acknowledge a critical nature of personality traits. As McAdams and Pals (2006) stated, personality traits were the most stable, nonconditional, and decontextualized aspects of human individuality. They mentioned that current research findings proved the substantial heritability of traits as well as their biological bases. In addition, they pointed out the test-retest correlation of selfreport trait scales over long periods of the adult life course. Hence, it is plausible to conclude that the personality traits are difficult to change over time. McAdams and Pals (2006) also provided a new perspective on the description of personality stating that personality was expressed as a developing pattern of dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, and self-defining life narratives. They positioned characteristic adaptations and self-defining life narratives as the core elements of a personality system together with the dispositional traits. Therefore, in our model, we propose that characteristic adaptations and work-life narratives could be the psychological processes that mediate the relationship between the Big Two and job satisfaction. Characteristic adaptations and self-defining life narratives are the more malleable parts of the personality system, since they could be redefined due to the circumstances.

#### The evaluation of characteristic adaptations

Characteristic adaptations were first introduced by Costa & McCrae (1994). They used the term *characteristic* to refer to the fact that the construct reflected the dispositional traits, and the term *adaptations* referred to the specific patterns of behavior that helped the individual to fit into the ever-changing social environment. DeYoung (2015, p.38) defined characteristic adaptations as "relatively stable goals, interpretations, and strategies specified in relation to an individual's particular life circumstances," underlining that they were influenced by traits, but they were separate entities not always consistent with traits. The goals were defined broadly as both conscious and unconscious representations of a desired future (DeYoung, 2010). Strategies were cognitive or behavioral functions such as plans, actions, skills, or automatized routines, utilized in the attempt to transform the current state into the desired future. Finally, interpretations were the representations of the world

or the self, involving both factual and evaluative information. The interpretations, framed in relation to goals, contained the representations of the past as well as the present, since the present was always perceived in reference to the past. In addition, the interpretations also included expectations about the possible future. Although, McAdams and Pals (2006) described characteristic adaptations and life narratives as two separate dimensions of the personality system, DeYoung (2015) claimed that self-defining life narratives could also be considered characteristic adaptations since they reflected an individual's reaction to specific life circumstances. In his words, "self-defining life narratives are a type of interpretation that provide a conscious meta-representation of many of the individual's goals, interpretations and strategies" (DeYoung, 2015, p. 40).

In our model, we adopted DeYoung's approach and included life narratives as part of the characteristic adaptations. We proposed that characteristic adaptations represented the psychological processes that mediated between Big Two and job satisfaction because they contained the goals, actions, skills, behaviors, and plans, as well as work-life narratives that would help an individual fit in the ever-changing work environment. Hitherto, the key issue was to use an appropriate assessment tool to evaluate the characteristic adaptations. DeYoung (2015) recommended administering a personal project analysis. Regarding his suggestions, we considered using Occupational Project Scale (OPS) as a suitable tool to measure characteristic adaptations.

Occupational Project is a new construct that is derived from the construct of Ontological Wellbeing (OWB) developed by Simsek and Kocayoruk (2013). OWB is a collection of affective and cognitive evaluations of one's life coupled with a wholetime perspective. In other words, OWB acknowledges life as a personal project, which is evaluated by individuals themselves in terms of past, present, and future dimensions. Considering work life as a personal project, Şimşek, Günlü, and Erkuş (2012) adapted OWB into work life and developed Occupational Project Scale (OPS). OPS allows an individual to make an affective evaluation of the past, present, and future of his/her occupational life. The past is questioned with an array of adjectives from proud and satisfied to upset, guilty, disappointed, regretful and incompetent. The present is evaluated by adjectives such as enthusiastic, motivated, energetic together with adjectives such as lost, tired, empty, anxious etc. Finally, the future is evaluated through adjectives like hopeful, confident, ambitious, etc. Both the evaluation process and the result of OPS are cognitive as well as affective, since a person should contemplate on a continuum of goals, achievements, failures, and learnings to make the required evaluation. Additionally, the time perspective of OPS facilitates the assessment of the life-narrative dimension of characteristic adaptations.

In the present study, we expect that Stability and Plasticity are related to occupational project, which represent the characteristic adaptations in work setting, since dispositional traits have influence on characteristic adaptations. Stability, providing an individual with the ability to avoid disruption of ongoing goal-directed functioning, and Plasticity, involving the pursuit of existing goals while adapting to new strategies and goals, should both be associated with an individual's evaluation of his/her work life as a personal project.

#### Occupational project and job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is defined by Locke (1976) as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (p.1304). Given that occupational project refers to goals, strategies, and interpretations, a positive evaluation of occupational project would mean contentment about the goal achievement in the past, confidence in the strategies of the present, and an optimistic view for the attainment of future goals. In this context, the job could be perceived as a right way to achieve the future goals of the occupational life as a project. The research literature supports the fact that goal attainment and goal orientation have positive relations with job satisfaction (Arvey, Dewhirst, & Boling, 1976; Roberson, 1990). As Heller, Judge, and Watson (2002) underline, in accordance with Locke, satisfaction is derived from the perception that job allows the attainment of valued goals. Thus, positive evaluation of occupational project would also positively affect the job-satisfaction level.

It is worth stating here that we considered positive affect dimension of Affect in Workplace as the other indicator of job satisfaction since Judge and Larsen (2001) argued that there was a need to include "work affect" measures to better understand the nature of job satisfaction. They pointed out that the most extensively validated measures were focused only on the cognitive dimensions of job satisfaction. Our study utilized one of the most extensively validated survey of job satisfaction, Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire that measures supervision-human relations, supervision-technical, company policy, compensation, career progress and recognition dimensions under the extrinsic component; while activity, independence, variety, social status, moral values, job security, social service, responsibility, ability utilization, creativity, authority and achievement dimensions under the intrinsic component of job satisfaction. Evidently, these components of extrinsic and intrinsic job satisfaction are focused on the cognitive aspects related to working conditions or organizational constructs. In order to replace the missing affective dimension, this study includes positive affect in workplace together with job satisfaction.

To sum up, our model considers that occupational project mediates the relationship between the Big Two and job satisfaction as well as affect in workplace. In addition, the model incorporates how affect in workplace might influence job satisfaction, given that positive affect in workplace would be positively related to job satisfaction. Figure 1 shows that Plasticity and Stability both affect Occupational Project, which in turn influences job satisfaction as well as affect in workplace. The fact that affect in workplace has an influence on job satisfaction is also represented in Figure 1.

# Method

#### **Participants**

The investigation relied on a convenient sample. Three hundred and one questionnaires were gathered from the population. The respond rate of the participants was about 35%. The questionnaires were gathered from two cities, Ankara and Izmir. The participants in Ankara were public-sector employees working as lower-and middle-level managers in one of the ministries of Turkey and private sector employees working as software and electronics engineers. The participants from Izmir were academicians working in the faculties of business in a private and a state university. No incentive was provided for their participation.

## Procedure

In Ankara, the questionnaires were distributed with the informed consent at the beginning of a training program and were collected at the end from those who are willing to participate. In Izmir, the questionnaires are conducted via e-mail. Two hundred and fifty-three (253) questionnaires were collected from a population of 1250. The demographic data was as follows; 103 females and 150 males; average age is 35.55 (SD = 8.73).

#### Measures

#### The Occupational Project Scale (OPS)

The Occupational Project Scale (OPS) is modified from Life Project Scale (LPS) (Simsek & Kocayoruk, 2013) that is developed to measure how an individual evaluates his/her whole occupational life with past, present, and future parts. Similar to LPS, the OPS has four factors, two of which are activation and nothingness that measure the present evaluation of the occupational project. The other two factors, regret, and hope, measure the evaluation of past and future, respectively. The LPS with its 24 items was used with changed instructions. The instruction statement adapted from LPS is as follows: "Please consider your own occupational life as a personal project with past, present and future aspects. Like all projects, your occupational project includes completed (the past), ongoing (the present), and prospective (the future) parts. What is expected from you is to rate the intensity of experiencing the emotions given when looking at these parts of your project." The phase "When I look at my past/present/future ..." was used to separate the different time dimensions and related affect adjectives. The OPS item ratings ranged from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely). The basic rationale of OPS is to encourage the participants to reflect their occupation as a personal project and then evaluate their emotions aroused from this perspective. In the present study, the internal consistency was found to be  $\alpha = .936$  for the total scores while ranging from .81 to .95 for the four factors.

To evaluate the validity of the OPS, Şimşek et al. (2012) confirmed the factor structure of this modified form and analyzed the intercorrelations of the OPS to general affect and job satisfaction. The results indicated that the OPS were moderately correlated with general affect (ranged from .43 to .49) and job satisfaction (ranged from .54 to .63). They also conducted hierarchical regression analyses to understand whether the OPS scores account for unique variance in job satisfaction and showed that the OPS scores accounted for more than 30% of the variance in job satisfaction scores beyond that already captured by personality and affect.

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#### The Big Five Inventory (BFI)

The 44-item BFI (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998) was conducted to assess the five personality dimensions of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. The rating scale is from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). The adaptation of the scale was conducted by Sumer, Lajunen, and Ozkan (2005) and the reported Cronbach's Alpha reliabilities ranged from .64 to .77. Internal consistency estimates were found to be satisfactory (range = .67 to .81) in the present study.

#### The Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ)

Job satisfaction is measured by using "Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire" (MSQ) developed by Weiss, Dawis, England, and Lofquist (1967). The five-point Likert type scale (5 = totally satisfied and 1 = totally dissatisfied) of MSQ is utilized for assessing the perceptions of the participants on the 20 items related to intrinsic satisfaction, extrinsic satisfaction and general satisfaction.

The intrinsic satisfaction items measure activity, independence, variety, social status, moral values, job security, social service, responsibility, ability utilization, creativity, authority and achievement dimensions. The extrinsic satisfaction items measure supervision-human relations, supervision-technical, company policy, compensation, career progress and recognition dimensions. General satisfaction is the sum of both intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction dimensions. As a job satisfaction questionnaire, MSQ is widely used and trusted, since it both encompasses the major components that determine job satisfaction and demonstrates high reliability (Chen, 2006; Hancer & George, 2003; Lau & Chong, 2002). The adaptation of the scale into Turkish was conducted by Baycan (1985), and the internal consistency was found to be satisfactory (Cronbach Alpha = .77). In the present study, the internal consistencies are found to be  $\alpha = .87$  for intrinsic satisfaction and .92 for extrinsic satisfaction.

#### Job Related Affective Well-being Schedule (JAWS)

The JAWS developed by Katwyk, Fox, Spector, and Kelloway (2000) consists of 30 items, that measure positive/negative emotions generated while working (e.g., "My job made me feel angry"; "My job made me feel excited"). The rating scale is from 1 (never) to 5 (extremely often). The questionnaire was adapted into Turkish by Simsek et al. (2012), and the internal consistency was found to be .95 and .94 for the positive and negative dimensions, respectively. Only the positive affect sub-factor was used in the present study, since positive affect, not negative affect, was considered the better indicator of job satisfaction. The internal consistency estimate for positive affect dimension of JAWS were found to be .95 in the present study.

#### Data analysis

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized to test the fit of the data to the measurement model and structural model in the present study using LISREL 8.8 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). SEM is a multivariate strategy, including measurement

and structural models. In the measurement model, parcels or total-scores of subfactors are employed as observed variables. Item parceling is used in order to normalize the distribution of the observed variables. Among the several methods for item parceling, rank-ordering items by the size of the item-total correlation and summing sets of items is preferred in this study. As a result, equivalent indicators are obtained by spreading the "better" and "worse" representative items across different parcels.

In the first step of the data analysis, the measurement model, the base for all the models, was checked for an acceptable fit to the data. In the second step, the structural model is tested using the method introduced by Baron and Kenny (1986) to clearly prove the effects of mediating variables in the relationship between higher-order traits and job satisfaction. A four-step approach is employed by Baron & Kenny's method (BKM) to support the mediation condition. First, the independent and dependent variables should have a statistically significant relation. Second, the independent variable should correlate with mediating variables. Third, the mediating variables. In the final step, the mediation should be checked for full-mediation or partial-mediation. If the correlation between independent variable and dependent variable becomes insignificant in the presence of the mediating variable, then there is full mediation. If merely the coefficient of the correlation between independent and dependent variables decreases when the mediating variable is included, then there is a partial-correlation.

The recent approaches to mediation assume that BKM suffers from the lack of statistical power (Mallinckrodt, Abraham, Wei, & Russell, 2006). Moreover, some researchers stated that the first condition of BKM is not required for a successful mediation (Frazier, Tix, & Barron, 2004; Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010). Taking these critics into account, we also used a bootstrapping procedure to show whether the indirect effects in our model are significant.

# Results

#### Testing the measurement model

The means, standard deviations, and correlations for all observed variables are presented in Table 1. The measurement model consists of the relations of latent variables with each other and with their respective observed variables. It is necessary to test the measurement model before the structural model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), since the measurement model is least restricted and least parsimonious, which provides the best data fit.

The observed variables were determined according to a priori factor structures of the constructs demonstrated by the earlier research. Neuroticism (Reverse of Emotional Stability), Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness are the indicators of Stability, while Extraversion and Openness are the indicators of Plasticity. Regret, Activation, Nothingness, and Hope are the four dimensions of Occupational

	Variable	М	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	EXT	28.00	5.60	_												
2	AGR	34.85	4.43	.21**	_											
3	CON	35.53	5.17	.25**	.39**	_										
4	NEU	19.35	5.26	— .32 <sup>**</sup>	— .48 <sup>**</sup>	30***	_									
5	OPE	37.65	5.52	.40**	.18 <sup>**</sup>	.32**	— .18 <sup>**</sup>	_								
6	REG	27.63	5.08	.39**	.28**	.30**	27***	.13*	_							
7	ACT	15.38	5.08	.41**	.22**	.18**	31**	.24**	.53**	_						
8	NOT	25.26	5.17	.25**	.36**	.30**	— .31**	.17	.61**	.54**						
9	HOP	20.67	6.80	.35**	.17**	.17**	— .24 <sup>**</sup>	.23**	.41**	.62**	.32**					
10	AW1	23.84	5.92	.34**	.32**	.20**	— .31**	.13*	.50**	.73**	.50**	.50**				
11	AW2	23.80	5.85	.30**	.31**	.24**	— .37**	.19**	.46**	.72**	.51**	.50**	.93**			
12	IJS	40.45	9.64	.32**	.25**	.23**	— .19 <sup>**</sup>	.16	.49**	.64**	.48 <sup>**</sup>	.44**	.70**	.67**	_	
13	EJS	25.69	6.35	.22***	.20***	0.1	23**	0.04	.41**	.58**	.38**	.42**	.64**	.62**	.76**	—

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and correlations among the variables used in the model.

N = 253; EXT = Extraversion; AGR = Agreeableness; CON = Conscientiousness; NEU = Neuroticism; OPE = Openness; ACT = Activation; NOT = Nothingness; AW1, AW2 = Two Parcels for the items of Positive Affect in Workplace; IJS = Intrinsic Job Satisfaction; EJS = Extrinsic Job Satisfaction \*\* p < .01, \* p < .05

Project. Positive Affect in Workplace as a latent variable is constructed from two observed variables created by parceling the items of this factor, since it is unidimensional. Finally, the latent variable, Job Satisfaction, consists of two observed variables, which are intrinsic satisfaction and extrinsic satisfaction.

The test of the measurement model resulted in an acceptable fit to the data, indicated by the following goodness of fit statistics:  $\chi^2$  (54, N = 253) = 150.07, p = .000; GFI = 0.92; CFI = 0.95; SRMR = 0.052; RMSEA = 0.084 (90% CI for RMSEA = 0.068-0.0.10). Factor loadings ranged from -9.95 to 20.67 with significant t-values, showing that they loaded significantly on their respective constructs.

All the latent constructs of the model were significantly correlated with each other, which also supported the basic propositions of the present study. First, Stability and Plasticity were correlated with both Job Satisfaction (.37 and .39 respectively) and Affect in Workplace (.50 and .40, respectively), satisfying the first condition of the BKM. Second, Stability, and Plasticity were significantly correlated to Occupational Project, .48 and .60, respectively. These significant correlations also supported the second step of the BKM. Third, Occupational Project is significantly correlated with Job Satisfaction (.78) and Affect in Workplace (.82), which was the third condition of the BKM.

It is worth mentioning that we tested the divergent validity of two latent constructs, Occupational Project and Affect in Workplace. Although the OPS (Appendix 1) could be clearly differentiable from the JAWS operationally, the high correlation between them prompted us (thanks to the anonymous reviewer) to make an additional analysis. We made a confirmatory factor analysis of a model in which the parameter between the constructs was fixed to 1.00. The results of chi-square difference test (82.51, 1; p < .05) showed that this model was much worse than the model above in which these parameters was free. Taking into account the critics of Shaffer, DeGeest, and Li's (2016), we also showed that the average variance extracted for the OPS (.84) was greater than the maximum shared variance between the constructs (.82).

#### Testing the structural models

The proposed model in Figure 1 was analyzed using Maximum Likelihood estimation method. An acceptable fit of the model to the data was achieved, which was indicated by the following goodness of fit statistics:  $\chi^2$  (58, N = 253) = 160.64, p = .000; GFI = 0.91; CFI = 0.94; SRMR = 0.055; RMSEA = 0.084 (90% CI for RMSEA = 0.069–0.099).

As indicated by Hancock and Schoonen (2015), running alternative models would strengthen structural equation models by providing a more complete picture of the current thinking in a domain of inquiry. Based on this suggestion, two alternative structural equation models were used to rule out the possibility that the fit of the proposed model was simply the result of a statistical coincidence and to determine the advantage of the proposed model against the alternative models. The model fit indices for the proposed model were tested against two alternative models: the model (Alt 1) in which the relationship of the metatraits to affect in workplace and occupational project was mediated by job satisfaction and the model (Alt 2) in which the causal relationship affect in workplace and occupational project was reverse. As seen in Table 2, the proposed model yielded better goodness of fit indices compared to the alternative models. The chi-square difference tests conducted between the proposed model and alternative models also showed that the proposed model was better in accounting for the variance in the data. The chi-square difference tests between the proposed model and alternative model 1 (51.09; 13; p < 0.5) clearly showed the superiority of the proposed model. The proposed model was also clearly better than alternative model 2, given that reversing the causal relationship between occupational project and affect in workplace resulted in 26.94 increase in chi-square value.

In order to provide support for the fourth condition of BKM, the paths from Stability to Job Satisfaction and to Affect in Workplace, and also from Plasticity to Job Satisfaction and to Affect in Workplace, were added into the equation, respectively. The results were as expected, indicating that none of these parameters had significantly improved the fit of the model to the data. Chi-square difference tests were conducted to ensure that the addition of direct paths from Stability and Plasticity to Job Satisfaction and Affect in Workplace did not affect the model fit.

As indicated in Figure 2, adding the path from Plasticity to Job Satisfaction produced a non-significant t-value with a chi-square difference test (.61, 1; p > .05) indicating that the decrease in chi-square was not statistically significant. This result shows that OP fully mediated the relationship between Plasticity and Job Satisfaction.

Table 2. Model fit indices and information criteria values for the proposed and alternative models.

	Proposed Model	Alternative Model 1	Alternative Model 2
Chi-square (df)	160. 64 (58)	211.73 (71)	187.58 (58)
GFI	.91	.89	.90
CFI	.94	.93	.94
SRMR	.055	.063	.089
RMSEA	.084	.089	.094
90% CI for RMSEA	.069–.099	.075–.10	.079–.11



Figure 2. Standardized parameter estimates of the proposed model.

The path from Plasticity to Affect in Workplace also produced a non-significant t-value, and the chi-square difference test (3.61, 1; p>.05) did not meet the criteria, which demonstrated that OP fully mediated the relationship between Plasticity and Affect in Workplace.

The path from Stability to Job Satisfaction similarly resulted in a non-significant t-value, and the chi-square difference test (.69, 1; p>.05) showed that the path did not contribute significantly to the fit of the model, showing that OP fully mediated the relationship between Stability to Job Satisfaction.

Finally, the path from Stability to Affect in Workplace produced a non-significant t-value. The chi-squ are difference test (2.79, 1; p>.05) resulted in non-significant decrease in chi-square, which indicated that OP fully mediated the relationship between Stability to Affect in Workplace.

We also used bootstrapping procedure (Shrout & Bolger, 2002) to test the indirect pathways from two metatraits to Job Satisfaction and Affect in Workplace. According to this procedure, significant indirect effect is indicated when the upper and lower limits of the 95% confidence interval (CI) do not include zero. We found this to be the case for the indirect effects from Plasticity to both Job Satisfaction (95% CI = .172 to .475) and Affect in Workplace (95% CI = .188 to .508), from Stability to both Job Satisfaction (95% CI = .050 to .376) and Affect in Workplace (95% CI = .050 to .396), as well as from OP to Job Satisfaction (95% CI = .232 to .497).

# Discussion

Inspired from computer modeling of neural networks, DeYoung et al. (2002) labelled the higher-order traits of Big Five, the simplest and broadest level of personality description, as Stability and Plasticity. The computer modeling of neural networks was based upon the idea that "any information processing system designed for stable classification but capable of adapting to novel inputs must necessarily be composed of two distinctive subsystems: one responsible for stability and the other responsible for plasticity" (DeYoung et al., 2002, p.536). Human beings are the most profound systems of information processing on earth with the aim of not

only survival but also having a fulfilling and meaningful life in their complex and ever-changing environments. Therefore, the higher-order traits, Stability and Plasticity, are functional for human beings to serve the basic need for maintaining order while adapting to novelty. Thus, in this study, we assumed that this "complex and ever-changing environment" could be intensely experienced in the workplace for many people, especially in the postmodern era. Accordingly, we predicted that having Stability and Plasticity would be in positive correlation with job satisfaction and affect in workplace. The results were in line with our expectations, indicating that Stability and Plasticity had moderate positive correlations with both job satisfaction and affect in workplace. The results were also congruent with the findings of the meta-analysis conducted by Judge et al. (2002) on the relationship between Big Five and job satisfaction.

The present study also aimed at explaining the positive correlation between the higher-order traits and job satisfaction from the point of view of personality theories. As Digman (1997) stated, the Stability dimension represented the social interest theory of Adler (1939) and socialization process explained by psychoanalysts and behaviorists. Stability would enable an individual to maintain positive social relationships at work, to display self-discipline and orderliness, to strive for achievement, and to eliminate negative affect and behavioral/motivational withdrawal (DeYoung et al., 2002). In line with this expectation. The Plasticity dimension, on the other hand, in resemblance to striving for superiority (Adler, 1939) and personal growth (Rogers, 1961), reflect the tendency to explore or to engage in novelty, display sociability, positive affectivity, incentive reward sensitivity, approach behavior (DeYoung et al., 2002). The results of the current study proved, in line with the predictions, that Plasticity also had moderate positive correlation with Job Satisfaction.

The most important finding of the present study was that occupational project fully mediated the relationship between the higher-order traits and both job satisfaction and affect in workplace. We used Baron and Kenny Method (1986) to measure mediation and further confirmed the results by using chi-square difference tests and bootstrapping procedure. The results indicated that it was possible to intervene with one's evaluation of occupational project to influence the level of job satisfaction and affect in workplace. In other words, even though job satisfaction was linked to Stability and Plasticity to a significant extent, it was not easy to change these highly in-born traits. This study revealed the psychological processes that took place between these two meta-traits and job satisfaction. These psychological processes could be summarized under the construct of "characteristic adaptations." According to DeYoung (2015), characteristic adaptations were part of the cybernetic or goal-directed system of personality, and they were composed of goals, strategies, and interpretations, which also encompassed work-life narratives. Due to the fact that one cannot manage what one does not measure, it is possible to conclude that the evaluation of characteristic adaptations by Occupational Project Scale (OPS) provides an individual with a tool to assess and intervene with the characteristic adaptations, with the aim of influencing job satisfaction and affect in workplace.

Occupational project as the mediator between the higher-order traits and job satisfaction facilitates an individual's assessment of his/her goals, plans, and strategies in a time bounded way, which also create a life narrative of the individual. An intervention to the formation of this narrative might result in a totally different meaning of the occupational project. Actually, occupational project is a concept based on constructivism, which proposes that each individual mentally constructs the world of existence through cognitive processes (Young & Collin, 2004). As they put forward, Mahoney considered the self a complex system of active and inactive self-organizing processes with the need to achieve balance between ordering and disordering processes in an environment of social and symbolic contexts. Young and Collin (2004) explained further that the construction of self and narrative in its various forms relied on the construction of meaning in temporal and social contexts and in relationship with others. Accordingly, career is among the particular forms that helps the individual to construct self over time and in context, and it includes self-definition, purpose, and subjectivity.

The change of career narrative, in other words, generating a new meaning of occupational project, might be considered a tool to cope with the unpredictable and ever-changing conditions of 21st century due to globalization and rapidly improving information technologies. As Savickas et al. (2009) stated, career belonged to the employee, not to the organization in the postmodern world. The new concept of work life imposes that employees take the responsibility of developing skills and competencies, maintaining employment and creating their own opportunities instead of expecting secure jobs in bounded organizations. In consequence, employees build their careers by imposing meaning on vocational behavior (Savickas, et al., 2009). In other words, career indicates a perspective that gives personal meaning on past memories, present experiences, and future aspirations, patterning them into a life theme. Young and Collin (2004) emphasize that individuals as the managers of their own careers, draw meaning from the role of work in their lives not from an organizational culture. Constructivism inspires and supports this emphasis on personal meaning and one's becoming an agent in one's own life. As Young and Collin (2004) clearly underline, career narrative may impose self-management and personal direction on the vocational behavior through the creation of meaning.

# **Practical implications**

The present study introduces OPS as a tool that could help measuring and understanding the meaning that the employees are giving to their careers and intervening with their personal constructs. OPS as an assessment tool reveals the gist of the narrative of the career life. OPS basically connects the employee's past to the present, and furthermore, to the anticipated future based on his/her particular past and present. Christensen and Johnston (2003) note that understanding a person's story can help others not only to establish better rapport, but also to understand and co-author career narratives that are meaningful for the employees, as career is essential for employees to make work life worthwhile. When employees face difficulty in finding meaning in their current jobs, they are likely to feel dissatisfied and may easily decide to move from one organization to the other since their loyalty is to their own vocational projects. Thus, by keeping close track of the occupational project of employees, especially the highly talented ones, organizations can achieve being part of the meaning creation process that is one of the key elements for the retention of 21<sup>st</sup> century employees. The change of meaning of one's occupational narrative and change of perception about characteristic adaptations both lead to a positive shift in one's evaluation of his/her own occupational project. As a result, the enhancement in the level of job satisfaction becomes possible.

#### Suggestions for future research

Occupational project can be considered an important construct for career counselling and managerial practices. Future research can focus on the application of OPS to human-resource processes such as talent management, performance evaluation, and employee selection. Longitudinal studies can be conducted to measure the incremental impact of OPS on these processes before and after its implementation. Job satisfaction, engagement, employee turnover rate, and absenteeism data can be compared before and after using OPS in the human resources processes and improvements can be searched for.

Longitudinal studies can be conducted on the influence of OPS to the Stability and Plasticity levels of the individuals. Whether changing the narrative identity with the use of OPS has an effect on the levels of Stability and Plasticity or not can be searched for through longitudinal studies.

# Limitations of the research

Although this research has given insight into how occupational project could mediate the relationship between the meta-traits, Stability and Plasticity, and job satisfaction considering both cognitive and affective dimensions, some limitations should be noted. The most important limitation is the research design that is basically dependent on cross-sectional data. Longitudinal design should be done to see the variability in the scores of OPS over a longer period of time.

# Conclusion

In this study, we analyzed the relationship between the Big Two and job satisfaction, finding out that both dimensions of the Big Two, Stability, and Plasticity correlated positively with job satisfaction. Stability provided an individual with qualifications such as impulse restraint, reduction of hostility and neurotic defense, development of conscience, goal pursuit, and ability to cooperate, while Plasticity equipped individuals with qualifications such as flexibility, assertiveness, enthusiasm, curiosity and innovation (DeYoung et al., 2002; Digman, 1997). The classical and contemporary personality theories also focused on these two fundamental aspects of personality. Adler (1939) referred to these two dimensions as "social interest" and "striving for superiority." According to Digman (1997), Stability represented social interest, whereas Plasticity represented striving for superiority, both of which were required

for satisfaction at work environment. Even though job satisfaction was proved to correlate with the two higher-order traits, it would be very difficult to modify these most basic traits of an individual in a work setting. Therefore, our study utilized the evaluation of characteristic adaptations, which included goals, strategies and interpretations, as the mediating variable between the Big Two and job satisfaction. In our model, a new construct, Occupational Project Scale (OPS), was introduced to evaluate characteristic adaptations. OPS made it possible to assess how an individual perceived the past, present, and future of his/her occupational life as a project. This evaluation had both cognitive and affective components. Thus, OPS correlated not only with job satisfaction, but also affect in workplace. The results indicated that OPS fully mediated the relationship between the Big Two and job satisfaction as well as affect in workplace. OPS facilitated an individual to contemplate on his/her work life as a project on a continuum of goals, achievements, failures, and learnings with time perspective. In other words, it encouraged the individual to create a work-life narrative to make the required evaluation. It is possible to intervene with occupational project because the narrative could be interpreted from a different perspective, a new meaning could be assigned to it or new goals and strategies could be adopted. Therefore, in this study, we presented OPS as a practical tool for management to identify the perspective of employees about their work life as a project and modify their interpretations to influence job satisfaction and affect in workplace.

# **Author notes**

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# The Occupational Project Scale\*

Please consider your occupational life as a personal project with its past, present, and future parts. Like all projects, your occupational life includes completed (the past), ongoing (the present), and prospected (the future) parts. What is expected from you is to rate the intensity of the emotions you experience when looking at these parts of your occupational project. Please answer according to the scale below.

Very slightly or not at all Extremely 2 3 4 5 1 When I look at the completed part of my occupational project, I feel: 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Proud 2. \_\_\_\_ Disappointed 3. \_\_\_\_\_ Satisfied 4. \_\_\_\_\_ Regretful 5. \_\_\_\_\_ Upset 6. \_\_\_\_ Guilty 7. \_\_\_\_ Incompetent When I look at the ongoing part of my occupational project, I feel: 8. \_\_\_\_\_ Tired 9. \_\_\_\_\_ Enthusiastic 10. \_\_\_\_\_ Aimless 11. \_\_\_\_\_ Lost 12. \_\_\_\_ Motivated 13. \_\_\_\_ Energetic 14. \_\_\_\_ Excited

- 15. \_\_\_\_\_ Irresponsible
- 16. \_\_\_\_\_ Empty
- 17. \_\_\_\_\_ Anxious
- 18. \_\_\_\_ Helpless

# When I look at the future of my occupational project, I feel

- 19. \_\_\_\_ Hopeful
- 20. \_\_\_\_\_ Strong
- 21. \_\_\_\_ Confident
- 22. \_\_\_\_ Courageous
- 23. \_\_\_\_\_ Looking forward
- 24. \_\_\_\_\_ Ambitious

\*Scoring: The scale has four factors:

- 1. Regret: 1(R), 2, 3(R), 4, 5, 6, 7
- 2. Activation: 8(R), 9, 12, 13, 14
- 3. Nothingness: 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18
- 4. Hope: 19-24