

Positive Forces of Life and Psychological Well-being among Corporate Professionals

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Abstract

In the threshold of the 21st century, professionals have learned how to enhance positive forces of life like optimism, hopefulness, resilience, efficacy, life satisfaction, happiness, humour, contentment, positive meaning, relaxation in life, religiosity and spirituality etc. so that to become fully developed human being in the phase of setbacks. In this study, an attempt was made to find out the pattern of optimism, life satisfaction and psychological well-being among corporate professionals going under recession. 80 participants were screened in the age range of 20-30 years from upper-middle socio-economic status. It was found that corporate professionals scored average and high on the scales of learned optimism and life satisfaction which in turn resulted into psychological well-being even in the time of recession. Thus creating an environment to remain healthy, emotive and productive, one has to be optimistic for future success.

Keywords: Optimism, Life Satisfaction, Psychological Well-being

Introduction

The megatrends of change are everywhere today. There is a rapid transition from an industrial to an information society. Perhaps the most powerful of the global changes are the breathtaking rapid advances in technological world. Although the upside is the dramatically greater ability to accomplish things, the downside is the pressure to constantly learn more quickly, lest we be left behind in the 'digital divide'. Therefore the modern world, which is said to be a world of technological achievement, is also a world of stress due to the cut-throat competition among nations, regions and enterprises on a global scale. The enterprises have to update their knowledge and skill in information technology on the one hand and flexible responses to market change on the other. The option for the growth, survival and stay ahead in business requires swift adaption to fast changing circumstances. As a result, managers and staff are pressurized for technological achievements, profit motives and productivity.

Challenge, stress and strain have thus passed on the work force at large. Employees now have to face and cope with leaner working conditions, increased flexibility with time pressure and long working hours due to narrowing deadlines and altogether with increased work load demands, at the same time being aware that the jobs are no longer stable and the work is becoming precarious and unemployment indeed is real threat. These contemporary social and economic pressures on an unusually massive scale make it harder

for them to adapt in the highly developed ways they expect. Although they still want to believe in their ability to learn, change and master stressful situations, today's turbulent changes can be undermining, if they lack the capabilities that lead to resilience. In these stressful situations, many people become undermined in their performance, conduct, or health. They may fail to meet deadlines or reach goals. They may cut corners or disregard rules. They may have sleep problems, headaches, upset stomachs, or even worse symptoms as the time spent under stress increases. Experiencing the same stressful circumstances, however, some people possess the ability of an optimistic explanatory style, are resilient and survive rather than be undermined. Their performance, conduct and health remain unaffected, as they find ways to shoulder all the different kinds of stress. Further, some of these resilient people not only survive, but actually thrive. They thrive by finding ways to turn stressful circumstances into opportunities for personal growth. Such optimistic and resilient people tend to enjoy good health (Peterson & Bossio, 1991), their immune systems work better (Singh & Pareek, 2007) and they cope better with stress using more effective coping strategies such as reappraisal and problem solving.

Positive forces of life such as joy, happiness, contentment, optimism, hopefulness, resilience, humorous, life satisfaction etc. play an important role in life. Research shows that positive emotions serve a buffering function, provide a protection from negative emotions and ill health (Fredrickson, 2000) and are favourable for healthy functioning (Trama and Kaur, 2009). These imply experiences of marvel and wonder (Fuller, 2006); broaden momentary thought processes and build personal resources which help the individual to deal with stress. It develops strengths, so individuals can realize their potential and thrive under adversities (Seligman, 2002). This in turn, fosters personal growth and well-being. A number of studies provide evidence that positivity and various positive forces may play an important role in psychological well-being and good health outcomes. For example, in a meta-analysis that examined not only correlational studies, but also those using longitudinal and experimental designs, the results clearly indicated that positive, happy people had better physical and mental health outcomes and behaviour (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005) and in a recent update of the literature, Lyubomirsky (2008, p. 25) concluded that happier, more positive people are "more resilient in the face of hardship, have stronger immune systems, and are physically healthier. Happy people even live longer."

In particular, studies have shown the link between positive moods (Ostir, Markides, Peek, & Goodwin, 2001), happiness (Graham, Eggers, & Sukhtankar, 2004), laughter and humor (Bachorowski & Owren, 2001; Lefcourt, 2001) life satisfaction (Mroczek & Spiro, 2005), optimism and hope (Peterson, 2000; Snyder, 2000; Scheier et al, 2000; Taylor et al, 2000), religiosity (George et al, 2002), spirituality (Hodge, 2006; Kaufman et al, 2006) and positive self-perceptions (Levy, Slade, Kunkel, & Kasl, 2002) and physical and mental health outcomes. Similarly in Indian perspective, a substantial body of researches have demonstrated the positive correlation between hopefulness (Gupta & Suman, 2004), resilience and happiness (Srivastava & Sinha, 2005; Deb & Arora, 2008), social support (Singh et al., 2007; Srivastava & Mishra, 2007), religiosity (Srivastava & Krishna, 2007) and spirituality (Latha & Yuvaraj, 2006; Pareek & Singh, 2008) and psychological well-being. Applied to the workplace, Wright (2003, p. 441) asserted that in taking a positive approach to organizational behavior, "More than just considering employees as a means to the desired end of higher organizational productivity, to make a truly valuable contribution to

the field the mission of positive organizational behavior (POB) must also include the pursuit of employee happiness, health, and betterment issues as viable goals or ends in themselves." Moreover, this previous research and perspective of the relationship between positivity (as the antecedent, independent variable) and well-being the dependent variable or desired outcome is beginning to extend beyond individual level boundaries to an understanding of the contextual effects of an organization's positive social interactions on employee health and well-being (Heaphy & Dutton, 2008).

In the present study an attempt was made to find out the pattern of optimism, life satisfaction and psychological well-being among corporate professionals going under recession. The recession deeply affected people. For many people, it created profound fears about loss of home, love, self-respect, and above all loss of meaning in their lives. Some, who lost their jobs, had the feelings of humiliation, embarrassment, sadness, guilt and frustration. Some of them may not be in a desperate financial situation, but they were still in a "psychological recession", meaning that they fear the recession is happening and this gave them a sense of loss of control, anxiety about what might happen to them in the future and that whatever is happening to others they cannot prevent happening to them. Whether someone was laid off or fired, losing his job can really feel devastating. One's job, besides providing the money necessary for living, can also give that person their sense of identity and self-confidence and if he loses that job his entire sense of self-worth and psychological well-being can be shaken. Therefore the investigator was interested to assess the pattern of optimism and life satisfaction and its contribution to psychological well-being among corporate professionals under recession threat.

Optimism is commonly thought of as being rather a trivial attribute. An optimist is widely thought of as someone who sees the silver lining in every cloud and views the world through rose tinted spectacles. There are two main approaches that are based on distinct conceptualizations of optimism (Peterson, 2000a). At one extreme, optimism has been conceptualized as a broad personality trait characterized by general optimistic expectations that more good things than bad will happen in the future, known as dispositional optimism (Scheier and Carver, 1985). While at the other extreme, optimism has been construed as an explanatory style, rather than a broad personality trait (Seligman, 1998). Optimistic people, according to this perspective, explain negative events or experiences by attributing the cause of these to external, transient, specific factors such as the prevailing circumstances. Apart from these two approaches, several researchers have contended that optimism is a thinking style that can be learned.

As Goleman (1995) believed that hope and optimism both can be learned. People, who can meet challenges, as they come up, lead to optimism. Learned optimism is a sense of enthusiasm, confidence and control, which develops when individual, achieves small successes. Optimism has a significant influence on health, happiness and achievement as observed by Seligman (1998). Optimism and hope, are predictive of physical and mental health as indexed or mediated by a variety of measures including self-reported health, positive response to medical intervention, subjective well-being, positive mood, immunological robustness, effective coping and health-promoting behavior (Peterson, 2000; Sydnor, 2000; Scheier et al., 2000; Taylor et al., 2000). The contribution of optimism to health can be supported by broaden-and-build theory which suggests that positive emotions

increase people's physical, cognitive and social resources, which in turn helps them to cope more effectively with stressful experiences and live healthier (Frederickson, 2001). Thus optimism influence individuals' orientation to events in their life and have a big impact on their approach to deal with problems and challenges with which they cope with adversity.

The new social changes in the 21st century have caused substantial stresses and dissatisfaction. It is conceivable if someone is high on psychological well-being, he perceives himself as a happy or satisfied person and then is expected to perform well. Whereas life satisfaction refers to an overall assessment of feelings and attitudes about one's life at a particular point of time, ranging from negative to positive. Veenhoven (1991) defined life satisfaction as "The degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his life-as-a-whole favorably." It is one of the three major indicators of well-being: life satisfaction, positive affect and negative affect (Diener, 1984). Diener, Diener & Tamir (2004) viewed that one of the probable determinants of life satisfaction is personality make-up as it influences not just the judgements of well-being, but is also a causal factor in the events which are being judged. A substantial body of Indian researches also indicated the factors related with life satisfaction. As Dubey (2003) found that psychological characteristics of future orientation, optimism and perceived control are related to better perception of quality of life and satisfaction with life. Similarly, Shobha & Sharada (2005) observed that life satisfaction depends on how the individual perceives the life at their disposal. Whereas, Hooda, Sharma & Yadava (2008) found that satisfaction with life is significantly and positively correlated with appraisal of negative emotions and of positive emotions.

Psychological well-being is the subjective feeling of contentment, happiness, satisfaction with life and work, sense of achievement, utility, belongingness, and no distress, dissatisfaction or worry, etc. It may be maintained in adverse circumstances and conversely may be lost in favorable situation. Psychological well-being deals with people's feelings about everyday experiences in life activities. Such feelings may range from negative mental states to positive mental health (Jahoda, 1958; Warr, 1978). To Levi (1987), psychological well-being is a dynamic state characterized by reasonable amount of harmony between individual's abilities, needs and expectations, and environmental demands & opportunities. Srivastava & Sinha (2005) found that resilience and happiness were positively related to well-being. Similarly, Abramson et al. (1978) & Bandura (1977) found that perceived control has been reported to be the key of psychological well-being. Though Bhattacharya, Singh et al. (2006) observed that subjective well-being is negatively related to neuroticism and positively related to extraversion and conscientiousness. Thus certain dispositions such as hope (Snyder et al., 1991), optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985), and expectancy to control (Grob et al., 1996) appear to influence subjective well-being.

In today's work culture, people spend more than one third of their time at workplace. Hence, there is an emergence to nurture the human potential and life enhancing power of positive forces and personality traits such as life styles, optimism, hopefulness, efficacy, resilience, virtues - love, hope, gratitude, forgiveness, joy, courage, humility; religiosity and spirituality. Seligman M. (2002) remarked that much of the task of prevention from behavior disorders in this new century should be able to create a science of human strength with the mission of understanding and learning how to foster the virtues and skills in young people, promoting well-being and positive thinking. Psychologists may inspire employees to develop

a more wholesome focus on the positive forces of life; identify, elevate and celebrate the creative potential of their frame of mind. Thus, optimism can be encouraged among professionals and pessimism can be reversed by exploring the variables contributing to life satisfaction and psychological well-being.

Objectives

- To explore the level of optimism and life satisfaction among corporate professionals.
- To explore the contribution of optimism and life satisfaction to psychological well-being among corporate professionals.

Hypotheses

- Optimism will significantly contribute to psychological well-being among corporate professionals.
- Life Satisfaction will significantly contribute to psychological well-being among corporate professionals.

Method

Participants: The sample consisted of 80 corporate professionals (46 males and 34 females) age ranged 20-30 years, having professional experience of 1-8 years from different software companies of Noida and Delhi, viz. CSC, Noida; R Systems International Ltd, Noida; HCL, Noida; Headstrong India Pvt Ltd, Noida; Tech Mahindra, Noida; EXCEL, Noida and Satyam Computers Services Ltd, New Delhi.

Measures

Learned Optimism Scale (LOS): Developed by Sanjyot Pethe, Sushma Chaudhary and Upinder Dhar (2000). The scale consisted of 22 items based on Likert's five point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The minimum and maximum scores were 22 and 110 respectively. A high score indicates high learned optimism. It is eminently suitable for group as well as individual testing.

Life Satisfaction Scale (LS Scale): The measure developed by Q.G Alam and Dr. Ramji Shrivastava (2001) was used. It is a diagnostic scale consisted of 60 items related to six areas, viz. health, personal, economical, marital, social and job, indicating the satisfaction limits. The items have two alternatives, 'Yes' or 'No'. The total score is obtained by summing up the raw scores to obtain a measure of overall level of satisfaction with life. Higher scores reflect higher levels of life satisfaction.

General Health Questionnaire-12(GHQ-12): Developed by Goldberg and Williams (1988). The GHQ-12 was used to assess the level of psychological well-being among the employees. The GHQ-12 is comprised of 12 items and is a shortened version of GHQ-60(which has 60 items). Responses were made on four-point Likert scale indicating the frequency with which the respondent had experienced the symptom 'better than usual', 'same as usual', 'less than usual' and 'much less than usual. The minimum and maximum score were 12 and 48 respectively. High score on the scale indicates poor psychological being.

Procedure

To administer the measures, the purposive sample was selected. Corporate professionals, age ranged 20-30 yrs and experience ranged 1-8 yrs were listed out. The participants were employed in different software companies of Noida and Delhi. Prior to the administration of the test, the rapport was established with the participating subjects and they were told about the purpose of the study. After their consent to participate in the study, the three questionnaires – LOS, LS Scale and GHQ-12 were administered with a gap of about one week between each questionnaire to minimize the chances of mechanical responding. The subjects were asked to fill the questionnaires by themselves according to the instructions on the questionnaires. Respondents were requested not to leave any item unanswered and to give each and every response honestly.

Results

The present study aimed to assess the level of optimism and life satisfaction and to investigate the contribution of certain positive forces viz. optimism and life satisfaction to psychological well-being among corporate professionals. In order to attain these objectives, chi-square (χ^2) test and graphical representation by bar graph; and correlation and regression analysis were carried through SPSS (10th version).

The percentage of professionals is organized into 2x3 contingency table. The two rows indicate two certain positive forces i.e. optimism and life satisfaction; and three columns represent three levels of optimism and life satisfaction i.e. high, moderate and low. The chi-square (χ^2) test was applied to find out the difference among different levels of optimism and life satisfaction. Table 1 reveals that the percentage of professionals who scored High, Moderate and Low is 12%, 84% and 4% on Learned Optimism Scale and 39%, 52% and 9% on Life Satisfaction Scale respectively. The value of chi-square was 23.74 with 2 degrees of freedom. The probability was below .001 which shows a significant difference among different levels of optimism and life satisfaction. The results have also been depicted by bar graph.

Figure 1 shows a vertical bar graph. The bars represent the percentage of corporate professionals at various levels upon the measures of optimism and life satisfaction. Bars are drawn in order; the professionals at high level are being placed on the left. An observation of the graph reveals that most of the corporate professionals scored high and moderate on the measures of optimism and life satisfaction and very less percentage of professionals scored low on these measures.

Table 2 shows that life satisfaction and learned optimism are positively and significantly correlated to psychological well-being. The correlation between optimism and psychological well-being is .48 which shows positive and significant relationship between these variables. The correlation between life satisfaction and psychological well-being is .63 also shows positive and significant correlation between these two variables.

In order to examine the contributions of different variables, regression analysis was undertaken. Life satisfaction was entered at the first step as it was the prime factor statistically contributing significantly to psychological well-being. Life satisfaction accounted

for 40% of the total variation in psychological well-being as shown in Table 3. The other variables were entered in the next block, using a stepwise method of entry.

In the second step, optimism was entered so that the role of optimism over and above life satisfaction in prediction of psychological well-being could be examined. Life satisfaction explained 40% of the total variance. In the second step, optimism added 9% of explained variance as shown in Table 4. The final model explained about 49% of total variance in psychological well-being.

Discussion

Table 1 and the figure indicate that most of the corporate professionals scored high and moderate on the measures of optimism and life satisfaction that lead to psychological well-being even in the time of recession. This means that they feel that conditions of their life are excellent and they have gained important behavioral skills in life. Kutner et al. (1956); Cutler (1973) Edward and Klemmack (1973) found that an individual will be satisfied only when there is job satisfaction and good socio-economic status that can lead to satisfaction in life. A good socio-economic status is achieved through job. Although people working in corporate sector were not getting any increment in their salaries, yet they were satisfied with their jobs because satisfaction does not depend only on money, but also on the type of job they are assigned. Interesting jobs, continuous learning, motivated work culture and needs fulfillment leads to satisfaction. In the threshold of 21st century, the professionals have learned how to enhance the positive forces of life in the face of hardship. They have developed the skill of resilience to stand up in significant life challenges and adversity as resilience is one of the most beneficial characteristics of optimism.

Emotionally resilient people have a specific set of attitudes concerning themselves and their role within the world that motivates and enables them to cope more efficiently and effectively. Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) studied and predicted that resilient people use positive emotions to rebound from, and find positive meaning in stressful encounters. They found that the experience of positive emotions contributed to participants' abilities to achieve efficient emotion regulation, and by finding positive meaning in negative circumstances. Corporate professionals were optimistic in the adverse period of recession because they were assessing it as an opportunity to re-evaluate their career, to gain new experiences and to be updated in their field. They had the capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out, had a positive view of themselves and confidence in their strengths and abilities, skills in communication and problem solving and the capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses that are important factors contributing to resilience. Thus resilience deeply affects how they view the world and the troubles they face. They believe that their troubles are temporary and there is always a solution. This enables them to move forward and look for the better solution.

The other objective of the present study was to investigate the contribution of certain positive forces viz. optimism and life satisfaction to psychological well-being among corporate professionals. For the purpose, correlation and regression analysis was conducted. The results indicate that life satisfaction is positively and significantly correlated with psychological well-being and is the prime factor contributing significantly to psychological well-being. The relation of life satisfaction and well-being is supported by the

finding of Moorjani and Geryani (2004) who found that there is a significant and positive relationship between life satisfaction and general well-being. Moreover, life satisfaction is related to better physical (Veenhoven, 1991) and mental health (Beutell, 2006), longevity, and other outcomes that one considered positive in nature. The findings regarding optimism show that optimism is related positively and significantly with psychological well-being.

It has been found from the results that optimism is the second factor contributing significantly to psychological well-being. A substantial body of researches indicated that optimism is associated with psychological and physical well-being. Optimism helped people to cope up with stress and reduce risk of illness (Carver et al., 1983; Horowitz et al., 1988). Similarly Scheier and Carver (1992) found that optimism continued to be an important predictor of subjective well-being. People with an upbeat, optimistic explanatory style tend to enjoy good health (Peterson and Bossio, 1991). Maintaining a positive outlook towards life and an optimistic approach to future are the qualities that add to well-being (Dubey and Agarwal, 2004). The concept of future orientation is related to individual's hopes and fears, his/her expectations, aspirations, plans and striving for goals. Future orientation has motivational and cognitive components. It not only influences the behavior of an individual but is also influenced by the events in one's life such as prolonged deprivation (Agarwal, Tripathi & Srivastava, 1983). Researchers in occupational health and health psychology have demonstrated that well-being is impacted by hope (Snyder, Lehman, Kluck & Monsson, 2006), self-efficacy (Axtell et al., 2000; Bandura, 1997; and Meier, Semmer, Elfering & Jacobshagen, 2008), and optimism (Carver et al., 2005).

Thus it will be important to determine the extent to which psychological well-being can be enhanced by key positive forces, and, thus, whether what has been learned about the importance of positive forces can be translated to fostering resilience. Thus, the secret of good health lies within us and not outside. Positive emotions, feelings and a positive mental attitude can improve the quality of people's lives and heal their illness and stresses. On the other hand, negative emotions and feelings add toxins to the organism. Irrational beliefs about life events generate irrational emotions, whereas rational beliefs result in rational emotions. So if people learn how to recognize and reorganize their irrational beliefs and replace them with healthy ones, they will feel better. As Subramanian and Nityanandan (2008) found that the adolescents, who scored high on hardiness and optimism scales, are more likely to engage in problem focused, active and support seeking coping strategies such as positive refocusing, refocus on planning, positive reappraisal and putting into right perspectives with positive interpretation. So people need to develop a positive attitude towards life in order to maintain life satisfaction and to live a happy and healthy life.

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Figure 1
Percentage of Professionals at Different Levels of Optimism and Life Satisfaction

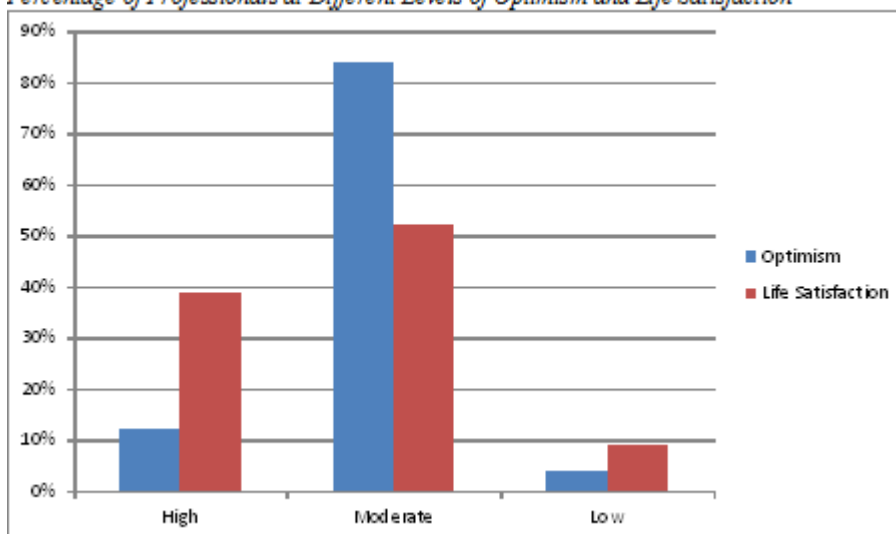


Table 1: *Difference among Different Levels of Optimism and Life Satisfaction*

Levels \ Variables	High	Moderate	Low
Optimism	12%	84%	4%
Life Satisfaction	39%	52%	9%

$\chi^2 = 23.74$, $df=2$, $P = \text{below } .001$

Table 2: *Correlation Coefficients among Different Variables (N=80)*

Variables	OPT	LS	PWB
OPT	1.000	.2860	.4782*
LS		1.000	.6310*
PWB			1.000

OPT - Optimism
LS - Life Satisfaction
PWB - Psychological well-being
* $P < .0005$

Table 3
Stepwise Hierarchical Multiple Regression Showing Contribution of Life Satisfaction to Psychological Well-Being (Step-1) (N=80)

Variable	R.Square	Beta	F	P
LS	.40	.63	51.61	0.0005

Multiple R= .63
Adjusted R Square= .39
Standard Error= 3.91

Table 4
Contribution of Optimism to Psychological Well-Being (Step-2) (N=80)

Variable	R Square	Beta	F	P
Optimism	.49	.32	37.69	0.0005

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