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Does Happiness Promote Career Success? Revisiting the Evidence

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Abstract

Empirical research demonstrates a relationship between happiness and career success. For example, happy people receive higher earnings, exhibit better performance, and obtain more favorable supervisor evaluations than their less happy peers. Researchers have posited that success leads to happiness, but Boehm and Lyubomirsky reviewed the relevant research in 2008 and argued that the alternative hypothesis—that happiness causes success—may be equally plausible. A decade later, we return to the literature to supplement studies we previously cited with new research and to determine whether the results of cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental investigations provide additional support for this hypothesis. We conclude that the evidence continues to persuasively suggest that happiness is correlated with and often precedes career success and that experimentally enhancing positive emotions leads to improved outcomes in the workplace.

Keywords

happiness, subjective well-being, positive emotion, work, career, success

> Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success.
>
> —Albert Schweitzer

Work hard, become successful, and *then* you will be happy. So goes the formula that has been directly and indirectly taught to successive generations of young people hoping to catch their piece of the proverbial American dream. This formula, however, may be broken and backwards (Achor, 2010). Like the lay public, many researchers have assumed that reaching certain standards of success will cause a person to become happy. In 2008, we reviewed the relevant literature and proposed that the alternative hypothesis—that happiness causes success—may be equally plausible (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008). In this article, we return to the literature published in the last decade to supplement studies cited previously in Boehm and Lyubomirsky (2008). We determine

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whether the present pattern of results provides even stronger support for our original hypothesis that happiness is an essential antecedent and determinant of success. Spoiler alert: We believe it does.

Building off our previous work, we define a happy person as someone who frequently experiences positive emotions such as joy, happiness, and contentment (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008). Researchers often use the more formal term "subjective well-being" when considering happiness, although subjective well-being may also include other measures such as those that tap negative emotions (e.g., anger, sadness) and global evaluations of how satisfied people are with their lives (i.e., life satisfaction; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). However, we focus here on the positive emotions or positive affect component of subjective well-being because experiencing frequent positive emotions of slight-to-moderate intensity is the hallmark of happiness (Diener, Sandvik, & Pavot, 1991). Notably, when people judge the extent to which they are happy, frequency of positive emotions is a better predictor than intensity. Furthermore, when one type of affect predominates (e.g., positive affect), the other type (e.g., negative affect) often occurs at low levels (Diener & Iran-Nejad, 1986). Throughout this article, we use the terms happy, high positive affect, greater positive emotions, and higher well-being interchangeably to describe a person who frequently experiences positive emotions relative to negative emotions.

We also focus on positive emotions because we posit that they are key to how happiness leads to success. Positive emotionality is associated with approach-oriented behavior (Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Watson, Wiese, Vaidya, & Tellegen, 1999) such as entering novel situations, interacting with others, and pursuing new goals (Carver, 2003). Positive emotions may also indicate that a person's life is going well—that one has adequate resources, no salient threats, and personal goals are being met (Cantor et al., 1991; Carver & Scheier, 1998; Clore, Wyer, Dienes, Gasper, & Isbell, 2001). In such situations, Fredrickson (1998, 2001) argues that people are well prepared to "broaden and build" intellectual, social, and physical resources—to hone skills and abilities, expand friendships, and rest to replenish energy—which may be summoned and utilized in times of need. As such, positive emotions may serve a critical and adaptive purpose that motivate the individual to muster effort in a variety of endeavors and prepare for future challenges (Fredrickson, 2001). Equipped with a hospitable environment and ready to pursue new skills and goals, individuals who frequently experience positive emotions are ideally situated to succeed. In the literature review that follows, we seek to demonstrate that happy people enjoy more success than their less happy peers and that such success is triggered by the experience of positive emotions. We focus specifically on success in the workplace (or on outcomes that may be relevant to career success such as teamwork) because most adults spend a large portion of their days engaged in work-related activities. Moreover, the majority of adults in the United States derive their sense of identity from their jobs (Riffkin, 2014), so it may be a particularly relevant domain that people consider when they assess their level of success.

To accomplish this—as in Boehm and Lyubomirsky (2008)—we consider three types of investigations to bolster our argument: cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental. Cross-sectional studies can provide evidence that a correlational relationship exists between two variables (happiness and success), but they cannot determine the direction of causality (i.e., whether happiness causes success or vice versa). Longitudinal research goes further by establishing the temporal order of the variables in question—often in real-world situations with high external validity. Thus, longitudinal research may help disentangle the "which came first?" chicken-or-egg-type conundrum. For example, in a longitudinal study, if people were happy before they became rich, then we cannot say that becoming rich made them happy people; their happiness predated their wealth. Of course, the problem with both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies is the possibility of the so-called third-variable problem, whereby variations in the outcome (career success) may be produced by a third variable (e.g., extraversion) because it also happens to be correlated with the predictor (happiness; Brewer & Crano, 2014).

Fortunately, well-designed experiments that involve random assignment, precise (positive, negative, and/or neutral) emotion inductions, and measures of various career-related outcomes (e.g., creativity and task performance) can provide robust evidence for the direction of causality. Yet such experimental studies often take place during relatively short time frames, in artificial laboratory environments, and induce low levels of the targeted emotions. Thus, experiments—while high in internal validity—are often lacking in external validity, and they are unable to accurately gauge real-world effect sizes and mechanisms. This is why it is so critical to consider the broad pattern of results across cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental studies, while keeping in mind the various strengths and weaknesses of each type of investigation. Although any one type of investigation (cross-sectional, longitudinal, or experimental) on its own cannot sufficiently substantiate our hypothesis, all three considered together provide robust, triangulating support for our hypothesis that happiness catalyzes workplace success.

As in Boehm and Lyubomirsky (2008), we pose three primary questions that are uniquely relevant to each type of investigation considered. Cross-sectional evidence can aid us in determining whether happy people are more likely to engage in successful workplace behaviors and become more accomplished in their careers. Longitudinal evidence can address the question of whether happiness precedes career success. Finally, experimental evidence can illuminate the direction of causality and establish whether happiness leads to success. The following updated review of past and new research seeks to answer each of these questions.

Cross-Sectional Evidence: Do Happy People Engage in Successful Behaviors and Are They More Accomplished in the Workplace?

In our broad survey of the cross-sectional literature, the evidence suggests that people who experience greater positive affect enjoy better outcomes in the workplace than their less happy peers. To start, a large and robust literature suggests that happy people are more satisfied with their jobs than unhappy people (Bowling, Eschleman, & Wang, 2010; Bruk-Lee, Khoury, Nixon, Goh, & Spector, 2009; Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2000; Fisher, 2002; George, 1995; Judge & Ilies, 2004; Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999; Mignonac & Herrbach, 2004; Moè, Pazzaglia, & Ronconi, 2010; Sutin, Costa, Miech, & Eaton, 2009; Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & de Chermont, 2003; Weiss, Nicholas, & Daus, 1999). However, the high correlation between positive affect and job satisfaction may be due, in part, to common method variance (i.e., the similarity between the measurement method rather than the constructs of interest; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Positive affect and job satisfaction may also be related due to the tendency of happy people to perceive themselves as having greater autonomy in the workplace (Iverson, Olekalns, & Erwin, 1998; Van Katwyk, Fox, Spector, & Kelloway, 2000), as autonomy is also positively related to job satisfaction (Crocco & Costigan, 2007).

Another way to gauge whether the performance of happy people is superior to their less happy peers is by examining whether they receive relatively more favorable evaluations from their managers, coworkers, and subordinates. It appears that positive affect tends to pay evaluative dividends. For example, supervisors judge happy versus unhappy employees relatively more favorably (Cropanzano & Wright, 1999; Judge et al., 1999; Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994; T. A. Wright & Staw, 1999), sales managers who report high positive affect supervise salespeople who are rated as high performing (George, 1995), and happy cricket players show superior performance during games (Totterdell, 1999, 2000). In one study, college dormitory resident assistants with higher versus lower levels of positive affect were rated as more effective by their undergraduate residents (Deluga & Masson, 2000). In another study, happy Master of Business Administration (MBA) students received better performance ratings from faculty evaluators than unhappy students (Staw & Barsade, 1993). Australian managers were also evaluated more favorably by their supervisors if they reported

high positive affect (Hosie, Willemyns, & Sevastos, 2012). Furthermore, a few field studies have established that well-being is correlated with job performance ratings, even after controlling for employee age, tenure with the organization, and education level (Cropanzano & Wright, 1999; T. A. Wright & Staw, 1999). Altogether, the cross-sectional literature suggests that happy people are perceived as performing better than their nonhappy coworkers.

Supervisor evaluations provide one good indicator that happy employees are performing better than their less happy colleagues. However, there is always the possibility that a halo effect may at least partially explain these findings (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008). In other words, because a person with high positive affect already has a socially desirable trait (happiness), the people around him are more likely to endow him with additional desirable characteristics (e.g., strong job performance). Fortunately, a variety of cross-sectional studies suggest that favorable supervisor ratings do not merely reflect halo effects. Happy employees also outperform unhappy employees on more objective measures of performance in an array of work environments. For example, the happy MBA students who received better performance ratings (Staw & Barsade, 1993) also exhibited adept interpersonal skills and greater managerial potential. The happy Australian managers receiving superior evaluations from their supervisors (Hosie et al., 2012) demonstrated better performance on work-related tasks such as following organizational procedures and effectively managing resources. Another cross-sectional study found that sales agents with a more positive outlook sold 37% more life insurance policies than their less positive colleagues (Seligman & Schulman, 1986). A meta-analysis of sports psychology studies also found a moderate effect size between positive mood (feeling cheerful, lively, and alert) and athletic performance (Beedie, Terry, & Lane, 2000).

Although Boehm and Lyubomirsky (2008) rightly warned that such correlational evidence does not prove causality, Côté (1999) concluded that there is likely a bidirectional relationship between happiness and job performance—such that positive affect leads to strong performance, and strong performance leads to positive affect. Yet the relationship between these two variables could be more complicated still; happiness and job performance may be linked in a chain of reciprocal relationships, where each set of variables iteratively influences the other across time (Warr, 1987).

Happy employees may also succeed in the workplace because they are more likely to go above and beyond for their organizations. Positive emotions predict what has been termed "organizational citizenship behavior" (OCB) or prosocial organizational behavior (Borman, Penner, Allen, & Motowidlo, 2001; Credé, Chernyshenko, Stark, Dalal, & Bashshur, 2007; Dalal, Baysinger, Brummel, & Lebreton, 2012; Fisher, 2002; George, 1991; Ilies, Scott, & Judge, 2006; Johnson, 2008; Lee & Allen, 2002; Miles, Borman, Spector, & Fox, 2002; Williams & Shiaw, 1999). Prosocial behaviors are actions intended to benefit one or more people other than the self (Batson & Powell, 2003). OCB promotes effective functioning within organizations, but the employee engages in such behaviors on a purely voluntary basis, and these actions may go unrecognized by any kind of formal reward system (Organ, 1988, 1997). Organ (1997) emphasized a few different OCB dimensions including giving assistance to others (altruism or helpfulness), preventing problems for others (courtesy), and maintaining high standards of attendance, punctuality, resource conservation, and work time usage (conscientiousness). Other researchers have proposed alternative or additional taxonomies that include categories like exerting extra effort on the job, protecting the organization, and spreading goodwill (Borman et al., 2001; George & Brief, 1992). Clearly, prosocial behaviors accrue a wide variety of benefits to organizations, so it is noteworthy that happy people are relatively more likely to help coworkers and customers (George, 1991), give blood, and donate money to charities (Priller & Schupp, 2011), as well as invest more hours in volunteer service (Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). Volunteering is also associated with greater positive affect (Greenfield & Marks, 2004). Thus, the presence of positive emotions may initiate upward spirals toward enhanced well-being (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002), whereby happy people engage in prosocial behavior in the workplace, so they get happier still and engage in yet more prosocial behavior.

Happy workers are also more invested and involved in their jobs (George, 1995; Langelaan, Bakker, van Doornen, & Schaufeli, 2006)—that is, they are high in work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Various withdrawal behaviors such as burnout, absenteeism, and turnover—which could be construed as the inverse of work engagement—are negatively correlated with high levels of positive affect (Credé et al., 2007; Langelaan et al., 2006; Miles et al., 2002; Thoresen et al., 2003). Relative to their less happy coworkers, happy workers are less likely to experience burnout (Iverson et al., 1998; Walkiewicz, Tartas, Majkowicz, & Budzinski, 2012), suffer from emotional exhaustion (T. A. Wright & Cropanzano, 1998), be habitually absent from work (Avey, Patera, & West, 2006; George, 1989; Gil et al., 2004), and quit their jobs (Van Katwyk et al., 2000). However, when workers are dissatisfied with their jobs, those with high positive affect report thinking more about quitting and actively seeking new employment than their low positive affect peers (Bouckenooghe, Raja, & Butt, 2013). This may be adaptive to career success, as individuals who are not satisfied with their current positions are better off seeking new employment elsewhere if they want to be successful. Individuals with high positive affect are also better at coping with organizational change (Judge et al., 1999) and are much more committed to their workplace (Herrbach, 2006; Judge et al., 1999; Mignonac & Herrbach, 2004; Thoresen et al., 2003) than those who tend to experience low positive affect. By and large, the cumulative evidence is relevant for governmental organizations, universities, and companies seeking to retain engaged employees while minimizing productivity losses and retraining expenses.

Happy workers' greater commitment to their jobs does not go unrecognized or unrewarded. Happy versus less happy managers receive more acknowledgment and commendations from their supervisors (George, 1995). Cross-sectional evidence also suggests that workers' optimistic attitudes toward themselves positively and directly impact their earnings (Mohanty, 2009). Moreover, there is a small overall correlation between happiness and income—with happiness being more highly correlated with income than education (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2000). Indeed, happiness and income rise in tandem (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Pinquart & Sorensen, 2000) up until about USD 75,000, after which point greater income does not enhance emotional well-being or happiness (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). It has been theorized that income may facilitate well-being by allowing people to meet certain basic needs like nourishment, clothing, and housing. However, at higher levels of income, the relationship between happiness and income appears to be moderated by other factors such as individual desires, expectations, and social comparisons (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002). Essentially, money can buy happiness, but only up to a point. Also, increased income is especially impactful for lower wage earners, as their lot in life could be significantly improved with greater financial resources.

In addition to greater accolades and income in the workplace, happy people reap a variety of interpersonal rewards. Greater positive affect is associated with greater social support from both colleagues and supervisors (Iverson et al., 1998). There are a few reasons why this might be the case. Happy people are more likely than unhappy people to use social contacts (coworkers and supervisors) to find information (Doucet, Thatcher, & Thatcher, 2012), which may help them build better relationships in the workplace by interacting with others more frequently. It is also likely that it is more pleasant to interact with happy people (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008), or it could be that happy coworkers are more cooperative than their less happy peers (Miles et al., 2002). Indeed, happy CEOs and managerial teams experience greater cooperation and less conflict than their less happy counterparts; the members of such teams are also more satisfied with group relationships and perceive themselves as having greater personal influence over the team (Barsade, Ward, Turner, & Sonnenfeld, 2000).

Beyond favorable supervisor evaluations and better group team relationships, individuals with relatively positive dispositions are better liked by their friends and acquaintances (Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage, & McDowell, 2003). Simply smiling—a behavioral outcome often used to

objectively assess happiness—is considered socially desirable (Sperduto, Calhoun, & Ciminero, 1978). In one oft-cited study, women who exhibited greater genuine positive emotions in their yearbook photos were rated as more warm, cheerful, pleasant, and sociable than their less happy-appearing counterparts (Harker & Keltner, 2001). Moreover, the judges rating the yearbook photos tended to like, trust, and want to interact more with the women expressing genuine positive emotions through their smiles. In another study, researchers were photographed at a conference, and those who were rated as looking happy in their photos were also judged as being more attractive, competent, trustworthy, and likeable (Dilger, Lütkenhöner, & Müller, 2015). Overall, happy people are more popular and have higher status among their peers than unhappy people (Feingold, 1983; Holder & Coleman, 2008; Hubbard, 2001; Östberg, 2003), which may in part be why very happy people tend to report strongly positive interpersonal relationships (Diener & Seligman, 2002).

In summary, the correlational data continue to suggest that happiness is robustly associated with career success. Not only are happy people more satisfied with their jobs compared to their less happy peers, but they are also more likely to demonstrate superior job performance, commitment to their jobs, and prosociality within the workplace. Employees who experience greater positive emotions receive more favorable supervisor evaluations, higher income, and better social support than less happy employees. All of these outcomes constitute an abundance of resources that happy employees may call upon when needed and may help them to perform better at their daily vocational duties. However, the cross-sectional evidence only allows us to verify that there is, in fact, an association between happiness and career success. To supplement the correlational evidence, we now turn to the longitudinal evidence to establish the temporal order of these variables.

Longitudinal Evidence: Does Happiness Precede Success in the Workplace?

Longitudinal investigations offer further corroborating evidence for our thesis. If happiness precedes career success, then researchers can be more confident that the egg (happiness) comes before the chicken (success). When reviewing longitudinal studies in conjunction with the cross-sectional research, a more convincing picture emerges. We consider the evidence below.

To begin, longitudinal research suggests that the happier people are, the more likely they are to successfully find subsequent employment (Haase, Poulin, & Heckhausen, 2012). This may be partially explained by happy people's greater motivation to invest time and effort, as well as overcome obstacles, in the pursuit of goals (Haase et al., 2012). Initial positive affectivity is associated with subsequent greater job search intensity—that is, filling out more job applications and searching more for online job openings (Turban, Lee, Veiga, Haggard, & Wu, 2013). Happy people are also less likely to procrastinate and more likely to plan activities ahead of time when searching for a job (Turban et al., 2013). In another study, college students who were happier before graduation were more likely to report receiving follow-up interviews 3 months later compared to their less happy peers (Burger & Caldwell, 2000).

Other work investigating the mechanisms of the association between happiness and job search success found that positive affect at an initial measurement period was subsequently associated with greater clarity about what kind of job one wants, as well as when and how to look for that job (i.e., job search clarity; Côte, Saks, & Zikic, 2006). The mediation process played out through a chain of variables, each one positively related to the last: positive affectivity leads to job search clarity, job search clarity leads to job search intensity, job search intensity leads to job offers, and job offers lead to employment status (Côte et al., 2006). Finally, a longitudinal study of British panel data found that people became happier *before* becoming employed, but that employment led to *decreases* in happiness at a subsequent time period (Binder & Coad, 2010). These findings suggest that happiness can

act as an antecedent to finding employment. They also provide evidence that becoming more successful (by finding employment) does not necessarily make people happier.

Longitudinal data also suggest that the benefits of positive affect extend beyond the job search to later job satisfaction and career attainment. One study with university employees found that positive affect measured at a first-time point predicted job satisfaction 2 years later—especially the extent to which employees enjoyed their work activities (Watson & Slack, 1993). Another study found that higher versus lower levels of happiness at age 14 predicted greater job satisfaction, higher levels of competence, and less depression, anxiety, and loneliness 10 years later when participants were ages 23–25 (Kansky, Allen, & Diener, 2016). Yet another study found that 18-year-olds who were warm, sociable, and happy were more likely to be working in prestigious jobs, be satisfied with their work, and feel financially secure 8 years later, at age 26 (Roberts, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2003). It is worth noting that the young adults who acquired higher status at their jobs by age 26 also became happier and more self-confident, suggesting the presence of a reciprocal relationship. A meta-analysis has also reported that stronger longitudinal associations are evident for correlations between initial subjective well-being and later job satisfaction rather than for correlations between initial job satisfaction and later subjective well-being (Bowling et al., 2010). This longitudinal evidence again points to a bidirectional relationship of mutually reinforcing variables that catalyze upward spirals resulting in ever-increasing levels of both happiness and success.

Some longitudinal research also provides evidence that happiness is a precursor to prosocial behavior both inside and outside the workplace. One study using German panel data found that people who felt happy in the past 4 weeks donated both blood and money more frequently than less happy people (Priller & Schupp, 2011). Additionally, an experience sampling method (ESM) study—in which employees indicated their mood repeatedly throughout the work day—found that positive moods were marginally associated with more prosociality (Miner & Glomb, 2010). When participants experienced a positive mood, they reported more frequently engaging in voluntary OCB—specifically, doing something not required by their job to help a coworker or the organization.

Longitudinal research also provides interesting temporal information about the link between happiness and social support. In one study, employees initially high in positive affect reported receiving greater support from coworkers 18 months later as well as superior evaluations from their supervisors (Staw et al., 1994). Other studies have replicated this finding, concluding that employees who are happy at an initial assessment often receive positive supervisor evaluations at a subsequent assessment—up to several years later (Cropanzano & Wright, 1999; T. A. Wright & Staw, 1999). Longitudinal evidence also suggests that happy adolescents report fewer relationship problems and greater friendship attachment in their mid-20s (Kansky et al., 2016), which may partly explain why happy people receive superior social support.

Because supervisor and peer ratings alone may simply reflect the presence of halo effects, it is important to note that the happiness and career advantage appears in the longitudinal literature when reviewing both subjective and objective measures of job performance. In an ESM study, corporate and government organizational directors were asked to self-report their well-being and productivity twice a week for 8 weeks (Zelenski, Murphy, & Jenkins, 2008). The study found both between-person (trait) and within-person (state) effects. In essence, happy directors were more productive than unhappy directors (between-person or trait effect), and directors with both high and low trait happiness were more productive on their happier days than their less happy days (within-person or state effect). However, happy directors self-rated their own productivity more favorably than unhappy directors (Barsade, 2002; Sarason, Potter, & Sarason, 1986; J. Wright & Mischel, 1982). To be sure, the directors in this ESM study could have rated their productivity highly, even though they were not in fact accomplishing more than their less happy peers or selves.

Fortunately, other longitudinal research investigates relatively more objective measures of job performance and productivity. In a longitudinal study of sales agents, those who started with a positive outlook sold more during the second half of their first year compared with sales agents who were less positive (Seligman & Schulman, 1986). An ESM study also found that employees at a Fortune 500 company handling technical and customer support completed calls at a faster rate when experiencing positive moods rather than negative moods (Miner & Glomb, 2010).

Additional longitudinal evidence suggests that happy people engage in fewer withdrawal behaviors (such as absenteeism and voluntary turnover) than less happy people. Thus, they may be more committed to their organizations. In a study of administrative staff, engineers, and technicians at a large electronics company, employees with high positive affect at baseline were less likely to be frequently absent from work over the next 5 months than employees with low positive affect (Pelled & Xin, 1999). Another longitudinal study following managers at a large U.S. company found that those who reported greater psychological well-being at an initial assessment were less likely to leave the company within the next 2 years (T. A. Wright & Bonett, 2007).

Relative to less happy peers, happy people are also less likely to lose their jobs (Diener, Nickerson, Lucas, & Sandvik, 2002; Luhmann, Lucas, Eid, & Diener, 2013) and tend to find new work more quickly when they do become unemployed (Krause, 2013; Marks & Fleming, 1999). However, longitudinal research suggests that there is an optimum level of happiness when it comes to finding a job after becoming unemployed. For example, after losing a job, people who are very happy or very unhappy are less likely to be reemployed several years later than individuals who are moderately happy (Krause, 2013). It could be the case that both very happy people (who are completely content with their situation) and very unhappy people (who may be depressed) might lack sufficient motivation to change their employment status.

Other longitudinal panel survey data suggest that life satisfaction tends to decline just *before* unemployment (Anusic, Yap, & Lucas, 2014; Clark & Georgellis, 2010; Hahn, Specht, Gottschling, & Spinath, 2015; Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2004), which indicates that unhappiness often precedes unemployment. Life satisfaction and positive affect are positively correlated (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Headey, Kelley, & Wearing, 1993), so declines in life satisfaction (as before a job loss) may be accompanied by similar declines in positive affect. Thus, the evidence implies that well-being may offer some measure of protection against unemployment—a particularly negative life event that is difficult for individuals to adapt to and recover from (Anusic et al., 2014; Fritz, Walsh, & Lyubomirsky, 2017; Lucas et al., 2004).

Although much research has focused on whether money buys happiness, a few studies have set out to test the opposite pathway—namely, whether happiness pays. Longitudinal research suggests that it does. Not only are well-being and income linked, it appears that happiness often precedes increased earnings. In other words, people who report being happy at an earlier time point obtain higher incomes at a later time point (Diener et al., 2002; Graham, Eggers, & Sukhtankar, 2004; Marks & Fleming, 1999; Staw et al., 1994). In one longitudinal study, first-year college students rated their cheerfulness relative to their typical peers, then reported their income 16 years later, in their 30s (Diener et al., 2002). The cheerful students (especially those with high-income parents) tended to earn more than the students who had rated themselves as less cheerful. In another longitudinal study, positive affect in adolescence was strongly correlated with income at age 29 (De Neve & Oswald, 2012). In that study, extremely unhappy adolescents later reported income approximately 30% lower than average, while very happy adolescents reported income approximately 10% above average. Other work with British panel data found that increases in happiness preceded increases in income (Binder & Coad, 2010). The researchers also concluded that there was poor support for the hypothesis that money buys happiness, because increases in income were followed by drops in happiness at a later time point—perhaps due to the effects of hedonic adaptation. In sum, longitudinal evidence supports the notion that happiness pays financial dividends.

To conclude, the longitudinal studies presented here provide good evidence that—contrary to the timeworn formula that people should succeed in order to be happy—a profusion of positive emotions may actually precede and foreshadow career success. The next section focuses on the experimental evidence to further substantiate our thesis.

Experimental Evidence: Does Happiness Lead to Success in the Workplace?

Experimental studies provide further evidence that happiness leads to success. Well-designed studies involving positive (or happy), neutral, and negative emotion comparison groups help researchers better evaluate the role of affect in success-related outcomes. Such experiments can also more effectively isolate third variables, such as self-selection effects, that may be inherent in cross-sectional and longitudinal research. We review the relevant experimental literature below.

According to experimental evidence, happiness may provide an advantage when workers arrive at the negotiating table. Many business transactions involve reconciling competing needs and objectives such as when a buyer and a seller attempt to agree on a price, two businesses merge, or an employee asks her company for a raise. Positive emotions may be the spoonful of sugar that makes negotiations more palatable and successful. In one study, participants paired in dyads were instructed to engage in a simulated negotiating task between two companies—each participant was directed to make as much profit for their respective company as possible (P. J. D. Carnevale & Isen, 1986). Participants who were randomly assigned to a positive emotion manipulation (reading cartoons and receiving a gift) demonstrated less contentious behavior, were more cooperative, and were better able to find mutually beneficial solutions than participants who received no such manipulation. A subsequent study with a similar protocol replicated these results (P. J. Carnevale, 2008). In the study, participants were directed to act as an appliance salesperson to negotiate a deal with a presumed buyer through a computer program. Participants who were given a gift (i.e., a bag of candy) to induce a positive mood before the negotiation again made relatively more concessions and found mutually beneficial solutions.

Several studies have further replicated and extended these findings. Happy people are more likely than their unhappy peers to negotiate in a collaborative and cooperative (rather than a competitive) manner (Baron, Fortin, Frei, Hauver, & Shack, 1990; Barsade, 2002; Forgas, 1998) and are more willing to make allowances during the negotiating process (Baron, 1990; Baron, Rea, & Daniels, 1992). People induced to feel positive emotions are also more likely to anticipate making and honoring deals than those induced to feel neutral emotions (Forgas, 1998). This positive, optimistic outlook may partly explain why happy people tend to use cooperative strategies at the negotiating table.

The optimism of happy people also translates into increased self-confidence and better performance in a variety of tasks. For instance, relative to people experiencing neutral emotions, people assigned to experience positive emotions set higher goals for themselves (Baron, 1990; Hom & Arbuckle, 1988), persevere at challenging tasks longer (Sarason et al., 1986), judge themselves more favorably (Sarason et al., 1986), evaluate their performance as stronger (Barsade, 2002; J. Wright & Mischel, 1982), and are more optimistic that they will succeed (Brown, 1984; J. Wright & Mischel, 1982). Notably, happy people's optimistic expectations of success are not unrealistic—people prompted to feel positive emotions actually perform better—for example, when completing coding assignments or performing digit substitution tasks—than people prompted to feel neutral or negative emotions (Baron 1990; Hom & Arbuckle, 1988). Relative to those assigned to neutral emotion control groups, people assigned to positive emotion treatment groups also demonstrate greater productivity without commensurate declines in quality (Oswald, Proto, & Sgroi, 2015). Taken together, the body of experimental evidence suggests that the presence of positive affect increases

self-efficacy—that is, confidence in one's own ability to achieve certain results (Baron, 1990; Kavanagh & Bower, 1985), which in turn appears to drive self-fulfilling prophecies (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 2003; Merton, 1948) that result in superior performance and productivity. In such a way, happy people outdo their less happy peers—and this process is potentially key to how happiness leads to success.

Consistent with the cross-sectional and longitudinal evidence, happy people's optimism does not only apply to themselves but also extends to the people around them. Indeed, people experiencing positive emotions tend to rate other people more positively (Baron, 1987, 1993; Baron et al., 1992; Griffitt, 1970). In a study that involved mock job interviews, people induced to feel positive affect rated ambiguously qualified job candidates higher than those induced to feel negative affect (Baron, 1993). Interestingly, people undergoing positive (vs. negative) mood inductions rated highly qualified candidates similarly and unqualified candidates lower. These results seem to suggest that when hiring for a job, happy people are likely to select the highly qualified candidates, eliminate the unqualified candidates, and give the ambiguous candidates a chance. That being said, the tendency of happy individuals to rate others more favorably is likely partly responsible for their superior social support in the workplace and perhaps for the greater success of happy teams. The Pygmalion effect is relevant here (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 2003), as happy people's propensity to see the best in others likely means they invest time, energy, and effort in their subordinates—again creating self-fulfilling prophecies when those colleagues live up to the happy person's positive, high expectations.

The cross-sectional link between happiness and prosociality is also well-documented in the experimental literature. Inducing positive emotions triggers other-helping behavior across a variety of contexts including helping needy children (Rosenhan, Underwood, & Moore, 1974), contributing to charity (Cunningham, Steinberg, & Grev, 1980; Isen, 1970), donating blood (O'Malley & Andrews, 1983), and volunteering time (Aderman, 1972; Baron & Bronfen, 1994; Baron et al., 1992; Berkowitz, 1987; Isen & Levin, 1972; Rosenhan, Salovey, & Hargis, 1981). People in a positive mood are also more likely than those in a negative mood to label extra tasks in the workplace as a normal part of their jobs (Bachrach & Jex, 2000).

A plethora of experiments now also demonstrate that directing individuals to engage in prosocial behavior increases well-being (Chancellor, Margolis, Jacobs Bao, & Lyubomirsky, 2017; Layous, Lee, Choi, & Lyubomirsky, 2013; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005; Nelson et al., 2015; Nelson, Layous, Cole, & Lyubomirsky, 2016; Pressman, Kraft, & Cross, 2015; Sheldon, Boehm, & Lyubomirsky, 2012). Indeed, the relationship between prosocial behavior and happiness may form a positive feedback loop (Layous, Nelson, Kurtz, & Lyubomirsky, 2017) and create upward spirals, whereby people experiencing frequent positive emotions engage in more prosocial behavior, which in turn makes them even happier, so they perform additional prosocial acts. Experimentally induced prosocial behavior also confers other benefits. For example, one study showed that performing kind acts for others increased peer acceptance (Layous, Nelson, Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, & Lyubomirsky, 2012). This finding may provide another explanation for why happy people receive better social support, especially given that other evidence suggests happy people are more likely than their less happy peers to engage in prosocial behavior. Another recent study conducted in a Spanish company also demonstrated that performing kind acts for others increased job satisfaction (Chancellor et al., 2017). Moreover, that study found that prosociality in the workplace can be contagious; the people who were the recipients of kind acts paid it forward 278% more than control participants and also became happier (Chancellor et al., 2017). The results suggest that prosociality may not just be good for the happy person engaging in it but also the organization as a whole.

Numerous studies also suggest that happiness boosts one's creativity, originality, and flexibility (Estrada, Isen, & Young, 1994; Grawitch, Munz, Elliott, & Mathis, 2003; Grawitch, Munz, & Kramer, 2003; Isen, 1993; Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987; Isen, Johnson, Mertz, & Robinson, 1985). Meta-analyses have corroborated these findings and concluded that effect sizes vary

depending on whether a positive mood group is compared to a neutral ($r = .18$, $d = .52$) or negative mood group ($r = .05$, $d = .18$, r effect sizes reported in Baas, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008; d effect sizes reported in Davis, 2009). In essence, positive emotions enhance creativity relative to neutral emotions, but the effect diminishes when compared to negative emotions. Davis (2009) also found that the type of creative task mattered, such that positive moods enhanced creative performance on ideation tasks that require the production of ideas, originality, and flexibility, but not on problem-solving tasks (see the review below regarding complex mental tasks). One study suggests that experimentally inducing an affective shift (from negative to positive affect) is more effective in boosting creativity (via higher originality and flexibility) than merely increasing positive affect alone (Bledow, Rosing, & Frese, 2013).

Positive emotions are also related to curiosity (see Kashdan, Rose, & Fincham, 2004, for non-experimental work). One experiment found that positive affect induced via watching films led participants to express a greater preference to go outdoors or experience nature (e.g., pick flowers, sit on the beach), engage in exercise or sports (e.g., swim, rollerblade), play (e.g., jump around, have fun), and be social (e.g., visit friends) than neutral or negative affect inductions (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Thus, this study supports Fredrickson's (1998, 2001) argument that positive emotions broaden attention and interests, while also stimulating exploration and playfulness.

There is one area where the benefits of positive emotions appear to be mixed: performing complex mental tasks. In the case against positive affect, research suggests that positive emotions hinder logical reasoning (Melton, 1995) and make it difficult to differentiate between strong and weak arguments (Mackie & Worth, 1989). Moreover, negative emotions may actually provide an advantage, as they promote systematic (as opposed to categorical) processing (Edwards & Weary, 1993), careful execution of the steps in structured decision-making protocols (Elsbach & Barr, 1999), and increased perception of persuasive arguments (Bless, Bohner, Schwarz, & Strack, 1990). However, some conflicting research suggests that positive emotions do confer some advantages by helping individuals disregard irrelevant information to make decisions more efficiently (Isen & Means, 1983).

This contradictory evidence can be reconciled by considering Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions more closely. Because positive affect signals that a person's life is going well, he or she can direct attention toward accumulating resources. When attention is focused on interesting and novel projects or goals, happy people may rely more on heuristics and previous information when making decisions relative to less happy people (Isen & Means, 1983). Yet when happy people are made aware that additional effort is called for on a given task—for example, in a situation when it is critical to make accurate judgments—they can perform equally as well as unhappy people (Bless et al., 1990; Bodenhausen, Kramer, & Süsser, 1994). Hence, positive emotions may help or hinder performance on complex mental tasks depending on the context.

The experimental evidence shows that people randomly assigned to experience positive emotions rather than neutral or negative emotions negotiate more cooperatively, set higher goals, persist longer, perform better, evaluate themselves and others more favorably, and are more prosocial in a variety of contexts. They are also more likely to be original, flexible, creative, playful, and curious. Although negative emotions may be adaptive in certain contexts when it comes to complex mental tasks, there is evidence that happy people can potentially overcome these drawbacks if they are made salient.

Conclusion

After broadly surveying the literature a decade following our original review (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008), we believe that the cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental research continues to support the hypothesis that happiness precedes and leads to career success. Exciting new research

examining this hypothesis has grown since 2008, yet our main argument in this updated review remains relatively unchanged—there is simply more evidence now to bolster it.

First, the cross-sectional literature supports a correlational link between happiness and various success-related outcomes. Happiness is positively associated with job autonomy, job satisfaction, job performance, prosocial behavior, social support, popularity, and income. Happy people also receive more positive peer and supervisor evaluations and are less likely to withdraw from work by becoming habitually absent or burning out.

Second, because correlation does not signify causation, we also reviewed the longitudinal evidence to establish temporal order. One of the biggest updates to the 2008 review involved adding several new longitudinal studies to the previously reported evidence. The longitudinal research suggests that people who are happy at an initial time point are more likely to find employment, be satisfied with their jobs, acquire higher status, perform well, be productive, receive social support, be evaluated positively, engage in fewer withdrawal behaviors, and obtain higher income at a subsequent time point.

Finally, we evaluated the experimental literature to determine the direction of causality. Although cross-sectional evidence can establish correlation and longitudinal evidence can demonstrate temporal order, there is always the possibility that other unmeasured variables could be driving observed changes in career success. The experimental research demonstrates that when people are randomly assigned to experience positive emotions, they negotiate more collaboratively, set higher goals for themselves, persist at difficult tasks longer, evaluate themselves and others more favorably, help others more, and demonstrate greater creativity and curiosity than people assigned to experience neutral or negative emotions.

However, experiments often come with their own set of limitations by way of short time frames and simulated laboratory tasks that may undermine real-world generalizability. Thus, it is important to consider all types of investigation presented here (cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental) to better advance our understanding of the evidence. It should be noted that happy people may also experience various other favorable outcomes not directly covered in this review, such as superior physical health and longevity (Boehm & Kubzansky, 2012; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Martin-Maria et al., 2017), which likely also facilitate greater career success.

Throughout this updated review, we have noted several pieces of evidence that suggest the presence of upward spirals—that is, where positive emotions trigger an adaptive outcome related to career success, which in turn triggers more positive emotions and further success. Such moments constitute an iterative process that often involves a bidirectional relationship between mutually reinforcing variables. Although the crux of our argument is that happiness causes success, much of the evidence suggests that once happy people achieve success, they become even happier. Future research should explore these upward spirals further.

In the final analysis, aside from the limitations of each type of investigation described above, many of studies we cite date back many years and quite a few use small sample sizes and/or have not yet been sufficiently replicated. This review, and even the meta-analyses cited in it, likely suffer—at least to some small extent—from publication bias. In other words, it is possible that there are a number of nonsignificant, unpublished studies locked away in various file drawers that may weaken our argument. Open science practices, such as preregistration and publicly available datasets, will likely help further resolve this issue in the future.

Another limitation of the happiness–success literature, as it currently stands, is the continued oversampling from Western, predominantly English-speaking populations. Some of the research presented in this review focuses on cultures that do not speak English, such as Switzerland, Spain, and Germany (Anusic et al., 2014; Chancellor et al., 2017; Luhmann et al., 2013; Priller & Schupp, 2011), but these cultures are still Western and individualist. Few of the studies cited in this review are conducted with Asian, collectivist samples (e.g., Layous et al., 2013; Nelson et al., 2015;

Williams & Shiaw, 1999) and none in Africa and Central and South America. It is very likely that culture moderates the relationship between happiness and success in a variety of still unknown ways. For example, in Asian cultures, workplace success may be predicted by frequent low-arousal positive emotions (e.g., calm and tranquility), but not by high-arousal ones (e.g., enthusiasm and joy; cf., Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006). We believe that psychology is beginning to turn the tide of Western ethnocentrism, but future research still needs to focus on a wider range of cultures. The findings in this review are not fully generalizable until they represent the world population as a whole—not just a Western subset of it.

We would also like to revisit a couple of caveats from 2008 and build upon them. First of all, happiness is obviously not the only determinant of career success. Clearly, there are other attributes and characteristics that individuals might acquire or possess—such as intelligence, social skills, and grit—that may also expedite achievement. Different careers likely require different combinations of skills and abilities to succeed. Furthermore, this review does not intend to imply that unhappy individuals are doomed to failure. On the contrary, many stunningly successful people have suffered from various forms of mental ill-being. For example, aviator Howard Hughes reportedly suffered from obsessive-compulsive disorder, while writer Virginia Woolf supposedly battled bipolar disorder. Leaders Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill were also allegedly clinically depressed. Future research further investigating the upside of this dark side is warranted (cf., Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014), with a close focus on how, when, where, and why negative emotions may be adaptive in the workplace. For example, the past and present review revealed that negative emotions may provide some benefits when performing complex mental tasks. Indeed, there are some occupations, such as accounting, where happiness may be disadvantageous (see Lucas & Diener, 2003, for additional examples).

As a final caveat, some executives and leaders reading this review may be tempted to start hiring overtly happy people and mandating a highly positive company culture. This is not recommended. Aside from the fact that such practices could be considered discriminatory and potentially illegal, unhappy people can achieve great things (as just elaborated). Moreover, creating an environment where workers feel forced to act happy may backfire, leading to greater emotional exhaustion and burnout among employees (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2003). Organizations are likely better served by carefully attending to the authentic happiness of their employees by building conditions and environments that allow workers to thrive. Another suggestion might be to give workers the option of engaging in positive activities designed to enhance well-being (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009) such as expressing gratitude to coworkers or performing acts of kindness for customers. Notably, implementing positive activities involves relatively few costs (if any) and likely improves company culture while boosting revenue.

All things considered, happiness is not functional in every situation. Although some laypeople believe that well-being scientists want them to be happy all the time, the truth is that positive and negative emotions are adaptive in different contexts (Oishi, Diener, & Lucas, 2007). It is healthy to experience a balance of both types of affect in day-to-day life. However, as this updated review suggests, positive emotions are particularly well positioned to catalyze success in the workplace. Thus, when pursuing the path to success, don't wait to be happy—begin with it.

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