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Workplace happiness: work engagement, career satisfaction, and subjective well-being

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Abstract

Purpose – Employee happiness or well-being is an emerging topic in management as well as in psychology. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the effects of perceived organizational support (POS) and psychological capital (PsyCap) on happiness in employees' work (i.e. work engagement), careers (i.e. career satisfaction), and lives (i.e. subjective well-being (SWB)).

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected from 550 employees in a conglomerate in South Korea. For statistical analysis, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis, reliability and correlation analysis, and structural equation modeling analyses.

Findings – Employees were highly engaged in their work, satisfied with their careers, and felt a greater sense of well-being in their lives when they had higher POS and PsyCap. Work engagement fully mediated the relationship between PsyCap and career satisfaction. POS had an indirect effect on SWB through career satisfaction. With regards to the relationships among the three outcome variables, career satisfaction turned out to fully mediate the relationship between work engagement and SWB. In addition, the direct effect of PsyCap on SWB was also found to be significant.

Research limitations/implications – This study focused on knowledge workers in South Korean for-profit firms. The participants were mostly male, junior or middle managers. Using a cross-sectional survey method, this empirical study leaves room for speculation about the causality among the variables. As the results of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses indicate, however, common method variance was found to not be of great concern.

Practical implications – The mission of human resources (HR) and organization development (OD) professionals in organizations is to improve individual and organizational performance and to enhance employees' well-being. HR/OD professionals can enhance employees' happiness not only in their work and careers but also in their lives by improving POS (e.g. growth opportunity, performance management, and compensation system) and developing PsyCap (e.g. staffing, training, and development, etc.).

Originality/value – This study linked the emerging constructs in positive psychology in general, in HR/OB in particular. To date, no study has empirically investigated the effects of PsyCap and POS on the three workplace happiness constructs: work engagement, career satisfaction, and SWB. This is the first study that found the relationship between POS and PsyCap. Last, while South Koreans are more collectivistic and less satisfied with their lives than the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average, the respondents in this study, working for highly reputable firms, perceived high level of happiness in their work and career, and eventually in their lives. Thus, organizational features had a stronger effect on workplace happiness than national culture.

Keywords Career satisfaction, Perceived organizational support, Well-being, Engagement, Psychological capital

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Despite inconclusive link between workers' happiness and productivity in the workplace, there seems to be a general agreement that happy workers are to be productive workers (Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2008; Wright *et al.*, 2004; Zelenski *et al.*, 2008). While well-being and life satisfaction studies conducted on working populations can be found in journals in diverse fields such as public health, education, and criminal justice, these studies often fail to examine the nature and context of work, reporting simple correlational results



(Erdogan *et al.*, 2012). Despite the recently increasing attention, empirical studies on well-being at work are still lacking. Although adults spend much of their time working, traditional life satisfaction or well-being studies have examined non-work populations such as students, patients, children, and/or adolescents. Thus, we believe the lack of attention paid to employee well-being in the management field is a critical research gap. As the well-being literature has ignored the work domain, the management literature has largely ignored the concept of employee well-being (Erdogan *et al.*, 2012). It is only recently that happiness at work or employee well-being that is believed to be associated with both work and personal life outcomes has begun to be researched in the field of human resources (HR) and organization behavior (OB).

Erdogan *et al.* (2012) suggested a state view of workplace happiness that happiness depends on satisfaction with environment, and that leadership, career development, job characteristics, and person-environment fit contribute to an understanding of happiness or well-being at work. In this study, we investigate happiness in an individual's work, career, and life and the potential effects of personal and contextual antecedent of workplace happiness. Although work engagement, career satisfaction, and subjective well-being (SWB) indicate considerable relationships with one another, and also tend to be relatively consistent within individuals over time, in this study, we consider them to be distinct concepts. First, employee engagement has become a key concern of scholars and practitioners because engaged workers are more motivated, more involved in their jobs and organizations, more productive, and more willing to go above and beyond what is expected of them to help their organizations survive and thrive (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008; Gebauer and Lowman, 2008). Employees who are highly engaged in their work and satisfied with their careers as a whole are happy in their lives. Next, career satisfaction, a proxy of one's perceived quality of work life, has been an important criterion for evaluating the individual's career as a whole (Judge *et al.*, 1999). Gattiker and Larwood (1988) defined career satisfaction as a reflection of an individual's values and preferences for the level of pay, challenge, or security that may have an effect on the individual's assessment of his/her career accomplishments. Last, with regard to SWB, researchers (e.g. Cropanzano and Wright, 1999; Lyubomirski, 2001; Seligman, 2002) have equated the term SWB with the term "happiness". Being happy refers to somewhat higher levels of activation as being satisfied or content. Happy individuals are likely to be more active, approach oriented, energetic, interested in their work, sympathetic to their colleagues, and persistent in the face of difficulties compared to unhappy employees.

In this study, we focus on perceived organizational support (POS) and psychological capital (PsyCap) as antecedents of well-being. According to organizational support theory (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986), employees form general beliefs concerning how much the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Based on the reciprocity norm, such POS would elicit employees' felt obligation to care about the organization's welfare and to help the organization reach its objectives. PsyCap is an individual's positive psychological state of development. PsyCap is a typical example of positive organizational behavior being state-like, open to development, and relevant to performance (Luthans *et al.*, 2007). However, little research has explored the consequences of PsyCap such as work engagement, career satisfaction, and SWB.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of POS and PsyCap on three key outcome variables: work engagement, career satisfaction, and SWB. To our knowledge, no study has integrated the key workplace happiness constructs in work, career, and life so far. Moreover, to date, most well-being studies have done in the Western cultural context. This empirical study, based on the data collected from 550 knowledge workers in a conglomerate in South Korea, extends the knowledge about workplace well-being. According to Better Life Index published by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development (OECD), South Korea ranks above the average in education and skills, personal security, jobs, and earnings, but below average in SWB and work-life balance (OECD, 2015). Overall, South Koreans are less satisfied with their lives than the OECD average. This study provides meaningful implications in the South Korean culture.

2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

In their literature review of 193 studies on life satisfaction and SWB, Erdogan *et al.* (2012) suggested a top-down (i.e. a trait view: stable traits determine happiness) and a bottom-up (i.e. a state view: happiness depends on satisfaction with environment) approach to life satisfaction or happiness. In the current study, we take the latter approach, focusing on happiness in the workplace. Erdogan *et al.* (2012) proposed a conceptual model of the relationship between work-related antecedents (i.e. needs satisfaction, mindful activity, and job-related tension), proximal mediators (i.e. quality of work life, quality of non-work life, and feelings of self-worth), and distal outcomes (i.e. life satisfaction and performance). Warr (2007) also discussed the various aspects of happiness in the workplace, integrating person-centered view and environment-focused view. Based on the above conceptual models, we investigate the potential effects of personal (i.e. PsyCap) and contextual (i.e. POS) antecedents on the level of happiness in an individual's work (i.e. work engagement as a proxy of work-related antecedent), career (i.e. career satisfaction as a proxy of a proximal mediator), and life (i.e. SWB as a proxy of a distal outcome). In the following section, we review the five constructs and subsequently derive the hypotheses.

2.1 POS

According to organizational support theory, employees develop positive general beliefs as to what extent the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Based on this reciprocity norm, POS draws on employees' felt obligation to help attain the organization's goals. Positive relationships have been found between POS and affective commitment (Panaccio and Vandenberghe, 2010), in-role job performance, and withdrawal behavior (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1990).

2.2 PsyCap

PsyCap is an individual's positive psychological state of development (Luthans *et al.*, 2007). Luthans *et al.* (2007) proposed that PsyCap offers a more comprehensive, higher-order conceptual framework for understanding and capitalizing on human assets in organizations (Avolio and Luthans, 2006; Luthans and Youssef, 2004). PsyCap consists of four dimensions: self-efficacy, hope, resiliency, and optimism (Luthans *et al.*, 2007). Self-efficacy refers to the confidence about one's abilities to use the cognitive resources, motivation, and courses of action to complete various tasks in a job context. Hope refers to a positive motivational state based on a sense of goal-directed energy and planning to meet goals. Resilience refers to the capability to overcome adversary and failure situation. Optimism is considered as attitudinal characteristics attributing positive events as permanent, personal, and pervasive, while expecting negative events as temporary, external, and situation-specific. PsyCap has shown to be state-like and thus open to development (Luthans *et al.*, 2007). There are a number of contextual factors that can affect the level of efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism. Luthans *et al.* (2007) claimed that employees with high level of PsyCap are more intrinsically motivated and proactive at work.

2.3 Work engagement

Engagement is a multidimensional construct (Law *et al.*, 1998; Rich *et al.*, 2010). Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement as the employment and expression of people's whole selves

(physical, cognitive, and emotional) in their work roles. We use the notion of work engagement that is defined as a positive, fulfilling, job-related state of mind which is characterized by three dimensions: dedication, absorption, and vigor (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). That is, work engagement is regarded as an intentional and thoughtful pursuit of work (i.e. dedication or cognitive engagement); as absorbing and interesting (i.e. absorption or emotional engagement); and as inspiring and energetic that they are willing to devote themselves with passion (i.e. vigor or physical/behavioral engagement). According to previous research on employee work engagement, engaged employees tend to show positive organizational outcomes, including more customer satisfaction, higher productivity and profit, lower turnover intention (Harter *et al.*, 2002), more in-role and extra-role behavior (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006), higher organizational commitment (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004), and work-family satisfaction (Bakker *et al.*, 2014).

2.4 Career satisfaction

Career satisfaction is a subjective measure of career success, which refers to positive work-related and psychological outcomes that a person achieves as a result of work experiences (Judge *et al.*, 1995). Career success is divided into two types: objective success (e.g. number of promotions and salary progression) and subjective success (e.g. job satisfaction or career satisfaction) (Helsin *et al.*, 2001). In their meta-analysis, Ng *et al.* (2005) categorized the predictors of career success: organizational sponsorship (e.g. supervisor support, career sponsorship, training and skill development opportunities, and size of organization), human capital, stable individual differences, and socio demographic status. With regards to career satisfaction, researchers have studied individual personality, race, and organizational support for career development. For instance, Lounsbury *et al.* (2003) found that assertiveness, conscientiousness, emotional resilience, and extraversion were positively associated with career satisfaction. Last, POS such as mentoring relationships led to higher perception of career development (Dreher and Ash, 1990).

2.5 SWB

Happiness is an affect-oriented evaluation of well-being that entails a preponderance of positive affect over negative affect (Diener, 1984). From this perspective, one can perceive one is doing well (happy), when one experiences (i.e. individual's appraisal) more positive than negative feelings in one's life (Christopher, 1999) and higher emotional intelligence (Carmeli *et al.*, 2009). Wealth (or income), health, stable employment, positive relationships, and happy recent life events (e.g. marriage, child birth, buying house, etc.) are associated with higher SWB (Weimann *et al.*, 2015). In their study of happy-productive worker thesis, Zelenski *et al.* (2008) concluded that happy people indeed are productive at the trait perspective and that people are more productive when in happy mood at the state view. SWB consists of two general components: affective balance (i.e. the comparison between the level of positive and the level of negative affect in one's life), and judgments about life satisfaction (Diener, 1984; Erdogan *et al.*, 2012). The current study is based on the state view vs the trait view. That is, we believe the sense of well-being is not fixed and could be affected by individual intention and contextual factors. We also adopted the life satisfaction approach, which is based on an individual's subjective cognitive appraisal of well-being, or a global assessment of a person's quality of life. This approach depends on the respondent's criteria to determine what is a good life (Diener, 1984). Life satisfaction is negatively related to cardiovascular mortality (Chida and Steptoe, 2008), sleep complaints (Brand *et al.*, 2010), and burnout (Haar and Roche, 2010). In terms of organizational outcomes, life satisfaction is related to lower turnover intentions (Rode *et al.*, 2007).

3. Hypotheses

3.1 POS – work engagement – career satisfaction

Kahn (1990) conceptualized that employees' perceptions of work contexts can produce favorable conditions in which employees are personally engaged. That is, individuals are different in perceiving and being able to express their preferred selves in their work roles. Employees who perceive more supportive contexts tend to be more engaged; in turn, they are likely to invest themselves more fully in their work roles. Saks (2006) reported that POS predicted both job and organization engagement. As the results of a study of 245 firefighters and their supervisors, Rich *et al.* (2010) also found that engagement mediated relationships between value congruence, POS, and core self-evaluations, and two job performance dimensions: task performance and organizational citizenship behavior.

Engaged individuals experience the feeling of being fully involved and enthusiastic about their jobs and organizations so that they are willing and able to contribute to the organization's success. While positive relationships have been found between POS and affective commitment (Panaccio and Vandenberghe, 2010), in-role job performance, and withdrawal behavior (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1990), little research has examined the direct relationship between engagement and career satisfaction. We propose that when employees develop positive general beliefs as to what extent the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being, they will have a positive work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, which will be likely to lead them to be satisfied with their careers as a whole:

H1. Employees' work engagement will positively mediate the relationship between POS and career satisfaction.

3.2 POS – career satisfaction – SWB

One of the important predictors of career satisfaction is organizational support that provides career opportunities for employees' personal goals (e.g. supervisor support, career sponsorship, training and skill development opportunities, and size of the organization) (Ng *et al.*, 2005). When employees are satisfied with their career development programs, they are likely to believe that their work in the organizations will improve their competence and enhance their marketability. Barnett and Bradley (2007) reported that significant predictors of career satisfaction include goal-specific contextual support as well as resources that provide financial and social support for employees' personal goals. Joo *et al.* (2013) found that developmental needs awareness fully mediated the relationship between learning goal orientation and career satisfaction of employees in the South Korean public sector. Armstrong-Stassen and Ursel (2009) also found that career satisfaction mediated the relationship between POS, job content plateauing, and retention. Thus, we propose that when employees perceive positive support from the organization as to what extent the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being, they will be satisfied with their overall careers including the career path, progress, skills development, and income, which in turn will lead to their life satisfaction:

H2. Employees' career satisfaction will positively mediate the relationship between POS and SWB.

3.3 PsyCap – work engagement – career satisfaction

According to Avey *et al.*'s (2011) meta-analysis on PsyCap, although previous studies have investigated the influence of PsyCap on employee attitudinal and behavioral variables such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship, performance, and undesirable attitudes and behaviors, we found only one study (Avey *et al.*, 2008)

that empirically examined the direct relationship between PsyCap and work engagement. We believe employees with high level of self-efficacy and optimism with challenging goals are likely to be more intrinsically motivated and cognitively, emotionally, and physically engaged in their job. They are likely to demonstrate more characteristics related to fulfillment and engagement, which result not only in productivity, but also in career satisfaction. Thus, we propose that when employees develop a high level of self-efficacy, resilience, hope, and optimism, they will have a positive work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, which will be likely to lead them to be satisfied with their careers as a whole:

H3. Employees' work engagement will positively mediate the relationship between PsyCap and career satisfaction.

3.4 PsyCap – career satisfaction – SWB

According to Ng *et al.* (2005), predictors of objective and subjective career success include human capital (e.g. number of hours worked, job involvement, job tenure, organization tenure, work experience, willingness to transfer, international work experience, education level, career planning, political knowledge and skills, and social capital) and stable individual differences (e.g. Big five personality factors, proactivity, locus of control, and cognitive ability). With regards to the studies in the South Korean cultural setting, learning goal orientation (Joo *et al.*, 2013) and proactivity (Joo and Ready, 2012) were significant predictors of career satisfaction. Although no previous empirical studies have investigated the direct relationship between PsyCap and career satisfaction, individuals with a high level of self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism are highly likely to perceive that their efforts will lead to a successful career experience.

Several studies reported a positive relationship between PsyCap and well-being. Avey *et al.* (2010) found a positive relationship between PsyCap and employee well-being over time. Culbertson *et al.* (2010) also reported that the relationship between PsyCap and hedonic well-being, measured two weeks apart, was mediated by eudaimonic well-being. In their recent study of South Korean employees, Choi and Lee (2014) reported that PsyCap was related to the perceived happiness in work and SWB. As the current study examine the predictors happiness at work, we propose that when employees have a high level of PsyCap (i.e. self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism), they will be likely to be satisfied with their careers (i.e. career path, progress, skills development, and income), which in turn will lead to a high level of life satisfaction:

H4. Employees' career satisfaction will positively mediate the relationship between PsyCap and SWB.

3.5 Work engagement – career satisfaction – SWB

Work engagement is employees' perceptions of work that is meaningful, physically, emotionally, and psychologically safe (Rich *et al.*, 2010). Traditional job satisfaction research has shown that job and life satisfaction are closely related one another (Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller, 2011). Research has revealed that engaged employees are highly energetic, self-efficacious individuals who exercise influence over events that affect their lives (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Joo *et al.* (in press) found that employees' cognition of their work environment and cognitive engagement explained 50 percent of the variance in psychological well-being in a South Korean context. While work engagement is believed to be related to work outcomes rather than life outcomes, attaining intrinsically valued goals turned out to affect SWB (Judge *et al.*, 2005).

While numerous studies have examined the relationship between job satisfaction and SWB, only a handful studies have investigated the relationship between career satisfaction and SWB (Erdogan *et al.*, 2012). Based on the review of nine studies, Erdogan *et al.* (2012) reported the average population correlation was 0.43, which was larger than job satisfaction (0.14) or organizational commitment (0.30). Thus, we believe that when employees feel highly engaged, they will be more satisfied with their overall careers, and that engaged employees are more likely to perceive a higher level of happiness:

H5. Employees' career satisfaction will positively mediate the relationship between work engagement and SWB.

4. Methods

4.1 Sample and data collection

In total, 12 companies of one of the largest conglomerates in South Korea were selected for data collection. The survey questionnaires were administered by HR managers and distributed to 750 employees. A total of 550 questionnaires were returned, giving us a final response rate of 73 percent. The sample in this study includes 91 employees at three financial companies, 197 at four manufacturing companies, 173 at three companies in the service industry, and 89 at a construction and trading company. While the pay level is different depending on industry, these firms share a similar corporate culture and most HR practices such as performance management system, and learning and development programs. Data were collected from trainees for the leadership development program in the group-wide corporate university. For these reasons, it was not in the scope of this study to analyze differences among these firms.

The demographic variables included gender, age, education level, hierarchical level, and the length of a leader-follower relationship. Most respondents were male (81 percent), in their 30s (39 percent) and 40s (48 percent), and in managerial positions (84 percent). In terms of education level, 67 percent of the respondents graduated from a four-year college and 21 percent from graduate school. The length of employment at the current employer was: less than three years (21 percent), between three and six years (20 percent), between six and nine years (14 percent), between 9 and 12 years (8 percent), and over 12 years (36 percent). In summary, most respondents were highly educated male managers in their 30s and 40s.

4.2 Measure

All constructs used multi-item scales. For the current study, two instruments (i.e. POS and SWB) were translated into South Korean through a four-step translation process: forward translation, assessment, backward translation, and assessment based on the criteria of clarity, common language, and cultural adequacy (Presser *et al.*, 2004). The survey questionnaire included a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

POS. To measure POS, we used Eisenberger *et al.*'s scale. Instead of the original 36-item scale, we adopted the eight-item short form from Rhoades *et al.* (2001). The internal reliability was 0.92 in the current study. A sample item included, "My organization really cares about my well-being."

PsyCap. We assessed PsyCap using the 24-item PsyCap Questionnaire (PCQ) (Luthans *et al.*, 2007). Each of the four components of PsyCap was represented by six items from the PCQ. In our study, the reliability was 0.94. Sample items include "I feel confident analyzing a long-term problem to find a solution" (efficacy), and "There are lots of ways around any problem" (hope).

Work engagement. The nine items of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale 9 (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006) were used to measure the level of perceived work engagement. In this study, we used it as a unidimensional measure and the internal reliability was 0.91. Sample questions for each dimension are “At my work, I feel bursting with energy” (vigor), “I am enthusiastic about my job” (dedication), and “I am immersed in my work” (absorption).

Career satisfaction. The five-item career satisfaction scale developed by Greenhaus *et al.* (1990) was used to measure subjective career success. The scale asks subjects to indicate their level of satisfaction with different dimensions of their careers: overall satisfaction, promotion, skills development, and income. In our study, the internal reliability was 0.84. A sample item was “I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career.”

SWB. To measure SWB in this study, we adopted three items of Lyubomirsky and Lepper’s (1999) four-item Subjective Happiness Scale. An item asking respondents the extent to which the characterization of an unhappy person describes them was dropped, because this socially undesirable item did not fit well with non-Western cultures such as South Korea where group conformity and harmony are more valued. Cronbach’s α for the three items was 0.83 in the current study. The items we used in this study include: “In general, I consider myself: not a very happy person vs a very happy person”, “Compared to most of my peers, I consider myself: less happy vs more happy”, and “Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life regardless of what is going on, getting the most out of everything. To what extent does this characterization describe you?”

5. Results

In this section, the results from the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), reliability and correlation, and hierarchical multiple regression analyses are reported. The measurement model test (i.e. CFA) and structural model assessments used maximum likelihood estimation as implemented in LISREL 8.8. For the descriptive and relational statistical analyses, SPSS 20 was used.

5.1 Measurement model assessment

We conducted Harman’s single-factor test as described in Podsakoff *et al.* (2003) to check for possible common method bias. The exploratory factor analysis based on the maximum likelihood estimation showed seven factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, which accounted for 61 percent of the variance. The first factor explained 37 percent of the covariance of the variables. We did not find any dominant factor explaining the covariance among the independent and dependent variables in the sample. Thus, we concluded that the sample we used in this study was not seriously tainted by common method bias. In addition, we conducted an additional analysis using the variance inflation factor (VIF) method. The highest VIF was 2.67 and the average of the VIFs was 2.21, which is much less than 10 (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2000; Neter *et al.*, 1996). In sum, we conclude that there was no severe multi-collinearity issue in this study.

A series of CFAs were performed to assess the construct validity of the measurement model. The primary purpose of a model fit assessment was to determine how the model as a whole was consistent with the empirical data. To validate the five constructs in a South Korean cultural setting and to test if any significant relations between them could be explained by common method variance, we compared two models in terms of goodness-of-fit. The goodness-of-fit indices used in this study include χ^2 , root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), non-normed fit index (NNFI), and comparative fit index (CFI). The first model was a three-factor model: POS; PsyCap; work engagement, career satisfaction, and SWB combined. The second model was a five-factor model: PsyCap, POS, work engagement, career satisfaction, and SWB. As a result

of the comparison, the five-factor model turned out to be a better measurement model in terms of all indices ($\chi^2 [1,117] = 4,784$; $p = 0.00$; RMSEA = 0.077; NNFI = 0.97; CFI = 0.97; SRMR = 0.062).

The results of the CFA offered further validity for the instrument and model in a South Korean cultural setting.

5.2 Descriptive statistics, correlations, and reliabilities

All the correlations indicated significant relationships ($p < 0.01$) among the constructs. All measures demonstrated excellent levels of internal reliability ($\alpha^2 = 0.83-0.94$). To examine the mean difference of the demographic variables, we have conducted a series of ANOVA. As the results, we found that male workers indicated significantly higher perception on POS, PsyCap, and work engagement. Employees with higher education tended to be higher in POS, PsyCap, and SWB. Older workers who are in higher rank perceived stronger POS, PsyCap, work engagement, and career satisfaction. However, no control variable turned out to be significant for SWB. In addition, to examine the mean differences among four groups by industry (i.e. financial, manufacturing, service, and construction and trading) we conducted a multivariate analysis of variance with *post hoc* Tukey tests. No significant mean difference by the four industries was found.

5.3 Structural model assessment

The structural equation modeling method was used to analyze the data and address the results of the hypothesis testing. The adequacy of the structural model was estimated by comparing the goodness-of-fit to the hypothesized model and an additional nested model. The hypotheses were then examined by investigating the path coefficients and the total effect sizes of the constructs in the final model.

5.4 Assessment of the hypothesized model

All research hypotheses were supported showing statistically significant path coefficients ($t > 1.96$, $p < 0.05$). In terms of effect size, PsyCap had a higher path coefficient for work engagement, whereas POS had a higher path coefficient for career satisfaction. With regard to the outcome variables, career satisfaction turned out to fully mediate the relationship between work engagement and SWB. Overall, in terms of squared multiple correlations (SMC), the antecedents accounted for 70 percent of the variance in work engagement, 65 percent of the variance in career satisfaction, and 59 percent of the variance in SWB.

5.5 Assessment of alternative models

Adding a direct path from PsyCap to SWB, the first alternative model was examined for statistical relationships. Although not hypothesized, it is assumed that PsyCap can positively influence employees' level of SWB because the correlation coefficient was strong ($r = 0.58$). The level of hope, resilience, optimism, and efficacy of employees would positively and directly influence the overall life satisfaction. In terms of SMC, the antecedents accounted for 70 percent of the variance in work engagement, 63 percent of the variance in career satisfaction, and 58 percent of the variance in SWB.

For a more parsimonious model, we examined the second alternative model excluding the two mediating paths (*H1* and *H4*) from the first alternative model (see Figure 1). The path coefficient from POS to work engagement was weak ($\gamma_{11} = 0.21$). The path coefficient from PsyCap to career satisfaction was also relatively weak ($\gamma_{22} = 0.22$). Overall, in terms of SMC, the predictors explained 69 percent of the variance in work engagement, 60 percent of the variance in career satisfaction, and 58 percent of the variance in SWB. The final model was determined based on the consideration of three criteria: goodness-of-fit, estimated parameters

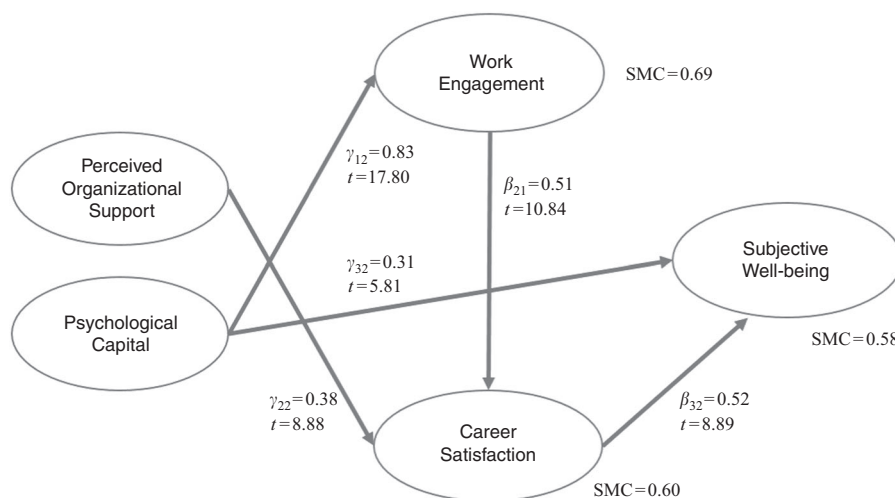


Figure 1. Standardized path coefficient estimates of second alternative (Final) model

with theoretical relationships, and the law of parsimony (Hair *et al.*, 2010). While the hypothesized model and the two alternative models provided equivalent fits to the data (see Table I), the second alternative model turned out to be the most parsimonious. Thus, we accepted the second alternative model as the final model.

5.6 Hypotheses testing

As mentioned before, all the hypotheses were supported based on the path coefficients and the total effect sizes of the constructs in the hypothesized model. Although not hypothesized, the direct effect of POS on PsyCap was significant (path coefficient: 0.19, $t = 3.52$). In sum, PsyCap played a pivotal role not only for work engagement but also career satisfaction and SWB. The total effects including the direct and indirect (mediating) effects are summarized in Table II.

6. Discussion

6.1 Research findings

In this study, we investigated the effects of POS and PsyCap on happiness in employee work (i.e. work engagement), career (i.e. career satisfaction), and life (i.e. SWB). Employees were highly engaged in their work, satisfied with their careers, and felt a greater sense of well-being in their lives when they had higher POS and PsyCap. Work engagement fully mediated the relationship between PsyCap and career satisfaction. Next, career satisfaction also fully mediated the relationship between POS and SWB. With regards to the relationships among the three outcome variables, career satisfaction turned out to fully mediate the relationship between work engagement and SWB. In addition, the direct effect of PsyCap on SWB was also found to be significant.

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δ df	RMSEA	SRMR	NNFI	CFI
Hypothesized	4,822**	1,120	-	-	0.077	0.064	0.97	0.97
Alternative Model 1	4,802**	1,119	20	1	0.077	0.064	0.97	0.97
Alternative Model 2	4,829**	1,121	+7	+1	0.077	0.062	0.97	0.97

Note: * $p < 0.10$

Table I. Summary of structural model comparisons

Table II.
Hypotheses
testing: effects
of path estimates

Path	Hypothesized model		Alternative model	
	Direct effects	Indirect effects	Direct effects	Indirect effects
POS → work engagement	0.21* (5.60)	–	–	–
POS → career satisfaction	0.34* (7.63)	–	0.38* (8.88)	–
PsyCap → work engagement	0.70* (14.95)	–	0.83* (17.80)	–
PsyCap → career satisfaction	0.22* (3.50)	–	–	–
PsyCap → SWB	–	–	0.31* (5.81)	–
Work engagement → career satisfaction	0.36* (5.21)	–	0.51* (10.84)	–
Career satisfaction → SWB	0.77* (15.04)	–	0.52* (8.89)	–
H1: POS → work engagement → career satisfaction	–	0.08	–	–
H2: POS → career satisfaction → SWB	–	0.26	–	0.20
H3: PsyCap → work engagement → career satisfaction	–	0.25	–	0.42
H4: PsyCap → career satisfaction → SWB	–	0.17	–	–
H5: Work engagement → career satisfaction → SWB	–	0.28	–	0.27

Notes: *t*-value in parenthesis. **p* < 0.05 (*t* > 1.96)

More specifically, based on the final (i.e. second alternative) model, POS and PsyCap were significantly associated with work engagement. Supporting Saks' (2006) study, POS was strongly associated with work engagement, based on the motivational processes of social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity. PsyCap was a strong predictor for work engagement, as shown in Avey *et al.* (2008). The direct effect between PsyCap and work engagement was the strongest (path coefficient: 0.83).

Second, POS, PsyCap, and work engagement accounted for 60 percent of the variance in career satisfaction. Supporting Armstrong-Stassen and Ursel's (2009) study, POS turned out to support employees' career advancement opportunities such as training and development, and promotion as well as better pay and benefits. Despite its apparent link, no research has ever investigated the relationship between work engagement and career satisfaction. Work engagement successfully mediated the relationship between PsyCap and career satisfaction.

Last, 58 percent of the variance in SWB was explained by POS, PsyCap, work engagement, and career satisfaction. Supporting Panaccio and Vandenberghe's (2010) study, POS was found to be indirectly associated with SWB through career satisfaction. PsyCap was found to have a significant direct effect on SWB. Supporting previous studies (e.g. Avey *et al.*, 2010; Choi and Lee, 2014; Culbertson *et al.*, 2010), employees with higher level of efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism turned out to have highly satisfied with their lives.

6.2 Theoretical contributions

With regard to the theoretical contributions, this study linked the emerging constructs in positive psychology in general, in HR/OB in particular. We examined three positive organizational behavior variables simultaneously.

To be more specific, one of the contribution of this study lies in that the study first explored PsyCap and work engagement as the antecedents of career satisfaction. That is, those with a high level of efficacy, resilience, hope, optimism tended to have a high level of work engagement, which in turn led to happiness at work. Moreover, career satisfaction also fully mediated the relationship between POS and SWB. When employees feel their organization value them and cared their well-being, they appeared to have high level of career satisfaction, which led to life satisfaction. More important, career satisfaction fully mediated the relationship between work engagement and SWB.

Another contribution of this study lies in that we identified the roles of contextual (i.e. POS) and personal (i.e. PsyCap) factors on the three workplace happiness variables in a non-Western (South Korean) context. In fact, all the constructs in this study were developed and validated in the USA. The current study examined the relationships among them in South Korean context. Since we found no clear cultural issue, this study successfully validated the constructs in a cultural context of South Korea.

Finding a suitable balance between work and life is a challenge for all workers, especially for South Korean employees. In South Korea, full-time workers devote 61 percent of their day on average, or 14.6 hours, to personal care (eating, sleeping, etc.) and leisure (meeting with friends and family, hobbies, games, computer and television use, etc.) – close to the OECD average of 15 hours (OECD, 2015). In addition, traditional South Korean culture is characterized as collectivistic, high power distance, and high uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1980). According to Diener *et al.* (2003) and Erdogan *et al.* (2012), previous research clearly indicates that individuals in collectivistic nations report lower levels of SWB and life satisfaction than those in individualistic nations.

Despite collectivistic national culture, our study reported a high level of SWB. In terms of descriptive statistics, SWB was 3.85. Considering it was the six-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 5, the perceived SWB was high. Thus, we believe that organizational characteristics need to be reviewed in more detail. Additionally, we sourced the data from employees of the large South Korean conglomerate. Hence, employees can hardly find comparable employers in the labor market of South Korea.

To conclude, the respondents in this study, working for the highly reputable firms in South Korea, perceived high level of happiness in their work and career, and eventually in their lives. Thus, we conclude that organizational features had a stronger effect on workplace happiness than national culture. More research is recommended in different national and organizational context.

6.3 Practical implications

We believe that the mission of HR and organization development (OD) professionals in organizations is to improve individual and organizational performance and to enhance employees' well-being. In the current study, we found the positive effects of POS and PsyCap on the three outcome variables of knowledge workers in South Korea. Thus, HR/OD professionals can enhance employees' happiness not only in their work and careers but also in their lives by improving POS and developing PsyCap. More specific, HR and OD professionals need to enhance the level of POS and PsyCap in the following ways.

First, PsyCap was a significant predictor not only for work engagement but also for SWB in this study. HR practitioners need to include the behavioral features of PsyCap as key competencies when they select and hire new employees. It is noted that PsyCap concerns about developmental nature of self (from actual to possible) (Avolio and Luthans, 2006). Thus, HR/OD professionals need to take an integrated approach including staffing as well as training and development to enhance the level of employees' self-efficacy, hope, resiliency, and optimism.

POS played a pivotal role in the level of career satisfaction in this study. More specifically, promotion and developmental opportunities as well as better compensation significantly predicted the level of career satisfaction. HR practitioners can improve the level of POS by providing better growth opportunities and by operating employees' performance management and compensation systems fairly and effectively.

6.4 Limitations and future research

The current study is not without limitations. First, as this study relied on self-reported answers by employees who volunteered to participate, common method bias is expected.

However, all the constructs in this study can be measured only by individual perceptions. More specific, there are high levels of convergence between self-report questionnaires, interview results, peer reports, and journals for pleasant and unpleasant events (Sandvik *et al.*, 1993; Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller, 2011). In addition, we conducted Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003) and concluded that common method variance was not of great concern. We also found the five-factor model had the best fit to the data, by far, as the result of a series of CFAs.

In addition, we used a cross-sectional survey method that leaves room for speculation with regard to causality among the variables. Although a typical causal relationship requires some time to lapse between cause and effect, cross-sectional studies do not allow this time lag. We suggest that future research be based on more longitudinal studies. Based on different time frames when collecting data, future researchers could investigate not only the causal relationships between the predictors and the expected criteria, but also the causal relationships among key outcome variables (i.e. happiness in their work, careers, and lives).

Furthermore, focusing on knowledge workers in South Korea, the sample of this study is likely to be restricted to a certain group with similar demographic characteristics, because it consists mostly of highly educated male managers. While this study focuses on only knowledge workers with higher education levels, future research should be conducted with workers from different educational backgrounds.

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