Character Strengths and Workplace Happiness in University Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Character strengths are positive traits that are considered important for number of desirable outcomes in an individual's personal, professional and social life. The present study investigated correlates and predictors of workplace happiness in university teachers. Sample consisted of 102 university teachers (male=66, female=36) selected from different renowned universities in Lahore, Pakistan. Workplace happiness questionnaire (WPQ), Workplace environment questionnaire and VIA-120 translated in Urdu were used as assessment measures. Findings of study revealed that gratitude, honesty, spirituality, hope and kindness were top ranked strengths while love of learning, perspective, self-regulation, prudence and appreciation of beauty and excellence were lowest in the present Pakistani sample of university teachers. Pearson product moment correlation analysis showed workplace environment was strongly associated with workplace happiness. Among strengths, appreciation of beauty and excellence, bravery, creativity, judgment, perspective and prudence had strong positive relationship with workplace happiness. Regression analysis revealed workplace environment as strong predictor and among character strengths, bravery as moderate while prudence as weak predictor of workplace happiness in university teachers. The study has discussed directions for future studies and implications of findings on educational as well as workplace setting.

*Keywords***:** Character strengths, workplace happiness, workplace environment, university teachers

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INTRODUCTION

Character strengths are the foundation of Positive Psychology. They are for the most part viewed as positive characteristics while virtue is viewed as any positive quality that is associated with religion or religious convictions like forgiveness, kindness, courage and so on. Peterson and Seligman (2004) designed a collaborative research project, the Values in Action project that provides classification of character strengths and virtues along with Values in action inventory (VIA-IS) to measure character strengths. This classification is thought to be parallel with Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), however, concentrating on qualities of a man

instead of its shortcomings. Twenty-four character strengths are classified in six virtues, according to this classification (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2009) these six virtues are named as (i) wisdom and knowledge (intellectual strengths) (ii) courage (emotional strengths) (iii) humanity (interpersonal strengths) (iv) justice (civic strengths) (v) temperance (strengths protecting against excess) and (vi) transcendence (strengths that forge connection to the larger universe). For detailed elaboration, please read work by Seligman et al. (2005).

Values in action inventory of character strengths have enabled people to conduct researches on character strengths. So far, character strengths have been studied with number of variables, different sample and various aspects of human life including well-being, personal growth, education, parenting and work. However, most of the studies have examined links of character strengths with different measures of wellbeing such as positive and negative affect, life satisfaction, happiness and resilience and have found links with diverse strengths. Happiness, being the most studied variable of all, may be characterized as the experience of continuous constructive outcomes, rare negative affect and a general feeling of fulfillment with life all in all (Myers & Diener, 1995). However, Martin Seligman's idea of happiness depends upon quite a number of internal circumstances under willful control. If someone desires to transform them, the level of joy is probably going to increment (Seligman, 2002). Thus, it is important for an individual to stay happy in every domain of life and especially at work where people spend half of their wakened day performing duties and interacting with others. So, happiness at the work place refers to employee satisfaction with their works and lives (Wesarat et al. 2015) and it depends on number of factors. According to Fisher (2010), workplace happiness could be affected by job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job involvement, engagement and flow & intrinsic motivation. However, it is considered that the important elements of workplace well-being consist of employment status (Mohanty, 2009; Foroutan, 2011), income (Caporale et al. 2009; Mathur, 2012), friendship (Huang, 2008; Bader et al. 2013) and work activities (Siegall & McDonald, 2004).

Organizations today, are striving to gain maximum productivity within limited resources. They are doing so by emphasizing over employees' dysfunctional attributes with the help of trainings and feedbacks (Linley et al. 2009). This approach can be fruitful to seek improved performance but it is neglecting the focus on employee's individual strengths (Hodges & Clifton, 2004). Therefore, there is a need to focus on individual strengths to enhance level of well-being & happiness of employees at their workplace. These individual strengths are an individual's positive personality traits that are commonly accepted as character strengths, according to VIA's classification of strengths.

Literature Review

There are numerous researches focusing on role of character strengths of individual's well-being and happiness (Green, 2021), realizing that focusing and endorsing character strengths can noticeably elevate level of happiness among individuals. From these researches, the top five strengths found most frequently associated with wellbeing are hope, zest, gratitude, love and curiosity (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004) and these are now termed as happiness strengths. Two noticeable works are worth to report regarding association of CS and well-being; (i) Research work by Quinlan et al. (2012) had reviewed eight various interventions and found significant increments in different measures of well-being. (ii) Ghielen et al. (2017), later on, extended Quinlan's work and suggested that strengths interventions had broader range of effects on positive

affect, well-being and life satisfaction. Researches have also been done on different nations in order to get strength-based profile of different nations (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2006). The largest study on CS done by McGrath (2015) included a wide range of sample from 75 nations showing that gratitude, spirituality and kindness were among top ranked strengths while self-regulation as lowest in almost all of the samples of 75 nations. He noted that in industrially advanced countries, love of learning was among top strengths while in the countries that were not industrially advanced, it was in bottom five strengths. When studies were conducted on happiness level based upon age, gratitude was found in association with happiness of older children (Park & Peterson, 2006).

Apart from relationship of strengths with happiness, happy life itself plays an important role on the overall wellbeing of an individual including his/ her workplace setting. Regardless of a substantial assortment of positive mental research into the connection amongst happiness and efficiency, happiness at work had customarily been viewed as a potential result of positive results at work. It is reported that Individuals having high score on three dimensions (the pleasant life, the good or engaged life, and the meaningful life) of orientation to happiness were enjoying high level of job satisfaction (Marti & Ruch, 2017). Among character strengths, strengths of curiosity, zest, hope, gratitude, spirituality (Peterson et al, 2009, 2010), love and curiosity were found in association with work satisfaction (Heintz & Ruch, 2019). Also, it has been suggested that applicability of signature strengths had positive connection with positive experiences (Harzer & Ruch, 2013), role performance, extra role performance (Woerkom & Meyers, 2015), work engagement (Bakker & Wingerden, 2020), job outcomes (Ghielen et al. 2017) and optimal functioning at work (Pelaez, 2020). Role of strengths to increment flourishing in different domains of life including workplace has also been witnessed (Wagner et al, 2021) with an improvement in job performance particularly due to connection of perseverance, teamwork, prudence, self-regulation, and honesty (Harzer & Bezuglova, 2019). These researches had shown a great deal of interest on role of character strengths on an individual's well-being, life satisfaction and positive outcomes at work. However, a direct association between character strengths and workplace happiness is yet to be found which the present study aimed to investigate. So, our first hypothesis was:

H1: There is likely to be a positive relationship between workplace happiness and characters strengths.

Apart from applying and endorsing strengths at work in increase employee's well-being, the space and ecosystem where an employee have to perform and to endorse his/her strengths can also have significant impacts. Organizations are striving to look out for the methods that can be helpful in increasing employees' efficiency but less is known about the working environment and its subsequent impacts (Wright & Davis, 2003). Previous researches have focused on innovation and creativity in association with work environment and found that perceived working environment has significant impacts on creativity levels (Amabile, 1996) whereas different ranges of environments are needed for different kind of activities at work (Penn et al, 1999). Later on, Dan (2014) took up the matter and investigated about working environment of employees. He indicated the factors affecting workplace happiness including job satisfaction, compensation, job security, company work environment/culture and working with others (Dan, 2014; Rahmi, 2019) whereas significant relationship was reported between physical work environment and employee well-being (Miller & Hendrickse, 2016) and satisfaction at work (Wright & Davis, 2003). The recent study by Gander et al. (2020) has reported that person-environment fit model has greater impacts on higher levels of

job as well as life satisfaction. The cited literature has given insight towards role on work environment and different factors related to work. However, there is research gap that could describe relationship between workplace happiness and work environment. Aiming to examine this association, our next hypothesis was:

H2: Workplace environment is likely to be positively associated with workplace happiness.

As the researches has repeatedly shown significant correlations between character strengths and positive outcomes at work, some of the researchers have also studied predicting factors of an individual's well-being and positive outcomes at work out of 24 character strengths and work environment. Studies found that strengths of curiosity, zest, hope and gratitude are predictors of life satisfaction (Peterson et al, 2010) whereas zest has influence on job satisfaction (Peterson et al, 2009).

Additionally, strength-based psychological climate was also found to affect work-related positive effect, role performance and extra role performance (Woerkom & Meyers, 2015). In a recent most study by Harzer et al. (2021), character strengths were found to be predicting job performance irrespective of general mental ability (GMA) whereas theological strengths (e.g., zest, love, hope, gratitude) were predicting life satisfaction whereas intellectual strengths had predicted personal growth (Azanedo et al, 2021). The strengths are considered even in personnel selection as score on a certain strength can predict job performance (Harzer & Bezuglova, 2019).

Overall, 12 character strengths are considered to be successful including leadership, integrity, persistence, bravery, open-mindedness, fairness, citizenship, self-regulation, love of learning, social intelligence, perspective and creativity (Boe et al. 2015). So, aiming to identify predictors of workplace happiness (and not of positive outcomes) out of 24 strengths and work environment, this research gap helped us to draw hypothesis 3 & 4 of our study:

H3: Work place happiness is predicted by Character strengths (specifically knowledge and interpersonal strengths), age, qualification, monthly income and duration of job.

H4: Workplace happiness is predicted by workplace environment.

METHOD

Correlation research design was used to conduct present study and purposive sampling technique was used to collect data. Sample comprised of 102 university teachers (male = 66, female = 36) recruited from different renowned universities in Lahore, Pakistan. This sample size ensured robust analyses in regression and had more chance of representative sample inclusion.

Following were the inclusion criteria for selected sample:

• Those teachers who had been working since last two years on permanent job were selected.

• Maximum age range was 50 as this meant ten years to retirement and enough years of service to had opinion about workplace happiness.

The descriptive statistics of demographic variables of selected sample are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of Demographic Variables (N = 102).

Variable	f (%)	M(SD)
Gender		
Male	66 (64.7)	
Female	36 (35.3)	
Marital status		
Married	62 (60.8)	
Unmarried	40 (39.2)	
Meeting with HOD		
Everyday	60 (58.8)	
Weekly	34 (33.3)	
Monthly	08 (7.8)	
Type of Meeting		
Only job related	21 (20.6)	
Formal	61 (59.8)	
Informal	20 (19.6)	
Age		35.16 (8.37)
Years of education		18.82 (1.97)
Monthly income		80617.64 (47538.00)
Govt job duration		9.79 (5.77)
Total job duration		11.22 (6.45)
Working hours		7.97 (1.39)

Note: For gender; 1=male and 2=female; For marital status; 1=married and 2=unmarried; For meeting with HOD; 1=everyday, 2=weekly, 3=monthly; For type of meeting; 1=only job related, 2=formal, 3=informal

Assessment Measures

Workplace happiness questionnaire (WHQ) (Saleem & Anjum, 2013), VIA-120 urdu translated version and Workplace environment questionnaire (WEQ) (developed by researcher) were used as assessment tools for the study. Workplace happiness questionnaire consists of 23 items and have five response categories ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree with the highest reliability i.e., α= .91. VIA-120 was used translated in Urdu by Anjum and Amjad (2016a) and was validated by authors with the average alpha reliability coefficient across all scales.79. Workplace environment questionnaire was developed on the basis of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It was 5 items measure that quickly revealed an idea about workplace environment of workers with five points type rating scale ranging from 1 (very untrue) to 5 (very true). Sample items include "There are all facilities available in my office" which accesses, along with other items, physical needs, and "I feel unsecure while working in office" that indicates safety needs at workplace environment. Pilot study was conducted to calculate alpha reliability of the scale that was satisfactory i.e α=.75.

Procedure

The research was started in an orderly manner by acquiring the permission from the authors of the scales which were used for the purpose of data collection. Formal authority letter was sought from the Institute of Applied Psychology. After receiving written permission from the authorities, the questionnaires were administered on willingness of teachers who fulfilled the inclusion criteria. A sample of 150 teachers was selected from different renowned public sector universities in Lahore, Pakistan according to the inclusion criteria. Before the administration of the scales, a formal consent was taken from the teachers just to ensure them that their information will be

kept confidential and would not be used for any other purpose except the studies. The participants were guaranteed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage. Workplace happiness questionnaire and work environment questionnaire was administered in hard form while VIA-120 translated in Urdu was administered online as the authorities of the scale did not allow to administer the survey in paper form. For this purpose, willing participants were asked to fill workplace happiness questionnaire and work environment questionnaire on the given form while registration link for VIA-120 translated in Urdu was sent them via email. Participants were assigned with participant's ID code that helped researcher to identify responses of every participant for all scales used in the study as the data was collected through two mediums. Results of VIA were sent them immediately with their signature strengths after they completed the survey on website.150 university teachers were accessed for this purpose. 102 teachers returned given forms containing workplace happiness questionnaire and work environment questionnaire while 79 of them registered to VIA website to take VIA-120 translated in Urdu. Response rate was 68%.

RESULTS

The data was analyzed in three key steps; (i) preliminary analysis, (ii) Pearson product moment correlation analysis and (iii) linear regression analysis. Findings of preliminary analysis are shown in following Table 2.

Table 2: *Descriptive and Psychometric Properties of the scales used in Present Study (N=102)*
F*or Character Strengths (N=80)*

Variables	*M*	*SD*	*k*	α
Workplace Happiness	93.39	12.07	23	.93
Work Environment	18.32	3.41	05	.69
Beauty	3.92	.69	05	.74
Bravery	3.96	.67	05	.80
Creativity	4.01	.77	05	.86
Curiosity	3.96	.71	05	.82
Fairness	4.13	.67	05	.83
Forgiveness	4.08	.63	05	.77
Gratitude	4.27	.66	05	.87
Honesty	4.22	.62	05	.83
Hope	4.14	.64	05	.81
Humility	3.95	.62	05	.68
Humor	3.96	.63	05	.77
Judgment	4.02	.66	05	.85
Kindness	4.14	.69	05	.84
Leadership	4.10	.58	05	.80
Love	3.99	.63	05	.79
Love of Learning	3.78	.74	05	.75
Perseverance	4.11	.70	05	.86
Perspective	3.82	.76	05	.81
Prudence	3.92	.72	05	.86
Self-Regulation	3.88	.71	05	.78
Social Intelligence	4.01	.63	05	.77
Spirituality	4.19	.64	05	.82
Team Work	4.12	.62	05	.85
Zest	4.14	.68	05	.83

Note. k = No. of items, α = Cronbach's alpha

Table 2 shows that gratitude, honesty, spirituality, hope and kindness were highest in mean while love of learning, perspective, self-regulation, prudence and appreciation of

beauty and excellence were lowest in mean among strengths scale. Alpha reliabilities for strength scales were between .74 and .87, for workplace happiness questionnaire was very high and that of workplace environment scale was satisfactory.

In second step, Pearson product moment correlation analysis was used to find relationship between character strengths, workplace happiness and workplace environment. The findings are shown in Table 3.

Table 3:

Correlations between Character Strengths and study variables (N=102)
For Character Strengths (N=80)

Variables	Work Environment	Workplace Happiness
Work Environment		.42***
Beauty	.23*	.42***
Bravery	.12	.42***
Creativity	.09	.38***
Curiosity	.05	.32**
Fairness	.07	.28*
Forgiveness	.10	.20
Gratitude	.13	.18
Honesty	.19	.29**
Hope	.14	.24*
Humility	.03	.18
Humor	.09	.28*
Judgment	.14	.35***
Kindness	.10	.25*
Leadership	.09	.23*
Love	.14	.28*
Love of Learning	.23*	.31**
Perseverance	.07	.25*
Perspective	.15	.36***
Prudence	.15	.42***
Self-Regulation	.12	.34**
Social Intelligence	.10	.33**
Spirituality	.10	.25*
Team Work	.11	.28*
Zest	.03	.21

Note: * $p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 3 shows that workplace environment had a strong relationship with workplace happiness. Among character strengths, all strengths had statistically significant positive relationship with workplace happiness except forgiveness, gratitude, humility and zest where appreciation of beauty and excellence, bravery, creativity, judgment, perspective and prudence had strong positive relationship and other strengths were moderate to weakly associated with workplace happiness while appreciation of beauty and excellence and love of learning were only strengths associated with workplace environment. None of the demographic variable showed significant relationship with workplace happiness. In the third step, linear regression analysis was used to find the predictors of workplace happiness. Findings of the analysis are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: *Character Strengths and Workplace Environment as Predictor of Workplace Happiness (N=102), for Character Strengths (N=80)*

Predictors	B	β	F	ΔR^2
			2.28	.52
Workplace Environment	1.30	.37**		
Bravery	10.76	.61**		
Prudence	7.19	.43*		

*Note: * p < .05. **p < .01.*

Regression analysis revealed that workplace environment was a moderate predictor of workplace happiness. Among character strengths, none of the strength was predictor of workplace happiness except bravery and prudence whereas bravery was as moderate predictor while prudence was a weak predictor of workplace happiness. None of the variables were identified as predictor of workplace happiness.

In addition to these analyses, independent sample t-test was also used to identify differences in workplace happiness and character strengths of male and female university teachers. Findings of t-test are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Gender Differences in Workplace Happiness (N=102)

	Male		Female			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Workplace Happiness	93.75	11.91	92.72	12.50	.41	.68
Bravery	3.84	.65	4.15	.67	-2.01	.05
Social Intelligence	3.88	.65	4.19	.55	-2.12	.03

*Note: * p < .05*

Table 5 revealed that there were no differences in workplace happiness of male and female university teachers. However, among character strengths, minor differences were found in the scores on bravery and social intelligence of male and female teachers. Female teachers scored higher on bravery and social intelligence than male teachers. Apart from these, no differences were found in workplace happiness of university teachers on the basis of marital status and meeting with head of department.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to investigates specific correlates and predictors of workplace happiness in university teachers. The variables studied in relation to workplace happiness were character strengths, workplace environment, age, gender, monthly income, qualification, duration of job and meeting with head of department. Findings of descriptive statics showed that signature strengths were partially consistent with the previous literature (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2006). When compared with literature on CS in Pakistan, few studies were found done by Anjum and Amjad (2016a, 2016b) on the sample of students. The results were consistent with these studies as well as with the findings of largest study on CS done by McGrath (2015) included a wide range of sample from 75 nations including Pakistan. However, appreciation of beauty and excellence, for the first time, was found among lowest strengths in the Pakistani sample in present study.

Comparing findings of correlation with previous literature, it was found that Park, Peterson and Seligman (2004) have reported that strengths of hope, zest, gratitude, love and curiosity were consistently associated with life satisfaction while in another study,

love, zest and hope were found to be positively associated with happiness (Park & Peterson, 2006). In Pakistani literature, zest, hope, gratitude, judgment and social intelligence showed highest correlation coefficient with SWB (Anjum & Amjad, 2016b). However, the results of present study were in variance with this literature as these studies investigated relationship of CS with life satisfaction and happiness. To stay happy at workplace, however, requires some factors other than love, hope, gratitude and zest. Researches, where CS were studied at workplace had revealed that character strength, especially of perseverance was the most associated with work productivity and least associated with counter- productive work behaviors (Ovadia & Lavy, 2015). Furthermore, application of signature strengths at workplace had resulted in more positive experiences (job satisfaction, experiencing pleasure, engagement and meaning fostered by one's job) at workplace (Harzer & Ruch, 2013) whereas Achieving Maslow's hierarchy of needs at workplace was found to be important for creating productive work environment (Croome, 2006). Hence, it can be said that application and endorsement of signature strengths leads to positive experiences and job satisfaction at work while these positive experiences and job satisfaction lead to workplace happiness (Fisher, 2010) and quality of life of workers at workplace.

In addition, linear regression analysis showed that workplace environment was a strong predictor of workplace happiness. The findings were consistent with previous literature that working climate explained well-being at workplace (Rego & Cunha, 2008). However, among character strengths, only bravery and prudence were found as predictors of workplace happiness. It was important here to note that character strengths all are positive traits and thus, all might not be equally important to be identified as predictors of workplace happiness. Thus, identification of bravery and prudence as predictors of workplace happiness in university teachers revealed that it is important to take careful decisions while dealing with risks and challenges manfully at workplace as it would lead to happiness at work for university teachers. Previous literature showed emphasis on character strengths (Gratitude in US sample and perseverance in Swiss sample) as predictors of life satisfaction (Peterson et al, 2007) and use of strengths as predictor of well-being (Proctor, Maltby & Linely, 2011) while there was little emphasis on predictors of workplace happiness identified from character strengths. Hence, the present study was a contribution towards predictors of workplace happiness.

Limitations, Suggestions and Implications

The current study was among the initial studies done in Pakistan that had explored character strengths in interdependent Muslim Pakistani culture. Though the previous studies had explored relationship of character strengths with wellbeing and subjective well-being in students, the present study was first of its nature that studied character strengths with workplace happiness. Future studies can be conducted with the participants from different professions using strengths-based interventions.

Findings of present study can help in building up educational system to make policies and environment conducive to use and enhance these character strengths so that teachers feel happy at their workplace. Moreover, these findings have showered light upon factors that can lead to workplace happiness and has provided strengths-based framework of workplace happiness of workers that will help organizations to build environment of their organizations to ensure well-being, satisfaction and happiness of their employees at workplace. Furthermore, the study lays ground for training programs based on character strengths in educational institutions to make teachers happy at workplace.

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