

# An Analysis of the Structural Relationship of Big Five Personality Factors with Job Happiness and Career Success

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## Authors' contributions

*This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author MG designed the study, wrote the protocol and supervised the work, performed the statistical analysis and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author DM carried out the field work and managed the analyses of the study. Both authors involved in generating findings of the study. The final manuscript was written and approved by author MG. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the structural relationship of the big five personality factors with job happiness and success among employees of an industrial complex. In this study, the population consisted of employees (340 persons) of an industrial company producing petroleum products in Isfahan (Isfahan, Iran), of which 189 persons were selected by using simple random sampling. The data were gathered by distributing big five personality factors inventory (short form), job happiness and career success questionnaires. Data were analyzed by using Pearson correlation coefficient and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The results showed positive and significant relationships between job happiness and openness to experience, agreeableness, and extroversion, and between career success and conscientiousness, extroversion, and agreeableness. Structural

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equation modeling results showed that career success was indirectly interrelated with agreeableness through job happiness and a direct relationship with conscientiousness. Accordingly, job happiness mediates the relationship between agreeableness and career success.

*Keywords: Personality traits; five big personality factors; job happiness; career success.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the last 2-3 decades, among approaches to personality traits so far reported, big five personality factors comprising neuroticism (N), extroversion (E), openness to experience (O), agreeableness (A), and conscientiousness (C), has drawn huge interest [1]. In neuroticism (also known as emotional instability), negative emotions such as fear, sorrow, excitement, anger, and guilt are the permanent and widespread emotions [2]. On the contrary, extroversion involves liking, desire to take part in gatherings and parties, and tendency towards assertiveness, activity, and chatter. The third factor, openness to experience, involves elements like active imagination, esthetics, inner emotional experiences, and independent judgment [3]. The fourth personality factor is agreeableness, involving altruism, sympathy toward others, and willingness to help others. Finally, the fifth factor is conscientiousness, which involves ability to control impulses and desires together with application of planned behavior to achieve goals [3,4].

Recent decade research evidence shows that each of the big five personality factors somehow plays roles in emotional and behavioral orientation in humans, and is associated with several variables in the workplace such as ambiguity, overload and conflict [5,6], professional attitudes (job involvement, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction) [7], happiness [8,9], job success [10], entrepreneurial behaviors [11], organizational citizenship behaviors, task performance and deviant behaviors [12-14]. As limited studies have addressed relationships between the big five personality factors and job happiness and career success, the present study mainly aims to investigate such relationships.

### 1.1 Happiness and BIG Five Personality Factors

Happiness is dominance of positive affects over negative ones and overall sense of satisfaction with life [15,16]. In the other words, happiness is dominance of positive affects and life satisfaction

[17-19]. The research evidence indicates that various factors can create feeling of happiness in people at workplaces, including personality traits as personal variables [9], together with equity and trust, purposeful work, autonomy, positive emotions, an enthusiasm for work, relationships, the challenging work, purposefulness, and work-family balance, holistic approach to life and work, and creativity at workplace [20-23]. This study focuses on the big five personality factors. Studies show non-uniform relationship between the big five factors and job happiness in all circumstances (different cultures). Most studies have found a positive relationship between job happiness and extroversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness, and conversely, a negative relationship between job happiness and neuroticism [8,24,25].

Personality traits are interrelated with readiness for positive emotions, except agreeableness that had no relationship with happiness while the other four factors i.e. neuroticism (negative relationship), openness to experience, conscientiousness and extroversion (in self-reporting conditions) show significant relationships with job happiness [25]. Also in another study, the big five personality factors and emotional intelligence are correlated with happiness, and found significant relationships between happiness and neuroticism, agreeableness, extroversion, and conscientiousness [24]. Specifically, emotional intelligence can have a mediating role in the relationship between the above four personality traits and happiness relationships. Furnham and Christophorou [26] investigate the relationship between happiness and personality traits and emotional intelligence, and find that extroversion and neuroticism are significantly related to happiness. Bahiraei et al, [8] study the relationship between the big five personality factors and happiness, and show that extroversion and neuroticism are related to happiness. Moreover, in their study, regression analysis results suggest that neuroticism, extroversion, conscientiousness and openness to experience respectively are significant predictors for happiness. Theoretically, the relationship between the big five personality factors and

happiness depends on the role and readiness of each big five factors for experiencing positive emotions [25,27]. Besides the relationship between the five big personality factors and job happiness, the present study examines career success as the ultimate outcome variable, based on affective spillover approach.

## 1.2 Career Success, Job Happiness and Big Five Personality Factors

Career success is one of variables, which have been intensively researched and for which the broad context has been offered so far. Baruch [28] suggests that career success consists of a set of desirable outcomes for people, which are grouped into as advancement (based on indicators such as power, autonomy, entrepreneurship, and self-control), learning (acquiring new skills, capabilities and competences), survival (accumulation of wealth to obtain power, security, and job security), cognitive achievements (satisfaction, self-esteem, self-actualization), quality of life and work-life balance. The research trend and theoretical grounds in case of career success is hugely affected by role of career success in creating personal and organizational efficacy [29]. According to the main indicators of career success cited by Baruch [28], along with career, career success includes subjective (intrinsic) and objective (extrinsic) aspects.

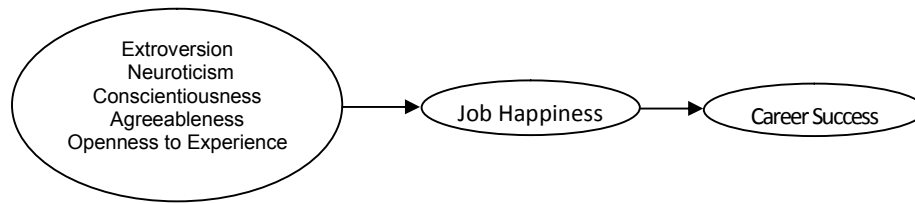
The objective aspect involves wages and benefits, organizational position and promotions. The subjective aspect involves job satisfaction, workplace task satisfaction, perceived career success, and life satisfaction [30-32]. Studies suggest that a number of factors are important to the individual in terms of career success, which include standing and position, self-allocation of time, challenges, security and social considerations. Accordingly, career success is largely psychological. Determinants of this phenomenon are particularly important to both subjective and objective levels [29]. According to Greenhouse (2003), antecedents of career success is grouped into 7 categories [29]: Organizational human capital investment, motivational factors, interpersonal relationships, professional choices or strategies, personality traits, organizational features, and family status. Among these factors, theoretical approach to personality traits has been intensively investigated outside Iran [10,33,34]. The present study focuses on job happiness and the big five

personality factors according to a series of simple and structural relationships.

Boehm and Lyubomirosky [35] determine whether happiness brings career success or not. Their findings reveal that happiness is a prerequisite for a sense of job success. Golparvar and Abedini [17], following affective spillover approach from overall levels to detailed and specific levels (such as positive effects of happiness about job satisfaction), show that happiness as one of the components of proposed affective capital, is a mediatory prerequisite for job satisfaction (as a phenomenon that plays an essential role in internal career success). Along with relationship between happiness and career success, some studies have shown a relationship between some of the big five personality factors and career success. In their longitudinal study, Sutin et al. [10] examine current relationship between the big five personality factors and subjective and objective career success and the relationship in the next 10 years, and suggest that people with emotional stability and conscientiousness achieve higher subjective and objective career success. Wille et al. [36] conduct their cross-sectional and longitudinal study (during 15 years) on the relationship between the big five personality factors and subjective career success. They find that subjective career success is potentially positively related to features such as agreeableness and conscientiousness, and negatively related to neuroticism (emotional instability).

## 1.3 Conceptual Framework

The pointing question is to what extent the big five factors are related to job happiness and career success (subjective and objective aspects) in a series of chained relationships. To answer this pivotal question, the influence of these factors on different behavioral, perceptual, cognitive and emotional experiences, as mentioned before, should be examined in different settings [4]. Extroversion (as a component that encourages social interactions of people) has a positive relationship with positive affects (since social interactions and relationships often require a high degree of positive affects) [12]. Goal-based conscientiousness is associated with planning and self-monitoring.



**Fig. 1. Conceptual model of research**

Accordingly, on many occasions, especially when people are performing their duties to achieve standards and personal targets, conscientiousness can cause positive emotional experiences such as happiness and subsequently a sense of success [10]. Agreeableness as the third big personality factor largely relies on compatibility with relationships and surrounding circumstances. In fact, high agreeable people mostly regard problems and situations as opportunities for compatibility and flexibility, and feel happy when they pursue compatibility and development of their own capabilities, and thus have high feelings of success [24,36].

Openness to experience as the fourth personality factor is based on relative emotion-seeking together with basic tendencies toward art and fantasy. As regards the relationship between openness to experience and feeling of happiness and success, the evidence shows people feel happiness and success at work when their basic tendencies are fulfilled [34]. Neuroticism i.e. emotional instability and personal readiness for experiencing negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, hopelessness and despair can easily establish a negative relationship (due to the contradictory nature of negative emotions) with feeling of happiness and success [8,9].

Beyond the theoretical logic of the relationship between the big five personality factors and job happiness and career success, the present study focuses on job happiness as a widespread positive emotional loading [35] and its mediating role in relationship between the big five personality factors and career success [17] because by role-modeling of each personality factor, job happiness can create a sense of success more easily in the course of emotion spillover. Accordingly, our theoretical model is designed (Fig. 1 above).

### 1.4 Study Hypotheses

**H1:** There is a relationship between the big five personality factors (Openness

to experience from the final analysis because of low reliability was removed, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) and job happiness.

**H1-1:** There is a positive relationship between conscientiousness and job happiness.

**H1-2:** There is a positive relationship between extroversion and job happiness.

**H1-3:** There is a positive relationship between agreeableness and job happiness.

**H1-4:** There is a negative relationship between neuroticism and job happiness.

**H2:** There is a positive relationship between job happiness and career success.

**H3:** Job happiness is the mediating variable between the big five personality factors (Openness to experience from the final analysis because of low reliability was removed, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) and career success.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

In this correlational study (Structural Equation Modeling, SEM), the population consisted of 340 employees of an industrial company in Isfahan (Isfahan, Iran) in spring 2014. In order to create a proper proportion of sample size to the whole population (according to the recommended sample size of 200 to 400 for SEM studies), 200 employees were selected from the personnel list using simple random sampling. Incompletely answered questionnaires (5.5%) were eliminated and the sample size reduced to 189 employees (response rate of 94.5%). 24.3% and 49.2% of participants had high school certificate and associate/ bachelor's degree (49.2%) respectively. Their age ranged between 21 years to 62 years old with 1-40 years of work

experience. %61.9 and %49.7 of the participants were male and female respectively. Their mean age was 35.28 years old (standard deviation 8.26), and the mean work tenure was 11.33 years old (standard deviation 8.49). Instruments used to measure variables were as follows.

The 20-item BPF-SF questionnaire was used to assess the big five personality factors, including 4 items for each one. Five-point Likert scale was used including 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This questionnaire was used by De Nevea and Oswald [1] based on the big five personality factors questionnaire (As cited by Mc Cray and Costa, 1989) in comprehensive longitudinal study on more than 15000 American youths, and appropriate validity indices (convergence and divergence) were reported. For instance, the significantly negative relationship was reported between neuroticism and positive effect and life satisfaction and the positive relationship between the other personality factors and positive affect and life satisfaction [1]. In Iran, this questionnaire was used by Raie and Golparvar [37], and its construct validity was assessed using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed this questionnaire as a five-factor questionnaire ( $\chi^2=7.17$ ,  $\chi^2/df=1.79$ , CFI=0.93, GFI=0.98, RMR=0.02, and RMSEA=0.07), and exploratory factor analysis (varimax rotation) confirmed (KMO=0.7, Bartlett's sphericity test=776.39, and  $p<0.01$ , and questionnaire variance was explained through 5 factors (55.19%) as introduced by De Nevea and Oswald [1,37]. In the present study, Cronbach's alphas for openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism were respectively 0.52,0.67, 0.63,0.67 and 0.71. Internal consistency of this study is same as that of the original study [1]. Note that due to the Cronbach's low-level alpha of openness to experience, this personality trait was eliminated from the final analysis.

To assess job happiness, we used fifteen items scale developed and validated by Golparvar and Abedini [17], with a 6-point scoring scale (from never=1 to always=6). Validity (using exploratory factor analysis) and internal consistency reliability (using Cronbach's alpha) were assessed by Golparvar and Rezaie [18] (reporting mean Cronbach's alpha beyond 0.9) and Golparvar and Abedini [17]. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was found 0.97. To assess career success, the 12-item questionnaire presented by Nabi [38] was used, with two subscales of subjective success (7

items), and objective success (5 items), and 5-point scoring scale (from never=1 to always=5). This questionnaire was translated into Persian [29], and its appropriate validity and reliability were reported. Nabi [38] estimated Cronbach Alphas for subjective and objective job success were 0.82 and 0.82 respectively. Golparvar and Ghazavi [29] measure this questionnaire validity according to exploratory factor analysis. Their calculated Cronbach's alpha of subjective and objective job success are 0.82 and 0.84, respectively. In this study, the overall Cronbach alpha for this questionnaire was 0.89. The data were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficient and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in SPSS (version 18) and AMOS (version 16) software.

### 3. RESULTS

Table 1 shows mean, standard deviation, and inter-correlations between variables.

According to Table 1, career success is positively and significantly related to extroversion, agreeableness, and job happiness, but not to conscientiousness or neuroticism. Also, job happiness is positively and significantly related to extroversion, agreeableness, but not to conscientiousness or neuroticism. These results support H1-2 and H1-3 (There is a positive relationship between extroversion and agreeableness and job happiness) and H2 (There is a positive relationship between job happiness and career success). The initial proposed model (Fig. 1) was assessed using structural equation modeling. An accepted model must show  $\chi^2/df<3$  for the insignificant chi-square, values above 0.95 for Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) greater than 0.95, 0.9 for Incremental Fit Index (IFI), RMSR<0.05, and RMSEA<0.08 [39].

Given all the above, chi-square in the proposed initial model was significant ( $p<0.01$ ),  $\chi^2/df>3$ , GFI, CFI, IFI all were less than 0.95, RMR>0.08, and RMSEA>0.08 (greater than desired cut-off point). Accordingly, the proposed model requires modification and revision [39]. Assessment of pathway coefficients of initial model and modification indices highlights the need for modifications as follows: three pathways from conscientiousness, extroversion, and neuroticism to job happiness were removed (because of insignificance), and one pathway was added from conscientiousness to career success to improve fitness indices in the final model. These changes were implemented and the

**Table 1. Means, standard deviation and inter-correlations between research variables**

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Career success	3.09	0.87	(0.89)					
Conscientiousness	3.96	0.74	-0.14	(0.67)				
Extroversion	3.52	0.78	0.33**	-0.16	(0.63)			
Agreeableness	3.9	0.65	0.17*	0.31**	0.36**	(0.67)		
Neuroticism	2.42	0.84	-0.05	-0.35**	-0.07	-0.28**	(0.71)	
Job happiness	3.26	1.02	0.77**	-0.04	0.31**	0.18*	-0.09	(0.97)

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , Alpha coefficients presented on diagonal

**Table 2. The results of structural equation modeling for final and revised model**

Row	Paths	b	SE	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>
1	Agreeableness → Job happiness	0.28	0.11	0.18*	0.032**
2	Job happiness → Career success	0.65**	0.04	0.77**	0.603**
3	Conscientiousness → Career success	-0.13*	0.05	-0.11*	

Note:  $n = 189$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

modifications were made in the finalized and revised model according to study background [34]. Table 2 illustrates results of structural equation modeling for the final and revised model.

According to Table 2, of the big five personality factors, agreeableness ( $p \leq 0.01$ ,  $\beta = 0.18$ ) had a significant relationship with job happiness and could account for 3.2% of variance of this variable. Next, job happiness ( $p \leq 0.05$ ,  $\beta = 0.77$ ) and conscientiousness ( $p \leq 0.01$ ,  $\beta = -0.11$ ) had significant relationships with career success, and could predict 60.3% of variance of this variable. In the final model, Chi-square was 4.85 and insignificant ( $p > 0.05$ ),  $\chi^2/df = 2.42$ , GFI = 0.99, CFI = 0.99, IFI = 0.99, RMR = 0.03, and RMSEA = 0.09. Fig. 2 show the final and revised model.

According to Fig. 2, agreeableness is positively related to job happiness, and job happiness and conscientiousness have positive relationships with career success. Agreeableness indirectly relates to career success through job happiness (Table 3).

**Table 3. Standardized and unstandardized indirect effects in final model of current research**

Row	Indirect effects	b	$\beta$
1	Indirect effect of agreeableness on career success through job happiness	0.18**	0.14**

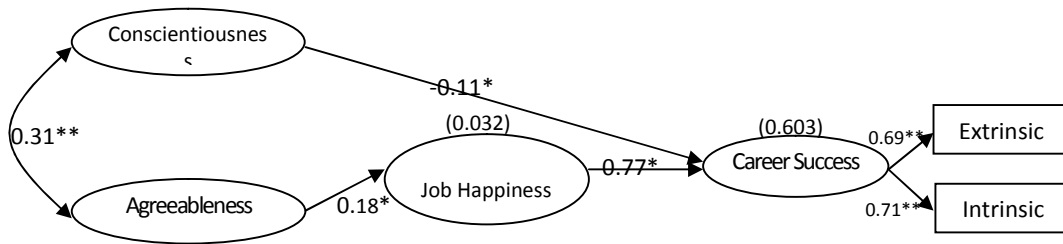
Note:  $n = 189$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

As Table 3 shows, agreeableness indirectly impacts on career success (i.e. 0.18 in an unstandardized way and 0.14 in a standardized

way) through job happiness. According to available sources on bootstrap test [39], this coefficient is significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) (most coefficients exceeding 0.08 at  $p < 0.01$ , and coefficients around 0.05 at  $p < 0.05$  are significant). Assessment of mediating effects showed that job happiness is a complete mediator in the relationship between agreeableness and career success.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate structural model of the relationship between the big five personality factors (Openness to experience which was removed from the final analysis because of low reliability, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) and job happiness and career success. The findings demonstrated that some of these personality factors affect job happiness and career success. The first hypothesis was confirmed: job happiness is positively and significantly correlated with extroversion (H1-2) and agreeableness (H1-3), but not significantly interrelated with conscientiousness (H1-1) and neuroticism (H14). The second hypothesis was also accepted: job happiness is positively and significantly interrelated with career success (H2). The relationship between extroversion and agreeableness and job happiness in this paper agrees with other studies to some extent [8,24-26]. Job happiness has a significantly negative relationship with neuroticism and a positively significant relationship with openness to experience, conscientiousness, and extroversion (in self-report conditions) [25]. Chamorro-Premuzic et al. [24] find a relationship between job happiness and neuroticism, agreeableness, extroversion, and conscientiousness.



**Fig. 2. Final and revised structural model of research**

Furnham and Christoforou [26] discover a relationship between job happiness and extroversion and neuroticism. Bahiraei et al. [8] observe the correlation between job happiness and extroversion and neuroticism. In the present study, at the simple correlative level (Table 1), there is a significant correlation between job happiness and extroversion, and agreeableness. For more discussion about obtained relationships between big five personality factors and job happiness in this research, it is necessary to focus on the relationships obtained through structural equation modeling.

This study and other related studies show non-homogeneous relationships between some of the big five factors (such as neuroticism, or extroversion) and job happiness, despite being cited in all studies, perhaps primarily due to the diversity of subjects and instruments used (many studies used Oxford happiness questionnaire) and the assessment context of the relationship between the big five factors with job happiness had been assessed. In many circumstances, positive emotion experiences such as happiness depends on the context in which happiness is studied [17,18]. In workplaces, the affective capital of happiness can be measured more accurately if occupational experiences and incidences are concerned [17]. Accordingly, in the present study, happiness is conceptually investigated with regard to psychosocial and spiritual experiences during work. To explain the relationship between job happiness and three factors of openness to experience, extroversion, and agreeableness, the role of these factors should be addressed. According to Table 1, job happiness has a stronger relationship with extroversion (0.31) relative to openness to experience and agreeableness (0.18). Extrovert people tend more likely to have extensive relationships with their surroundings, and to make extensive social bonds, which are supported by other people and satisfy their basic need for active and continuous interaction. This satisfaction leads to happiness at workplace.

Moreover, extroverts are sociable people with positive emotions that create a sense of comfort and positive emotion in others, and thus receive positive feedback from their surrounding people, which can create increased job happiness in them [4,12].

As concerns the relationship between agreeableness and job happiness, agreeable people compromise and consider problems as opportunities for adaptation and development, and feel happy when they pursue adaptation and development [24,36]. This attitude gradually increases their capabilities and capacity for compromise, and the pretext for happiness. People with openness to experience often seek new experiences, and if they gain experience during work, their basic desire is satisfied and feel happiness [34]. In this study, there is no significant relationship between job happiness and conscientiousness or neuroticism, which may have various reasons. Given that the mean score of neuroticism is less than that of other four personality factors, it is probably not significant statistically in a way that causes a negative and significant relationship with job happiness as reported in previous studies [8,24-26]. On the other hand, lack of a significant relationship between conscientiousness and job happiness may be attributed to the fact that conscientious people do not involve their emotions in work processes, and they tend to be purposeful and success-oriented [24,36].

The second study hypothesis, regarding positive relationship between job happiness and career success is confirmed. This was in line with results obtained by Bohem and Lyubomirsky [35] and Golparvar and Abedinin [17]. According to affective spillover approach, depending on the situation, general positive emotions can potentially provoke specific positive emotions (same as career success that is partly based on positive emotions experienced during work). When a person feels mentally (cognitively and emotionally) happy because of process of

affective facilitation, positive and situation-dependent emotions are more easily experienced [17]. Thus, job happiness can be considered a dimension of affective capital, which provokes several work-related emotions. Accordingly, the relationship between job happiness and job success can be related to general positive affective spillover in workplace. The last study hypothesis concerning structural relationship between the big five personality factors and job happiness (as a mediator variable) and career success suggests that job happiness is a mediating variable in the direct relationships between agreeableness and career success and also conscientiousness has a direct relationship with career success.

The direct relationship between conscientiousness and career success in the final structural model per se confirms the view that conscientious people are perfectionists in their efforts to achieve their predetermined work and life plans and a complete success is predominant for them [5,6]. In fact, according to results, when feeling of success is at a moderate level (mean career success of 3.09 reported in Table 1 in a 5-point scale suggest moderate level of career success in study subjects), regardless of happiness, conscientiousness can weaken feeling of career success in people. Perhaps, this is because in their endeavor to achieve work objectives, conscientious people primarily focus on their perfectionist goals without any attention to their own emotions, and also are not happy with moderate levels of success. This can eliminate the role of job happiness and other positive affective-based variables and cause a negative relationship between conscientiousness and career success.

However, agreeableness as one of the big five personality factors, unlike conscientiousness, reinforces career success through job happiness. Despite stronger relationship between extroversion and job happiness, agreeableness affect career success through job happiness in the final structural model. This is because relationships are multilayered in structural model, and hence change is probable. According to the final structural model, agreeableness can be considered as an important factor for feeling happiness in industrial workplaces perhaps because coordinated and flexible relationship with others is essential in industrial workplaces for people to perform their duties. Coordination and flexibility are prominent features in agreeableness [8,9]. Thus, because of less

challenging and flexible relationships, agreeable people are well-coordinated with others and feel happy through feeling of support and positive relationships. This is followed by positive emotions due to happiness spillover into career success, and thus provides the context for receiving promotion and other external factors (objective career success) and feeling of satisfaction (subjective career success).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In general, the present study reveals that agreeableness can indirectly increase rate of career success through job happiness and conscientiousness can directly increase rate of career success. These findings put forward suggestions to developing countries, such as Iran. First, agreeableness has relatively high positive impact on job happiness and second, conscientiousness has high positive impact on career success. Therefore, in practical terms, it is recommended that industrial organizations consider agreeableness as a positive personality trait at the time of employing workforce, that can increase rate of job happiness and success. Furthermore, they should not emphasize perfectionist conscientiousness if they wish to have employees with a balanced feeling of success. Interested researchers should conduct similar studies in non-industrial settings, so that a more comprehensive knowledge can be attained in relation to the big five personality factors for job happiness and career success. Finally, this study is limited in terms of location scope. Therefore, these results should cautiously be generalized to other locations. Also, this correlational study cannot examine cause and effect relationship same as experimental studies.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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