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## Employee achievement orientations and personality as predictors of job satisfaction facets



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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the incremental value of achievement orientations (Mastery-Approach; Mastery-Avoid; Performance-Approach; Performance-Avoid), above Extraversion and Neuroticism, in predicting two different types of satisfaction outcomes; expectation-based-job-satisfaction (EX-JS) and satisfaction-with-one's-own-job-performance (P-JS). Using structural equation modelling, data from 242 UK government body employees showed that only Extraversion shared a (positive) relationship with EX-JS. Whereas, the strongest relations with P-JS were found for Neuroticism and Mastery-Approach with both sharing positive relationships with this satisfaction outcome. Analyses indicated that Mastery-Approach accounted for unique variance in P-JS beyond Extraversion and Neuroticism. Findings show that there is scope for experiences of satisfaction at work to be traced to stable approach competence specific motivational tendencies.

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### 1. Introduction

Achievement Goal Theory (Dweck, 1986) proposes that individuals engage in behaviour with a competence-specific purpose. This purpose, an achievement orientation, thus describes the pattern of cognition and action that results from pursuing various goals (DeShon & Gillespie, 2005). These orientations have been theorised to reflect dispositional, trait-like motivational characteristics (Nicholls, 1989) that are distinct from basic personality traits (Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007). Importantly, they have also been found to relate to workplace outcomes such as learning, training and job performance (Payne et al., 2007; Steele-Johnson, Beaugard, Hoover, & Schmidt, 2000). In the present study, we investigate the extent to which an employee's achievement orientation may also predict different forms of satisfaction in the workplace, beyond that of two major personality traits already known to impact satisfaction – Extraversion and Neuroticism.

#### 1.1. Satisfaction in the workplace

Job satisfaction is typically conceptualised as a multidimensional construct encompassing satisfaction with one's manager, peers, pay, promotional opportunities, job security and company

policy (Churchill, Ford, & Walker, 1979). Personality taxonomies have provided vital support for the role of dispositions in job satisfaction (see Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2000; Furnham, Petrides, Jackson, & Cotter, 2002; Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002). The current research addresses dispositional relations not to global job satisfaction but to two important conceptual distinctions, that of expectation-based-job-satisfaction (EX-JS), and, satisfaction-with-one's-own-job-performance (P-JS). Inclusion of these distinct forms of job satisfaction allows for exploration of multiple facets of job satisfaction, which, could be differentially affected by personality and/or achievement orientations. The current satisfaction facets relating to 'expectations' and 'own performance' are investigated given theoretical relevance to achievement orientations, as described below. EX-JS is concerned with an employee's satisfaction in relation to whether they feel their job expectations are being fulfilled in their current position and "emphasises the match between expectations and perceived reality for aspects of the job taken as a whole" (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Conley, 1991, p. 45). Research has shown such satisfaction to negatively relate to role conflict (Bacharach et al., 1991) and role overload (Bacharach & Mitchell, 1982). EX-JS is useful in assessing and understanding the extent to which employee dispositions might differentially influence attitudes towards job expectations currently being met. EX-JS is thus an externally referenced measure of satisfaction in the workplace.

The second outcome of interest, P-JS (see Steele-Johnson, Heintz, & Miller, 2008), concerns the extent to which an individual

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is content with their own performance. P-JS is a more self-referential measure of satisfaction in the workplace compared to EX-JS. Measures of P-JS have been previously used in laboratory settings with P-JS often increasing in a linear fashion during the course of a laboratory task and higher P-JS being reported under low, relative to high, cognitive load conditions (Steele-Johnson et al., 2000). There is no evident research which has addressed possible relationships between satisfaction with one's own performance and dispositional tendencies within an organisational framework. By considering these two specific satisfaction outcomes, one can take into account the possible non-similarity of expectations satisfaction versus performance judgment satisfaction across individual personality and achievement characteristics.

### 1.2. Extraversion and Neuroticism, and satisfaction at work

In examining the relation between achievement orientations and job satisfaction, it is important to consider incremental validity beyond broad aspects of personality that are already known to predict this outcome. Extraversion and Neuroticism – the 'Big Two' personality traits that appear in most major personality taxonomies – play significant roles in explaining job satisfaction (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Indeed, in their influential review of personality and significant life outcomes, Ozer and Benet-Martinez (2006) note that, while other traits are more salient predictors of "how well one does at work", Extraversion and Neuroticism are the most salient predictors of "how one feels about work". Extraversion positively relates, and Neuroticism negatively relates, to global satisfaction at work (Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2000; Furnham et al., 2002; Judge & Bono, 2001; Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999). Judge et al. (2002) estimated true score correlations with job satisfaction of  $-.29$  for Neuroticism and  $.25$  for Extraversion, generalising across studies. These observations are highly consistent with findings in the subjective well-being literature that Extraversion positively relates, and Neuroticism negatively relates, to overall satisfaction with life (e.g., DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). A comprehensive theoretical explanation for these associations is currently lacking, however these associations are potentially explained by the susceptibility of extraverts to positive affective experiences and of highly-neurotic individuals to negative affective experiences (Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991; Watson, Weise, Vaidya & Tellegen, 1999). Our aim in this study is not to evaluate a particular theory of the relation between personality and job satisfaction, but rather to examine the predictive validity of achievement orientation above and beyond personality variables that have a known link with job satisfaction. For our first hypotheses, we predict that the associations of Extraversion and Neuroticism with global job satisfaction will generalise to the more specific conceptualisations of job satisfaction, EX-JS and P-JS.

**Hypothesis 1.** Extraversion is positively related, whereas Neuroticism is negatively related, to EX-JS.

**Hypothesis 2.** Extraversion is positively related, whereas Neuroticism is negatively related, to P-JS.

### 1.3. Employee achievement orientations and satisfaction at work

Dweck (1986) proposed individuals can be mastery or performance orientated; those with a mastery-orientation are typically concerned with developing their competence and acquiring new skills; those with a performance-orientation are focused on the demonstration and verification of their ability (Elliot & Dweck,

1988). Dweck (1986) suggested that mastery-oriented individuals tend to hold an incremental theory reflecting beliefs that self-attributes such as intelligence and skills are developable entities. Whereas, performance-orientated individuals tend to believe that self-attributes are fixed entities (Dweck, 1999; VandeWalle, 2003). Since this two-factor conceptualisation, both orientations have been suggested to vary in motivational direction. Performance-orientated individuals can be motivated either to demonstrate superior competence relative to others (Performance-Approach), or to avoid demonstrating inferior competence relative to others (Performance-Avoid) (Elliot, 1999). Mastery-orientated individuals are assumed to be motivated to either focus on the development of competence through task mastery (Mastery-Approach) or to strive to avoid deterioration/leaving the task incomplete (Mastery-Avoid) (Baranik, Barron, & Finney, 2007; Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Although there is a relative paucity of research directly addressing the achievement orientation-job satisfaction relationship, Joo and Park (2010) found performance-orientation predicted career satisfaction (a workplace-satisfaction variable) but no relations for mastery-orientation. Janssen and Van Yperen (2004), and Van Yperen and Janssen (2002) found a positive correlation between a mastery-orientation, but no relation for performance-orientation, and global job satisfaction. These researchers only examined the original two-factor (mastery/performance) framework without considering motivational directions (approach/avoid). Furthermore, these researchers examined satisfaction at the global level. Some job characteristics encompassed at this level may not be equally important to individuals with different achievement orientations. Considering the dimensions of EX-JS and P-JS addresses this; how achievement orientations might differentially relate to satisfaction concerned with ones 'job expectations' (EX-JS) compared to a more self-orientated satisfaction dimension (P-JS), is now outlined.

Mastery-Approach has been found to beneficially relate to intrinsic interest in learning and training (Fisher & Ford, 1998), higher worker self-efficacy (Phillips & Gully, 1997) and job performance (Payne et al., 2007). With an incremental view on skill development, Mastery-Approach individuals view the exertion of effort (in the pursuit of competence development) as an indication of success in itself, allowing one to gain enjoyment from their efforts (Duda, 2001; Dweck, 1999; Elliot, 1999). As such, it is expected that such individuals will be disposed to experience high self-referential satisfaction (P-JS), and, given their approach like temperament, to make more positive judgments of expectation fulfilment (EX-JS).

Mastery-Avoid has been found to be associated with less adaptive outcomes including worry and test anxiety (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Mastery-Avoid, like Mastery-Approach, stems from the perception that skills are malleable (incremental view) and predominantly under one's control (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Mastery-Avoid individuals can also be considered to view the maintenance of their competence (and ultimately their own performance) to result from their exertion of effort (Elliot & McGregor, 2001) suggesting Mastery-Avoid individuals would be likely to perceive their own exerted effort as indicative of success. This encourages the perception that Mastery-Avoid individuals would score high on a self-referential satisfaction variable like P-JS. However, with the observed associations between Mastery-Avoid and less affective outcomes, and with other research finding theoretically meaningful links between negative affectivity and avoidance like temperaments (Elliot & Thrash, 2002), one might expect that the avoidance nature of this dimension would generally contribute to the tendency to have more diminished levels of satisfaction (at a less self-oriented level) when thinking about expectations being met at work (EX-JS).

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