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## Empirical paper

# Personality traits, individual innovativeness and satisfaction with life

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### ABSTRACT

There is plenty of research on personality traits that explains its impact on human behaviors in different situations. However, there is sparse research available in the literature that explains how does personality traits affect innovativeness among individuals and satisfaction with life perceptions (subjective wellbeing). The current study proposes and empirically examines a conceptual model that addresses this important gap in the body of knowledge. Famous Big-Five personality traits theory is used to explain this phenomenon in this research. Data is collected from 613 students enrolled in different executive, master and PhD level programs in different universities of Pakistan. The study found positive influence of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience on individual innovativeness and satisfaction with life perceptions. Neuroticism is found to be negatively related to individual innovativeness and satisfaction with life perceptions. Finally, the study noted a positive association between individual innovativeness and perception with life. The applications and implications of this research are discussed in details.

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## Introduction

The theory of personality traits postulates that people naturally deal with different situations and interact with their environment in different ways. From a management perspective, information about an individual's personality can provide valuable information pertaining to what is the best method of communicating with them and what types of jobs and tasks they are most suitable for. However, personality traits may also be key indicators of other facets of an individual's life,

including innovativeness (Ahmed, 1998; Eastman, Eastman, & Tolson, 2001; Hsieh, Hsieh, & Wang, 2011) and satisfaction with life (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999; Loewe, Bagherzadeh, Araya-Castillo, Thieme, & Batista-Foguet, 2014; Lounsbury et al., 2003; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997).

Existing literature on the influence of personality traits on innovativeness focuses primarily on employees' innovation performance (Buchanan, 1998; Hsieh et al., 2011) or an individual's propensity to accept innovative new products (Yi, Fiedler, & Park, 2006). However, very few studies have studied innovativeness in the context of an individual's willingness develop new ideas and experience new things. Even fewer studies have addressed its influence on satisfaction with life, despite

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innovativeness being a significant predictor of satisfaction with life (Nimrod, 2008). This study aims to bridge this gap using the Individual Innovativeness (II) instrument developed by Hurt, Joseph, and Cook (2013).

Furthermore, very few studies have considered the mechanisms and conditions through which personality traits improve an individual's perceived satisfaction with life. However, various studies indicate that there may be process variables underlying the relationship between personality traits and satisfaction with life (Furler, Gomez, & Grob, 2013; Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2004; Hsieh et al., 2011), although these have been scarcely studied. To address this, Heller et al. (2004) have called for more complex theoretical models that synthesize these process variables. Similarly, Nimrod and Kleiber (2007) have called for an examination of the role of personality, among other factors, in the relationship between innovativeness and satisfaction with life.

In line with these recommendations, this study posits that individual innovativeness is an antecedent of life satisfaction. That is, individuals with personality traits that are conducive of innovativeness would be more likely to perceive their lives as fulfilling, particularly in terms of perceived quality of family life, career, and health (Loewe et al., 2014). This occurs because innovative individuals enjoy doing something new and seek challenges, which serve to broaden and deepen their sense of meaning in life (Nimrod & Kleiber, 2007). By investigating the role of innovativeness in an individual's perception of satisfaction with life, this research aims to expand existing understanding beyond 'what' personality traits are associated with life satisfaction to 'why' individuals possessing these personality traits perceive their lives as more satisfying. In doing so, it is hoped that this study will stimulate research beyond the Big Five personality traits and toward the attitudes and behaviors that directly influence an individual's satisfaction with life.

## Literature review

### The 'Big Five' personality traits

Although a number of popular models of personality traits continue to influence contemporary research (Jung, 1971; Kirton & De Ciantis, 1986), the Five Factor Model (the 'Big Five') proposed by McCrae and Costa Jr (1999) is the most widely used and recognized model today (Rossberger, 2014). It builds upon the 35 bipolar clusters of terms related to personality traits developed by Cattell (1943) and the classic Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) by adding an important fifth personality trait, namely neuroticism or emotional stability, which is a core domain predictive of depression and anxiety disorders. A brief description of the Big Five traits is provided below (Rossberger, 2014):

- **Extraversion:** extent to which individuals engage with the external world and experience enthusiasm and other positive emotions.
- **Agreeableness:** extent to which individuals value cooperation and social harmony, honesty, decency, and trustworthi-

ness. Agreeable individuals also tend to have an optimistic view of human nature.

- **Conscientiousness:** extent to which individuals value planning, possess the quality of persistence, and are achievement-oriented.
- **Neuroticism:** extent to which individuals experience negative feelings and their tendency to emotionally overreact.
- **Openness to Experience:** extent to which individuals exhibit intellectual curiosity, self-awareness, and individualism/nonconformance.

Furthermore, a number of 'mini-markers' of each personality trait have been defined and studied, such as 'talkative' for Extraversion, 'sympathetic' for Agreeableness, 'disorganized' (reverse-coded) for Conscientiousness, 'temperamental' for Neuroticism, and 'imaginative' for Openness to Experience (Bozionelos, Bozionelos, Polychroniou, & Kostopoulos, 2014; Weele, 2013). Similarly, McCrae and Terracciano (2005) identified a set of facets or features for each of the Big Five personality traits based on data from 50 cultures. Despite claims about the universality of the Big Five personality traits, some studies have criticized the lack of conceptual validation (Waller & Ben-Porath, 1987) and questionable conceptual and methodological assumptions (Block, 1995) of the model. However, other extensive studies have shown that the model comprehensively subsumes nearly all English trait adjectives (Goldberg, 1990) and is stable across cultures (McCrae & Terracciano, 2005). Accordingly, the Big Five model was used to analyze individual personality traits in this study.

### Individual innovativeness

Innovativeness may be defined as "the degree to which an individual is relatively earlier in adopting an innovation than other members of his system" (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971), where "relatively earlier" refers to actual, rather than perceived, time of adoption. Individual innovativeness is a persistent trait or disposition that determines how an individual perceives and reacts to an innovation (Yi et al., 2006), where a high level of individual innovativeness would yield a more positive reaction. Individual innovativeness is often studied in the context of diffusion of innovation, particularly relating to consumers and their willingness to adopt innovative new products (Midgley & Dowling, 1978) and the propensity of organizational members to seek external knowledge (Tortoriello, 2006). However, this study adopts a more generalized perspective of individual innovativeness that affects how an individual perceives and reacts to new ideas, inventions, or ways of doing things as well as the individual's propensity to improvise, generate original ideas, and accept challenges (Hurt, Joseph, & Cook, 1977). This would allow for an authentic investigation of the influence of innovativeness on an individual's satisfaction with life.

### Satisfaction with life

The conceptualizations of satisfaction with life typically diverge into two streams: the 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' approaches (Loewe et al., 2014). The 'bottom-up' perspective views an individual's overall satisfaction with life as the

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