

# Occupation as a Personal Project System: Application of the Ontological Well-Being Concept to Workplace

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**Abstract** In this research, factor structure of the Occupational Project Scale (OPS) was investigated to determine whether the four-factor structure (e.g., regret, activation, nothingness, and hope) obtained from the research by O. F. Simsek and E. Kocayoruk (2010, Unpublished manuscript) would be validated in the context of workplace. Additional relationships between this new construct and personality, general affect, and job satisfaction were then computed for construct validity. The second aim of the present research was to provide support that the evaluations of occupational projects mediate the relationships between general affect, affect in the workplace, and job satisfaction. Consequently, structural relations among the constructs were tested using structural equation modeling. The results confirmed the four-factor structure and showed that this construct mediated the relationship between affect variables (general mood and affect in the workplace) and job satisfaction. The results are discussed in the context of career counseling.

**Keywords** Job satisfaction · Affect · Well-being · Occupational project

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Affect and Job Satisfaction

About a century ago, Freud (1955) indicated that love and work are the cornerstones of humanness. Modern life, as Freud foresees, is a collection of personal attachments to

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meaningful others and occupational life. Indeed, research showed that there are clear spillover effects between these two areas, indicating that satisfaction in the workplace affects people's ongoing life and life satisfaction (Brief and Weiss 2002; Heller et al. 2002; Judge and Illies 2004). Recent efforts in the search for the causes of job satisfaction focus on the dispositional characteristics of individuals such as personality and affect (Illies and Judge 2003; Judge and Illies 2004; Judge and Larsen 2001). Research based on dispositional approach indicates that these variables have close connections to the job satisfaction of employees. When coupled with genetic factors' influence on job satisfaction (Arvey et al. 1989), this paradigm seeks to understand the basic and robust determinants of employees' well-being.

It is known that affective dispositions of employees are more related to job satisfaction than personality characteristics (Judge and Larsen 2001; Kaplan et al. 2009). Research into the relationship between affect and job satisfaction is based on the two-dimensional model of positive and negative affect (PA, NA; Tellegen et al. 1999; Watson and Tellegen 1985). According to this unipolar affectivity approach, the affective reactions of individuals are found to load two orthogonal factors of valenced emotional activation and engagement. Moreover, it is indicated that the associations between these affective dispositions and job satisfaction could be stronger than it appears. According to Brief (1998), Brief and Weiss (2002), for example, most of the job satisfaction measures used in research have cognitive elements, although job satisfaction consists of both cognitive and affective dimensions, which reduces the correlations between affect and job satisfaction.

Some argue that affect in the workplace should also be considered in the research on job satisfaction (Judge and Larsen 2001). It is apparent that affective dispositions individuals have will be highly influential in their affectivity in job. Judge and Larsen (2001) introduce the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) nexus, by which job satisfaction is thought of as a function of PA and NA. This model explains individual differences in emotional reactions to work conditions and the modulation of affective responses that people experience in the workplace. Similarly, Brief and Weiss (2002) indicate that affective dispositions of individuals will have a remarkable influence on the degree of pleasure derived from the job. According to the authors, one way in which temperaments influence job satisfaction is through mood at work.

Overall, there is an agreement that affect, whether in general or specifically at work, has remarkable influences on job satisfaction. The common opinion is that, according to dispositional approach to job satisfaction, affective dispositions of individuals make them prone to perceiving experiences or stimuli related to job in a certain way (Brief et al. 1995; Brief and Weiss 2002; Judge and Larsen 2001; Levin and Stokes 1989). That is, individuals with high NA will have a tendency to focus on negative and unpleasant characteristics of the job as well as themselves and the world, whereas individuals with high PA will exhibit high levels of energy and be optimistic about their job circumstances.

## 1.2 Job as a Personal Project System

It is clear that the research based on dispositional approach has been proved that affect is one of the most important causal variables concerning job satisfaction. Research by Tellegen et al. (1988) indicated that genetic factors have remarkable influence on both PA and NA. Adaptation theory of well-being, similarly, indicates that people have a set point of happiness and even after highly positive or negative life events quickly return to their neutral levels of affect (Brickman et al. 1978; Diener et al. 2006). Moreover, Arvey et al. (1989) showed that job satisfaction has a genetic component. It is plausible to argue, then,

that it is hard to make a progress in increasing job satisfaction levels of employees when it is considered as a function of PA and NA, which are both highly resistant to change. Discovering possible mediators between affective dispositions and job satisfaction will add to understanding and to the interventions concerning job satisfaction. The mediatory variables, however, in this relationship have been largely unacknowledged by research, in addition to the lack of exploration of ways through which causal model building may be possible (Brief and Weiss 2002; Judge and Larsen 2001).

Judge and Larsen (2001) argue that personal goals and related constructs might be considered as important mediators between affect and job satisfaction, which is ignored in the research on job satisfaction (Pomaki et al. 2004). Indeed, an examination of the recent reviews and empirical research on the relationship between affect and job satisfaction reveals two general mechanisms: First, the affective systems of the individuals have an impact on the pursuit of personal goals (Judge and Larsen 2001; Kaplan et al. 2009; Pomaki et al. 2004; Wright et al. 2007), and second, the pursuit or accomplishment of personal or self-concordant goals bring about positive attitudes toward job (Judge et al. 2005; Maier and Brunstein 2001; Pomaki et al. 2004; Pomaki et al. 2009).

Personal goals has been mainly considered as “future-oriented representations of what individuals are striving for” (Maier and Brunstein 2001, p. 1034) in job satisfaction research. Simsek (2009), however, has introduced a new construct, ontological well-being (OWB), as a collection of affective and cognitive evaluations of one’s life project coupled with a whole-time perspective, which has important implications for the research on job satisfaction. Based on the concept of personal goals, this new conceptualization acknowledges life as a personal project, which is evaluated by individuals themselves in terms of past, present, and future dimensions. This framework could easily be transformed into research on job attitudes so that one’s occupation is considered as a personal project that could only be evaluated by taking into account both the past and the present conditions of this personal enterprise, in addition to the future. Moreover, the OWB construct reflects a higher-order conceptualization of personal goals unifying all personal goals or projects.

It is evident that jobs have personal/private meanings for each individual (Maier and Brunstein 2001). When considered in the context of workplace, OWB, in this respect, brings about the idea that occupation as a personal project may be evaluated according to the standards defined by the employees themselves. Although job satisfaction (well-being in the workplace) has been researched for possible exogenous variables, the personal meanings attached to it have attracted less attention from the researchers.

This new conceptualization, in accordance with the OWB concept, represents a constructivist view to workplace since it incorporates narrative components of occupational history with the whole-time perspective. Such an outlook to occupation is highly consistent with the recent conceptualizations of career construction which insists that professional life is a construction of career consisting of personal histories or narratives (Young and Collin 2004; Young and Valach 2004). Savickas et al. (2009) similarly state that individuals’ life should be regarded as life trajectories which include progressive designing and building their lives including their work careers. This constructivist paradigm seeks to understand individuals’ private self-constructing process as a system of the past, present, and future subjective identities, which has critical implications for career (Guichard 2009).

Thus, once OWB is acknowledged as a job-related construct, the concept of occupational project (OP) seems to be a plausible mediator between affective states and job satisfaction. Further, there is no research that has attempted to integrate affective dispositions with the broader literature on goals and job satisfaction.

The first aim of the present research is to validate the Occupational Project Scale (OPS) as a modified version of the Life Project Scale (LPS; O. F. Simsek and E. Kocayoruk, 2010, Unpublished manuscript) which has four factors. The first factor, 'Nothingness', comprised of 6 affect adjectives such as aimless, lost, empty, and anxious. The second factor, 'hope', consisted of six adjectives such as forward-looking, confident, ambitious, and hopeful. The third factor, 'regret', included both negative adjectives such as regretful, guilty, and disappointed, and positive, such as proud and satisfied. The last factor, 'activation', consisted of 5 adjectives all of which were positive except for the adjective 'tired'. Thus, the factor structure of the OPS was investigated to determine whether this four-factor structure (e.g., *regret*, *activation*, *nothingness*, and *hope*) derived from the study of Şimşek and Kocayörük would be validated.

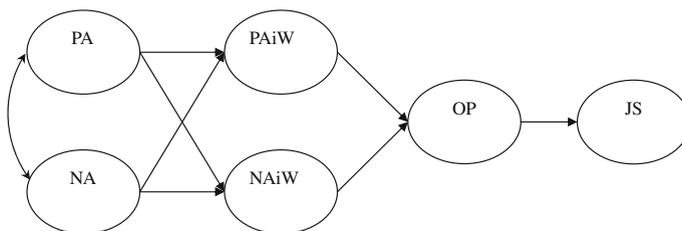
Additional relationships between this new construct and personality, affect, and job satisfaction were then computed for construct validity. It was expected that the scores on the OPS would be positively correlated with both extrinsic and intrinsic job satisfaction scores. Additionally, the OPS scores were expected to be associated with general affect and personality since past research (Illies and Judge 2003; Judge and Illies 2004; Judge and Larsen 2001) has shown that both of these enduring characteristics have an effect on job related well-being. Specifically, the OPS scores were expected to be correlated positively with all personality dimensions except for neuroticism.

The second aim is to provide support that the evaluations of OP mediate the relationships between general affect, affect in the workplace and job satisfaction. Consequently, structural relations among the variables were tested using structural equation modeling. This model is presented in Fig. 1. According to this model, general affectivity, or mood, is the main resource contributing to employees' affective experiences in the workplace. High positive and low negative emotional experiences in the workplace, on the other hand, bring about and contribute to the evaluation of OP, which, in turn, resulted in higher levels of job satisfaction.

## 2 Method

### 2.1 Participants

The first two groups, from Ankara, consisted of public sector workers who were employed as lower and middle level managers in one of the ministries of Turkey and private sector software and electronics engineers, respectively. Both participants in each group were not



**Fig. 1** Conceptual diagram of the structural equation model. *PA* positive affect, *NA* negative affect, *PAiW* positive affect in the workplace, *NAiW* negative affect in the workplace, *OP* occupational project, *JS* job satisfaction

only the ones attending management and organization certificate program but also pursuing a career in the defense industry. The questionnaires were distributed at the beginning of the certificate program in different four periods and were collected at the end of the program. In addition when the questionnaires were distributed it was mentioned that the research was an independent and a private one. The final group consisted of academicians from one private and one state university in Izmir. Participants were the members of faculties of business and they had positions as research assistants and professors. The questionnaires were distributed and collected via e-mail. All the participants in each group were permanent and long-term contracted employees.

Three hundred one questionnaires were gathered from the population (the population size is 1.250). The respond rate of the e-mailed participants was about 35%. The demographic data were as follows; 117 females, 184 males; age average 40.67 (SD = 8.35); average work experience 14.28 (SD = 8.59); 110 private sector employees, 191 public sector employees. The sample included 43 high school graduates, 141 bachelor degree and 117 postgraduate degree holders from a variety of universities. 105 of the population were single whereas 196 were married.

## 2.2 Measures

### 2.2.1 *The Occupational Project Scale (OPS)*

The OPS is an adapted version of the LPS (O. F. Simsek and E. Kocayoruk, 2010, Unpublished manuscript), which is developed for measuring employee's evaluation of their OPs with the past, present, and future parts. The OPS is thus created for the assessment of one's affective evaluation of whole occupational life. O. F. Simsek and E. Kocayoruk (2010, Unpublished manuscript) found that the LPS had four factors, two of which (*activation* and *nothingness*) represent present evaluations of life project while the other two (Regret and Hope) are indicators of the past (*regret*) and future (*hope*). Since the theory behind the two scales is the same, the items were not changed. Thus, the 24-item LPS were used but with changed instructions. The instruction of the scale was so formed that individuals reflect on their occupation as personal projects, and, then rate the intensity of their emotions elicited from such an outlook. In this regard, the following statement was included in the instruction: "Please consider your own occupational life as a personal project with past, present, and future aspects. Like all projects, your occupational project includes completed (the past), ongoing (the present), and prospective (the future) parts. What is expected from you is to rate the intensity of experiencing the emotions given when looking at these parts of your project". The phrase "When I look at my past/present/future)" was used to distinguish the three time dimensions and related affect adjectives. The OPS item ratings ranged from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely).

O. F. Simsek and E. Kocayoruk (2010, Unpublished manuscript) found that these factors accounted for 62% of the total variance with internal consistency estimates ranging from .82 to .87. Internal consistency estimates were stronger in the present study, ranging from .81 to .95.

### 2.2.2 *The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)*

PANAS (Watson et al. 1988) is established on two factors, PA & NA. These so called factors are believed to be the best indicators to define affect experience since most of the emotions can be grouped under these two factors. The scale consists of 10 affect adjectives

for each dimension such as excited and sad, respectively. Different scores can be obtained from the scale according to different time frames (moment, today, past few days, year, or general). The general time frame was used in the present research. Internal consistency was .88 and .87 for PA and NA, respectively. The adaptation of the scale to Turkish was made by Gençöz (2000). Consistent with the original study, the result of the factor analysis revealed two factors, accounting for 44% of the total variance. In the present study, internal consistency was .86 and .81 for PA and NA, respectively. The PANAS is assumed to be the widely recognized and used scale by most of the researchers in this area (Brief and Weiss 2002).

### 2.2.3 *The Big Five Inventory (BFI)*

The Big-Five Inventory (BFI): The 44-item BFI (Benet-Martinez and John 1998) was administered to assess five personality dimensions—Neuroticism (emotionally stable, not easily upset), Extraversion (talkative), Openness (curious about many different things), Agreeableness (helpful and unselfish with others), and Conscientiousness (a reliable worker). Ratings are indicated on a scale from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly) for each item. The scale was adapted by Sumer et al. (2005) who reported only Cronbach's Alpha reliabilities ranging from .64 to .77. Internal consistency estimates were found to be satisfactory (range = .67 to .81) in the present study.

### 2.2.4 *The Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ)*

The widely accepted and used “Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire” (MSQ) was developed by Weiss et al. (1967). The MSQ is a five-point Likert type scale where the respondents were requested to state their perceptions of different items on the scale using the following five categories: 5: Totally Satisfied, 4: Satisfied, 3: Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied, 2: Dissatisfied, 1: Totally Dissatisfied.

The MSQ measures intrinsic satisfaction, extrinsic satisfaction and general satisfaction. The questionnaire consists of 20 items. In the intrinsic satisfaction category, the items include activity, independence, variety, social status, moral values, job security, social service, responsibility, ability utilization, creativity, authority and achievement dimensions. In the extrinsic satisfaction category, the items include supervision-human relations, supervision-technical, company policy, compensation, career progress and recognition dimensions. General satisfaction is the sum of the intrinsic & extrinsic satisfaction dimensions (Feinstein and Vondrasek 2001:8). The MSQ is a widely recognized and trusted scale which highlights important components that comprise job satisfaction and has demonstrated satisfactory results and reliability values (Chen 2006; Feinstein and Vondrasek 2001; Hançer and George 2003; Lau and Chong 2002). The scale was adapted into Turkish by Baycan (1985) and was found to have satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = .77). Internal consistency was found to be .90 in the present study.

### 2.2.5 *Job-Related Affective Well-Being Schedule (JAWS)*

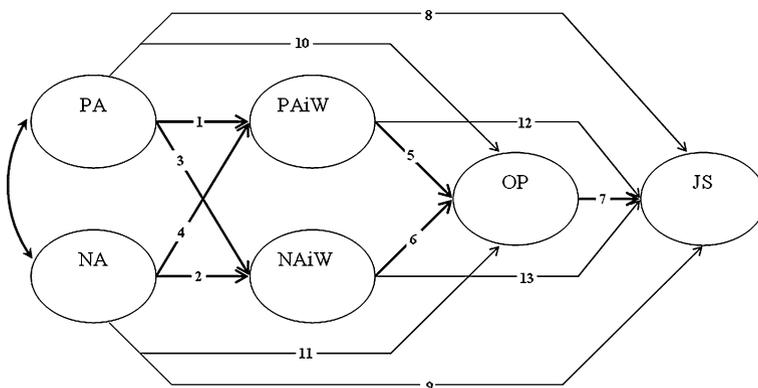
The JAWS was developed by Katwyk et al. (2000). The scale consists of 30 items, each of which represents different positive/negative emotions that a person can feel while working (e.g., “My job made me feel angry”, “My job made me feel excited”). The population is expected to indicate on a five point scale the degree to which each emotion is felt related to

specific aspects of work. Ratings are indicated on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (extremely often). The scale was translated into Turkish for the present study using back-translation procedure. Internal consistency estimates were found to be .95 and .94 for the positive and negative dimensions, respectively.

### 2.3 Data Analysis

After exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses of the items of the OPS, some validity estimates were represented by calculating the correlations of the OPS with job satisfaction as well as personality and general affect. Additional hierarchical regression analyses were computed to see whether the OPS accounts for unique variance in job satisfaction beyond that already captured by personality and general mood. Finally, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the models in the present study. SEM is a multivariate strategy including measurement and structural models. The Measurement model was created using parcels or total scores of sub-factors as observed variables. Item parceling is a method that normalizes the distribution of observed variables and increases the reliability of these indicators. Although there are different types of item parceling, the method used in this study creates relatively equivalent indicators by spreading “better” and “worse” items across different parcels. Indicators as parcels were created for each latent variable by rank-ordering items by the size of the item-total correlation and summing sets of items to obtain equivalent indicators for those constructs. Before the structural models are tested, the measurement model which is base for all the models should provide an acceptable fit to the data (Anderson and Gerbing 1988).

The structural model depicted in Fig. 1 was tested as a whole. However, this model assumes a set of mediation relationships among the variables. The nested models strategy suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was used to assess these nested models and thus supporting for the mediational relationships in the model. The model including all the direct effects between variables is outlined in Fig. 2. The tests of mediation were examined by showing whether there were differences among this partially mediated model and the variations of fully mediated models by deleting the paths 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 from the model, each of which takes the mediator effect of PA and NA in the workplace and OP into consideration.



**Fig. 2** The parameter specifications in the model tested

### 3 Results

#### 3.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis of the OPS

A principal-axis factor analysis (PFA) was implemented with Oblique rotation method by which the nature of the underlying structure can be understood. Since the correlations among the factors were expected to be moderate, Direct Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization method was used. When the two criteria were considered, the sample size was found to be adequate for factor analysis with the following statistics: the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .91 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was 5726.6 ( $p < .001$ ). The results of PFA yielded 4 factors with eigenvalues of greater than 1, which exactly match the original measurement model.

Examining the factor loadings in this analysis, however, indicated that the two items (guilty and incompetent) included in the regret factor in O. F. Simsek and E. Kocayoruk (2010, Unpublished manuscript) had cross-loadings and were thus eliminated from the analysis. The elimination of these items resulted in again four factors perfectly consistent with the original factor structure.

The first factor (*hope*) contained 6 items referring to the evaluation of future dimension of OP, accounting for 43% of the variance. The second factor (*nothingness*) also consisted of 6 items, reflecting evaluation of the present dimension of occupational project with feelings such as aimlessness, helplessness, emptiness, and anxiety. This factor accounted for 16% of the variance. The third factor (*regret*), consisting of 5 adjectives such as regret, feeling upset, and pride accounted for 6% of the variance and called activation. The last factor (*activation*) consisted of 5 items such as feeling energetic, excited, and drained, accounting for additional 6% of the variance. This four-factor structure, accounting for 71% of the variance, and the item factor loadings are presented on Table 1.

Corrected item total correlations ranged from .84 to .90 for hope, from .49 to .81 for nothingness, from .54 to .64 for regret, from .42 to .85 for activation, and from .27 to .77 for the whole scale.

The correlations among the factors ranged from .34 to .65, showing that the factors are weakly or moderately correlated with each other. The strongest correlation was between activation and hope, and the weakest between hope and nothingness, while the correlation between hope and regret was .45, between nothingness and regret, .54, between nothingness and activation, .50, and between regret and activation, .55.

#### 3.2 Confirmatory Factor Analyses of the OPS

A competing models strategy was used by testing the factor structure obtained in this study against the original factor structure since there existed inconsistency between them. Additionally, correlated and uncorrelated-factor models were tested. Consequently, four models were tested: a priori correlated, a priori uncorrelated, empirical correlated, and empirical uncorrelated. Using Lisrel 8.5 (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1993). Several goodness of fit statistics were used, including the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio, the comparative fit index (CFI), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and incremental fit index (IFI).

Goodness of fit statistics represented on Table 2 show that both uncorrelated models deteriorated the fit. When it comes to the original/a priori correlated and the empirical correlated models, it is clear that the elimination of the two items decreased the chi-square value and resulted in a better model. The chi-square difference test (82.84: 43,  $p < .01$ ),

**Table 1** Factor loadings of the items of OPS

Item/Factor	<i>H</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Hope (H)</i>				
Forward-Looking	<b>.914</b>	.081	.041	.031
Confident	<b>.897</b>	.072	.034	.027
Ambitious	<b>.892</b>	.091	.021	.044
Strong	<b>.869</b>	.053	.043	.062
Hopeful	<b>.859</b>	.083	.034	.052
Courageous	<b>.849</b>	.062	.032	.064
<i>Nothingness (N)</i>				
Empty	.051	<b>.832</b>	.082	.011
Irresponsible	.042	<b>.724</b>	.045	.072
Helpless	.018	<b>.673</b>	.205	.012
Anxious	.063	<b>.658</b>	.055	.036
Lost	.043	<b>.650</b>	.058	.337
Aimless	.065	<b>.569</b>	.026	.334
<i>Regret (R)</i>				
Regretful	.021	.202	<b>.752</b>	.031
Proud (rev.)	.012	.235	<b>.736</b>	.042
Disappointed	.042	.236	<b>.664</b>	.041
Upset	.012	.220	<b>.658</b>	.076
Satisfied (rev.)	.013	.265	<b>.636</b>	.351
<i>Activation (A)</i>				
Enthusiastic	.019	.051	.011	<b>.772</b>
Motivated	.023	.012	.023	<b>.766</b>
Excited	.226	.023	.021	<b>.764</b>
Energetic	.224	.012	.061	<b>.755</b>
Drained (rev.)	.014	.269	.055	<b>.586</b>

Analysis is based on 301 observations. OPS item ratings range from 1 to 5. Likert scale anchors ranged from 1 = *very slightly or not at all* to 5 = *extremely*. Internal consistency estimates for the factors are  $\alpha = .96$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ,  $\alpha = .80$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ , respectively

indeed, showed that the empirical model is better than the original/a priori model obtained in O. F. Simsek and E. Kocayoruk (2010, Unpublished manuscript). Moreover, the lower values of Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and Expected Cross Validation Index (ECVI) for the modified four-factor correlated model also confirmed that this model was better than the other models.

### 3.3 Validity of the OPS

To test concurrent validity, the intercorrelations of the OPS to Big-Five personality dimensions, general affect, and job satisfaction were calculated. The results are presented on Table 3.

It is evident from the correlations that the OPS scores are either moderately or highly correlated with personality (ranged from .25 to .45), general affect (ranged from .43 to .49), and job satisfaction (ranged from .54 to .63). First, the correlations of the four factors with

**Table 2** The results of confirmatory factor analyses on the OPS

Indices	A priori correlated	A priori uncorrelated	Empirical correlated	Empirical uncorrelated
$\chi^2$	476.08	2,380.66	393.24	1,988.03
df	246	252	203	209
$\chi^2/df$	1.93	9.44	1.93	9.53
GFI	.99	.93	.99	.94
AGFI	.98	.92	.98	.92
RMSEA	.056	.17	.056	.17
CFI	.99	.92	.99	.93
AIC	584.08	2,476.66	493.24	2,076.03
ECVI	1.95	8.26	1.64	6.92

$N = 301$ . Confidence intervals for the RMSEA were as follows: A priori correlated = .048 – .063, a priori-uncorrelated = .16 – .17, empirical correlated = .048 – .064, empirical uncorrelated = .16 – .18; *GFI* goodness-of-fit index; *AGFI* adjusted goodness-of-fit index; *RMSEA* root-mean-square error of approximation; *CFI* comparative fit index; *AIC* akaike information criterion; *ECVI* expected cross-validation index

job satisfaction are strong, the highest of which is *activation*. Thus, it is clear that individuals' emotional evaluations of their occupation as a project extending from the past to the future have important connections to their job satisfaction. The correlations with affect, moreover, indicate that these evaluations are associated with experiencing NA and PA in general. Finally, the correlations with personality dimensions indicated that the evaluation of occupational project is associated with the personal dispositions of the individuals. Extraversion has the highest correlation with the OPS scores, whereas openness to experience has the lowest. The other dimensions of agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism have moderate correlations with the OPS scores.

To understand whether OPS scores account for unique variance in job satisfaction beyond that already captured by personality and affect, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. In these analyses, PA and NA scores of general affect were the first block, five personality dimensions were the second, and the four factors of OPS were the third. The analyses were repeated for the factor scores and the total scores on the MSQ.

The results of these hierarchical analyses are shown on Table 4. The regression analyses showed that the OPS scores accounted for more than 20% of the variance in job satisfaction scores for both total and sub-factor scores. About 30% of the variance was explained by the OPS scores in total and intrinsic job satisfaction. In both of the regression analyses, *activation* and *nothingness* as the present time evaluations were only significant predictors of the criterion variables when all variables were in the equation. When the extrinsic satisfaction scores are the criterion, only *activation* and *hope* sub-factors added to the variance which is explained by personality and affect.

### 3.4 Test of the Measurement Model

Before testing the measurement model, preliminary principal components analyses (PCA) were conducted on the items of each measure to understand their factor structure. The PCA on the PANAS was resulted in five factors having eigenvalues of 5.62, 2.92, 1.42, 1.10, and 1.02. However, the scree-plot suggested, as expected, two components, accounting for 43% of the variance. The same result was evident for the JAWS. A PCA on the schedule produced four factors having eigenvalues of 14.2, 3.3, 1.13, and 1.01. Scree-test indicated

**Table 3** Intercorrelations among variables

	OPsum	Reg.	Activ.	Nothing.	Hope	NA	PA	Ext.	Agre.	Consc.	Neu.	Open.	JS	InSat	ExtSat
OPsum	—														
Regret	.79**	—													
Activation	.84**	.52**	—												
Nothingness	.75**	.61**	.51**	—											
Hope	.80**	.43**	.65**	.34**	—										
NA	-.49**	-.39**	-.36**	-.48**	-.33**	—									
PA	.43**	.32**	.41**	.25**	.38**	-.28**	—								
Extraversion	.45**	.40**	.43**	.25**	.36**	-.37**	.49**	—							
Agreeableness	.34**	.31**	.22**	.36**	.20**	-.40**	.23**	.24**	—						
Conscientiousness	.31**	.31**	.20**	.30**	.19**	-.25**	.47**	.29**	.41**	—					
Neuroticism	-.37**	-.29**	-.32**	-.32**	-.27**	.59**	-.35**	-.35**	-.48**	-.33**	—				
Openness to experience	.25**	.17**	.25**	.12*	.23**	-.12*	.51**	.39**	.24**	.33**	-.22**	—			
JSsum	.63**	.46**	.62**	.47**	.46**	-.23**	.29**	.28**	.25**	.19**	-.20**	.11	—		
Intrinsic satisfaction	.62**	.47**	.60**	.48**	.44**	-.20**	.30**	.29**	.27**	.22**	-.17**	.15**	.96**	—	
Extrinsic satisfaction	.54**	.38**	.55**	.37**	.43**	-.25**	.21**	.22**	.18**	.11	-.22**	.03	.90**	.74**	—

N = 301; *OPsum* sum scores of the OPS, *NA* negative affect, *PA* positive affect, *JS* job satisfaction (Sum Scores of MSQ)

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 4** Hierarchical regression analyses with the OPS scores, general affect, personality, and job satisfaction

Criterion/predictors entered by step	$\beta 1$	$\beta 2$	$\beta 3$	$R$	$R^2$	Adj. $R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Job satisfaction							
Step 1				.323	.104	.098	–
PA	.241**	.211**	.059				
NA	–.158**	–.067	.114				
Step 2				.382	.146	.126	.042*
Extraversion		.165*	.018				
Neuroticism		.029	.037				
Openness		–.107	–.104				
Agreeableness		.168*	.110*				
Conscientiousness		.000	–.001				
Step 3				.669	.448	.427	.302**
Regret			.094				
Activation			.449**				
Nothingness			.164**				
Hope			.098				
Intrinsic satisfaction							
Step 1				.322	.104	.098	–
PA	.271**	.212**	.070				
NA	–.115*	–.032	.155*				
Step 2				.398	.158	.138	.054**
Extraversion		.176**	.037				
Neuroticism		.078	.082				
Openness		–.074	–.068				
Agreeableness		.201**	.138*				
Conscientiousness		.032	.023				
Step 3				.669	.447	.426	.289**
Regret			.097				
Activation			.426**				
Nothingness			.203**				
Hope			.067				
Extrinsic satisfaction							
Step 1				.285	.081	.075	–
PA	.156**	.176*	.033				
NA	–.198**	–.109	.035				
Step 2				.329	.108	.087	.027
Extraversion		.122	–.015				
Neuroticism		–.050	–.039				
Openness		–.139*	–.142*				
Agreeableness		.091	.050				
Conscientiousness		–.048	–.036				

**Table 4** continued

Criterion/predictors entered by step	$\beta_1$	$\beta_2$	$\beta_3$	$R$	$R^2$	Adj. $R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 3				.585	.342	.317	.234**
Regret			.075				
Activation			.411**				
Nothingness			.078				
Hope			.129*				

$N = 301$ .  $\beta_1$ ,  $\beta_2$ ,  $\beta_3$  = standardized beta coefficients for Steps 1, 2, and 3

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

that two-factor solution is the most suitable factor solution, accounting for 58% of the variance. The PCA on the OPS had already been done in exploratory factor analysis, which yielded four factors consistent with the expectations. The analyses on the MSQ resulted in four factors with eigenvalues of 8.5, 1.4, 1.3, and 1.1. The scree-test, however, revealed that a one-factor solution is the most favorable one, explaining 43% of the variance.

Based on these results, the observed variables of the measurement model is composed of two parcels for both PA and NA, two parcels for both PA and NA in the workplace, the total scores of the four dimensions of OPS, and three parcels for MSQ. It is known from the literature that PA and NA should be evaluated separately since, as known from the literature, they are orthogonal (Tellegen et al. 1999; Watson and Tellegen 1985).

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for the 15 measured variables are shown on Table 5. The test of this measurement model resulted in acceptable goodness of fit statistics:  $\chi^2(75, N = 301) = 200.00$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 2.70$ ; GFI = .92; CFI = .96; SRMR = .046; IFI = 96.

Examination of the factor loadings in this measurement model revealed that the indicators all loaded significantly in the predicted directions on their respective factors, with t-values ranging from 12.17 to 22.40. The factor loadings of this measurement model were relatively strong, ranging from .66 to .96, with most over .70. These results were deemed to be proof for validity of the measurement model.

### 3.5 Test of the Structural Model

The test of the partial mediated model in Fig. 2 resulted in a good fit to the data as indicated by the following goodness of fit statistics:  $\chi^2(76, N = 301) = 200.16$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 2.63$ ; GFI = .92; CFI = .96; SRMR = .047; IFI = 96. For testing the mediational effects in the model, related paths were deleted from the model. Chi-square difference test statistics for these direct paths from PA to job satisfaction (1.89, 1:  $p > .05$ ), from NA to job satisfaction (2.97, 1:  $p > .05$ ), from PA to OP (5.41, 1:  $p < .05$ ), from NA to OP (3.09, 1:  $p > .05$ ), from PA in the workplace to job satisfaction (4.60, 1:  $p < .05$ ), and from NA in the workplace to job satisfaction (.99, 1:  $p > .05$ ) were then computed. It is evident from the results that only two paths, from PA to OP (path 10) and from PA in the workplace to job satisfaction (path 12) should be retained since these significantly improved the fit of the model.

Deleting the other 4 paths from the model resulted in an acceptable goodness of fit statistics:  $\chi^2(80, N = 301) = 206.70$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 2.58$ ; GFI = .92; CFI = .96; SRMR = .055; IFI = 96. The chi-square difference test (6.54, 4:  $p > .05$ ) showed that this final

**Table 5** Correlations among the observed variables used in the structural model

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. PA1	25.46	4.13	1														
2. PA2	24.65	3.73	.684	1													
3. NA1	16.65	4.59	-.172	-.259	1												
4. NA2	11.09	3.82	-.230	-.244	.622	1											
5. PAIW1	23.93	5.85	.348	.435	-.346	-.259	1										
6. PAIW2	23.88	5.65	.384	.474	-.359	-.251	.930	1									
7. NAIW1	17.19	5.85	-.359	-.337	.552	.475	-.582	-.601	1								
8. NAIW2	16.91	6.16	-.354	-.349	.505	.472	-.615	-.641	.875	1							
9. REGRET	18.75	4.20	.272	.347	-.355	-.308	.553	.525	-.521	-.562	1						
10. ACTIVATION	15.45	5.01	.333	.459	-.394	-.242	.727	.717	-.519	-.552	.568	1					
11. NOTHINGNESS	25.24	5.28	.202	.285	-.453	-.400	.484	.500	-.646	-.687	.558	.533	1				
12. HOPE	20.63	6.69	.315	.386	-.337	-.242	.546	.539	-.388	-.398	.451	.648	.354	1			
13. JS1	23.11	5.47	.212	.275	-.297	-.210	.709	.687	-.475	-.513	.458	.600	.452	.474	1		
14. JS2	23.84	5.46	.172	.292	-.176	-.132	.640	.629	-.378	-.421	.442	.568	.420	.416	.773	1	
15. JS3	19.43	5.02	.230	.318	-.245	-.166	.639	.633	-.395	-.434	.444	.557	.440	.407	.815	.832	1

N = 301. All correlations are significant at the .01 level. PA positive affect, NA negative affect, PAIW positive affect in the workplace, NAIW negative affect in the workplace, JS job satisfaction

model did not differ from the partial mediation model. Thus this model was accepted as better since more parsimonious. The model with standardized path coefficients is depicted in Fig. 3.

Overall, the results indicated that the effect of PA and NA on job satisfaction is fully mediated by affect in the work place and OP. Additionally, NA in the work place fully mediated the relationship between NA and OP, and similarly OP fully mediated the relationship between NA in the workplace and job satisfaction. The direct paths located at the upper side of the model indicate that PA in the workplace partially mediated the relationship between PA and OP, while OP partially mediated the relationship between PA in the workplace and job satisfaction.

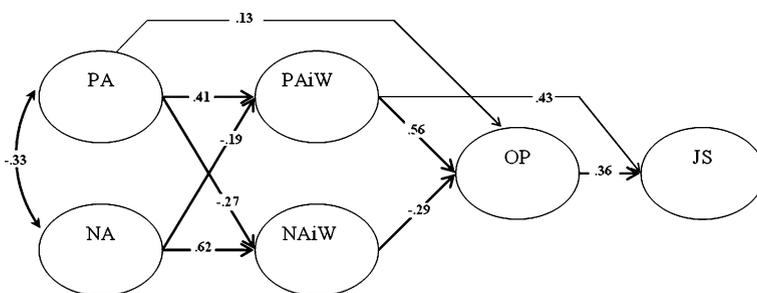
It is worth mentioning that 31% of the variance in PA in the workplace and 50% of the variance in NA in the workplace was accounted for by general mood (PA and NA). PA, PA in the workplace, and NA in the workplace accounted for 74% of the variance in OP. Finally, 58% of the variance in job satisfaction was accounted for by PA in the workplace and OP.

## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 Occupation as a Personal Project System

The basic assumption behind the ontological well-being presented by Simsek (2009) is that a balanced time perspective, namely a unity of past, present, and future, is a useful organizing principle for happiness and positive adjustment, and emphasizes that seeing continuity between past, present and future is closely related to self-actualization, growth, and achievement. In such a framework, people are considered to be time travelers who construct their own trajectories as growing individuals. The results of the factor analyses showed that the model proposed by Simsek (2009); O. F. Simsek and E. Kocayoruk (2010, Unpublished manuscript) could easily be applied to the workplace when occupation is considered as a personal project, namely OP. The measurement model was shown to fit the data perfectly, indicating that the construct has the same four dimensions: *regret, activation, nothingness, and hope*.

It is worth mentioning that these factors reflect a constructionist framework for occupation and consider it as a personally meaningful project. Infusing time into the evaluation



**Fig. 3** Standardized parameter estimates for the structural equation model. PA positive affect, NA negative affect, PAiW positive affect in the workplace, NAIW negative affect in the workplace, OP occupational project, JS job satisfaction

of occupation is to consider it from a narrative point of view since, as research (Dapkus 1985) indicated, ‘becoming in time’ is one of the most indicators of phenomenological category in individuals’ experience. The four factors emerging from this research, consequently, seems to be the consequences of one’s concerns about OP which brings about negative emotions such as anxiety, regret, disappointment, and exhaustion, or positive emotions such as satisfaction, forward-looking, confidence, and enthusiasm.

The first factor, *hope*, reflects a positive outlook for the future of OP and consists of only positive adjectives such as forward-looking, confidence, strength or ambition. *Nothingness*, the second factor, refers to one’s present situation with regard to the project and consists of negative emotions such as emptiness, helplessness, and anxiety. The third factor, *regret*, has been acknowledged as an important emotion and refers to the desire to go back and change the past (Lucas 2004). The last dimension, *activation*, is like PA since it consists of positive and activated affect adjectives. This factor, however, is quite different from PA since it is emotional reactions or evaluations in reaction to the present conditions of OP. This dimension reflects one’s level of energy or enthusiasm to sustain the project.

Research on affect is mostly based on the hedonic conceptualizations of emotional experience such as PA and NA proposed by Tellegen et al. (1999). Brief and Weiss (2002, p. 297), however, indicate that “perhaps the most glaring example of the narrowness of organizational research is the overemphasis of the study of mood at the expense of discrete emotions”. To our knowledge, this research is the first to show that the affective experience concerning occupation or work could be considered in a constructivist framework and the resultant structure includes different affective dimensions other than PA and NA.

It is evident from the results of the regression analyses that this model gives additional information concerning the attitudes toward job (e.g., job satisfaction) beyond and above personality and general mood. Although personality and general mood has been found to be the most robust determinants of job satisfaction (Illies and Judge 2003; Judge and Illies 2004; Judge and Larsen 2001), some researchers define job satisfaction on the basis of personal goals and goal satisfaction (Judge and Larsen 2001; Judge et al. 2005; Pomaki et al. 2004, 2009). It is not surprising that this research on goals, although limited, showed that the goals or projects of the individuals have an impact on the attitudes toward job. The occupation, in this context, should be considered as a personal project because of its great importance in individuals’ lives and the fact that the degree of progress in this project affects overall life satisfaction.

Thus, OP is supposed to be a higher-order construct uniting all other goals concerning work, not solely a sum of specific work-goals. As Shmotkin (2005) stated, life history evolves around a core personal scheme and results in a self-perceived trajectory. All individuals, similarly, may convince a unique core personal scheme concerning the occupation, which means OP. This personal scheme could be ‘hard work and achievement’, ‘achieving fame’ or ‘seeking respect for one’s identity’. As it reflects on one’s core personal concerns about occupation or work, OP is, thus, highly associated with job satisfaction.

Moreover, the results showed that OP was correlated with all personality dimensions as well as general affect. According to the results, OP had the strongest correlation with extraversion and neuroticism. It is known that these two dimensions are the closest correlates of affective evaluations of life (Diener et al. 2006). It is clear from the results obtained in this research that these two dimensions are also important in the affective evaluations of OP. The moderate relationship between the scores on the OPS and general mood is also noteworthy and will be considered in the following section.

## 4.2 OP as a Mediator Between General Mood and Job Satisfaction

The structural equation model tested in the present research showed that OP is an important mediator variable on the link between affect and job satisfaction. The model showed that the effects of general affect or affect in the workplace bring about job satisfaction through the mediatory role of OP. Such mediation could be explained as follows: Affective dispositions and affective experience in the workplace both lead individuals to seek personal accomplishments concerning occupation more successfully and, thus, causes more positive evaluations of OP, which, in turn, contribute to job satisfaction. The literature on affective experience indicates, in this regard, that affect and motivation is closely related in attaining personal goals. According to Judge and Larsen (2001, p. 91) individuals with positive affective disposition are more likely to pursue self-concordant goals. Kaplan et al. (2009), similarly, suggest that positive and negative emotions could be considered as indicators of behavioral activation and behavioral inhibition, respectively; PA fosters the vigor, energy, and excitement that accompany reward-seeking behavior while NA promotes avoidance type behaviors in situations perceived as threatening.

Thus, it is possible to argue that a predisposition to experiencing PA or low levels of NA would contribute to an individual's behavioral activation system, thus increasing the chances of the attainment of work-related personal goals. It is clear that such an individual would be more disposed to evaluate OP positively, which, in turn, would lead to a more positive attitude toward job. Indeed, according to a recent review by Pomaki and Maes (2002), research showed that the way employees think and feel about their work goals is closely related to work-related outcomes.

The results of this research showed that these relationships change according to the valence of the affect; that is, whether positive or negative. The model tested in this research indicates that the effect of PA and OP is partially mediated by positive affect in the workplace (PAiW) and the effect of PAiW on job satisfaction is partially mediated by OP. PA has been considered as the main indicator of happiness (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005). It could be stated, then, that to be happy in general affects OP with and without the mediatory role of PAiW. That is, happy individuals are more prone to make some progress in their OP independent of their affective experiences in the workplace. Similarly, happiness in the workplace (PAiW) seems to contribute to job satisfaction with and without the mediatory role of OP. In other words, experiencing increased PAiW directly contributes to job satisfaction in addition to its effect on OP. Such a result is expected given that those individuals with a disposition to experience PA are more likely to perceive their job more satisfying.

The emerging picture for NA is crucially different than that of PA. The results showed that the effect of NA on OP is fully mediated by negative affect in the workplace (NAiW), and, also that the effect of NAiW on job satisfaction is fully mediated by OP. It seems that having a disposition to experience NA makes individuals focused on negative experiences in the workplace and, thus, evaluated OP as being less satisfying, which, in turn, results in lower levels of job satisfaction. A recent review by Levin and Stokes (1989) gives a degree of justification for such a picture: that is, NA accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in job satisfaction, above and beyond that accounted for by job characteristics. Moreover, high NA individuals are shown to be less satisfied with tasks in both enriched and unenriched task conditions. Thus, it seems clear that NA has a detrimental effect on one's OP, which, in turn, brings about decreased job satisfaction.

### 4.3 Suggestions for Future Research

It is clear in this research that OP as a personal construction has a crucial impact on job satisfaction. It is not completely clear, however, from this research what the concrete aspects of these projects are. Future research should be focused on what specific meanings might be attributed to occupation or work, above and beyond job-specific goals.

One further issue that should be clarified by future research is whether mood and affect in the workplace cause individuals to pursue their OP more successfully, or whether these affective experiences such as experiencing higher levels of NA cause a more negative evaluation of projects. Although the hypothesis that individuals' mood has an important motivating effect on attaining personal goals has been strictly supported by the research (Judge and Illies 2004; Judge and Larsen 2001), it is also known from research (Judge and Illies 2004) that individuals with high levels of NA have more negative memories. Since evaluation of one's OP is partly dependent on autobiographical memory, mood could have a crucial effect on the evaluation of OP. Moreover, even state mood could also have an impact on these evaluations, which is a concern that should be illuminated by the future research.

The model tested in this research indicates that OP should be taken into consideration in the context of job satisfaction. Future research should evaluate the importance of OP in the context of job performance; whether OP could explain unique variance in job performance above and beyond dispositional characteristics and whether it is a crucial mediator variable in this context.

Another issue that should be clarified by the future research is whether the issues concerning organization of autobiographical memory such as clarity (Wright and Nunn 2000) have an effect on the relationship between OP and job satisfaction or job performance since these characteristics could have important effects on the construction of OP. A clear autobiographical memory concerning occupation, for example, would make individuals more certain about the link between personal or job-related characteristics and satisfaction from the job. Thus, a moderator role of the autobiographical memory should be evaluated in the search for the relationship between OP and attitudes toward job.

### 4.4 Practical Implications

The results of this study offer a number of practical implications. Individuals' general mood has been considered as a deterministic factor for being happiness and satisfaction in the workplace. This research is the first to show that job and work related outcomes could be considered from a hermeneutic perspective, through which individuals could be seen as constructors of their own projects while in employment. Employees should thus be seen not only as individuals trying to accomplish job-specific tasks or goals but also as actors attaching personal meanings to work since they try to accomplish a personal project by their occupation.

Thus, research on employee well-being should focus on general or job-specific factors affecting OP since these factors are more responsive to manipulation than mood. It could be argued, for example, that the arrangement of the work environment in accordance with the personal aspirations would be more effective than focusing on dispositional characteristics of employees, which are less open to change. The results of this research indicate that such a principle is especially important in the context of NA. According to the results of this research, focusing on the factors that contribute to NA experiences in the workplace

would have crucial effect on one's evaluation of OP, and, in turn, would contribute to one's level of job satisfaction.

Recent approaches to career counseling advise using narrative techniques to help clients. Christensen and Johnston (2003) for example state that the construction of personal narratives is an efficient way of helping clients for career planning. Guichard (2009), similarly, indicates that helping clients creating their own narratives would contribute to solve many problems related to career or occupation.

All of these approaches to career counseling, however, use only the evaluations concerning the past, and do not take into account the present and future evaluations of career. OP construct, however, indicates that all of these time perspectives should be included in the evaluation of any history of career. Career construction counseling, in this respect, should focus on all of these time perspectives and help the client construct an OP. Then, it seems important for occupational counselors to help clients exploring their OP deeply in order to resolve job-specific or general problems. It is plausible for a counselor, in this respect, to focus a clients' unhappiness in the job and this problem could be examined in a hermeneutical perspective, during which OP is clarified and re-constructed. Such an evaluation would bring about clarity in personal meanings attributed to the job and, thus, could contribute the level of satisfaction obtained from job.

#### 4.5 Limitations of the Research

Although this research has given some insight into the causes and consequences of one's view of job as a personal project, some limitations should be noted here. The most important limitation is the research design which is basically dependent on cross-sectional data. Although the causal pathways are indicated in the model, more rigorous tests of causality should be done using longitudinal or experimental designs.

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