



## A Path Analysis of Inspiration, Purpose in Life, Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being among Filipino Workforce

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**Abstract** The relationship among inspiration and subjective well-being as mediated by purpose in life and gratitude has been postulated (Thrash & Elliot, 2010). In the present study, a sample of 254 Filipino employees was used to verify whether some types of inspiration influence purpose in life and gratitude. Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS), Inspiration Scale (IS), Purpose in Life Scale (PLS), and the Gratitude Questionnaire with Six Items (GQSI) were used to respectively assess subjective well-being, inspiration, purpose in life, and gratitude. The results of path analysis showed that purpose in life mediated the relationship under investigation but contrary to Thrash and Elliot's (2010) theory, gratitude did not.

**Keywords:** inspiration, subjective well-being, purpose in life, gratitude

The concept of subjective well-being has gained attention where different factors have been related to it. Most of these studies showed that subjective well-being is influenced by internal and external factors of the individual, with the preponderance of external factors (Lynbomirsky, Sheldon, & Schakade, 2005). Given this assumption, Thrash and Elliot (2010) investigated inspiration's influence on well-being. Inspiration was composed of three core characteristics: (1) *transcendence* that refers to a concrete and vivid awareness of better possibilities, the gained awareness resembling an illumination or insight in the vision metaphors; (2) *evocation* that refers to the fact that inspiration is experienced as evoked in the sense that the inspired person ascribes responsibility to something beyond the self; and, (3) *approach motivation* which translates the fact that one is compelled to actualize one's new idea or vision. The three core characteristics reflect the combination of two component processes of inspiration: (1) being inspired by; and, (2) being inspired to. The former involves the

appreciation of, and accommodation to the perceived intrinsic value of the evocative object, and the latter involves the motivation to transmit or actualize the qualities exemplified in the evocative object.

Thrash and Elliot (2010) were not the only ones who examined the relationship between inspiration and well-being. Other studies (Haidt & Keltner, 2004; Hymer, 1990; Kris, 1952; Maslow, 1968; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Poloma & Pendleton, 1991) also pointed to this relationship. However, it was Thrash and Elliot's (2003) construct validation that operationalized both inspiration and well-being. From their construct validation, they theorized that inspiration influences subjective well-being through the mediation of purpose in life and gratitude. In other words, inspiration enhances purpose in life and gratitude, which, in turn promotes well-being. The concepts of purpose and gratitude have also been the subject of many researches.

Some researchers argue that purpose derives from connecting to something that transcends the self (e. g., Buber, 1996; Frankl, 1992; Nozick, 1989; Seligman, 2002). Others (Emmons, 1999; Klinger, 1977; Scheier et al., 2006) support the idea that purpose derives from pursuit of valued goals. McKnight and Kashdan (2009) argued that purpose offers direction in life and living according to one's purpose and offers a self-sustaining source of meaning through goal pursuit and goal attainment. This is corroborated by Burrow and Hill's (2011) study with adolescents and emerging adults. These authors found that greater purpose commitment mediates the association between identity commitment and well-being, supporting the assumption that affirming who one is may include establishing a particular direction in life, which may result in more selective and positive experiences. Another study by Ishida and Okada (2011) with university students comparing purpose in life to approval motivation indicated that purpose in life has a greater influence on emotional response and the autonomic nervous system response during psychological stress. The authors postulated that both purpose in life and approval motivation grow through experiences that include exposure to supportive and empathic understanding from parents and teachers during various developmental stages. Based on these studies, it appears that inspiration includes life with sense of purpose because it affords opportunities for transcendence of limits and for striving toward valued goals. This is further supported by Diener, Sapyta, and Suh (1998), attainment of one's life purpose influences a person's subjective well-being.

As for gratitude, it has been a subject of investigations by many researchers. McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, and Larson (2001) defined it as a positive affective response to receiving a gift. They concluded their study with the observation that gratitude as a typical response to perceived benevolence from other moral agents fosters prosocial behavior among beneficiaries and benefactors alike and might have important interfaces with people's well-being and spirituality. In the same line, Emmons and Crumpler (2000) presented gratitude as an emotional state and an attitude toward life that is a source of human strength in enhancing one's personal and relational well-being. Their study mentioned an empirical experiment by Emmons (1999) that supported the supposition that gratitude is a source of human strength since participants in the gratitude condition reported more progress toward their goals than those in the non-gratitude condition.

A corroboration of this supposition came from an empirical study by Emmons and McCullough (2003) suggesting that a conscious focus on blessings may have emotional and interpersonal benefits. This study revealed that gratitude affects subjective life appraisals and appears to create increases in positive affect as well as reductions in negative affect. Solomon (1983) saw in gratitude an estimate of gain coupled with the judgment that someone else is responsible for that gain. Polak and McCullough (2006) argued that gratitude results from two cognitions: that one has obtained a positive outcome and that an external agent is responsible for it.

Since inspiration involves the gains associated with transcendence and approach motivation, as well as the perception that something beyond the self is causally responsible, inspiration leads to feelings of gratitude toward its source.

The studies about purpose and gratitude lend a support to Thrash and Elliot (2010) theory that inspiration influences well-being through the mediation of purpose in life and gratitude. Besides establishing the dual mediation in their model, these two authors also raised the question of whether some types of inspiration might produce more purpose in life and gratitude than others.

There seems to be a dearth of studies that investigated this “contextualized” aspect of the inspiration - subjective well-being relationship as mediated by purpose and gratitude. Thus in the present study, the authors contribute to the literature on the area by investigating whether or not the mediation of purpose in life and gratitude in the relation between inspiration and subjective well-being will remain significant regardless of the type of inspiration. This study conceptualized the model by Thrash and Elliot (2010) by considering the effects of inspiration provided by the superiors to their subordinates’ (employees) expressed sense of purpose and feeling of gratitude. In other words, the study intends to determine whether employees would report a significant sense of purpose in life and gratitude, which affect their subjective well-being as a function of being inspired by their immediate superiors in the company. Specifically, the researchers hypothesized that when employees are inspired to work by their immediate superiors in the company, they gain purpose in life and experience a sense of gratitude, which in turn will heighten their subjective well-being. Support for the hypothesis allows organizational analysis and interventions may be introduced in companies to ensure a happier and more effective workforce through the inspirations provided by their leaders.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

The study used a cross-sectional explanatory design. Following Johnson (2001), the cross-sectional explanatory design is used when the primary objective of the research is to develop or test a theory about a phenomenon and to explain how the phenomenon operates by identifying the causal factors that produce change in it; and when the data collection is done at a single point in time. The present study was intended to test Thrash and Elliot’s (2010) theory about the mediating effect of purpose in life and gratitude in the relation inspiration - subjective well-being. The

theory was tested using a sample of Filipino workforce and the data were collected during a single period of time.

### Respondents

The target population of the study was the Filipino workforce. To obtain the sample, the researchers made use of non-probability sampling method, specifically, the convenience sampling. The researchers resorted to this method due to time constraint. The researchers conducted the survey in the Company where one of them is presently employed.

The participants were from a retail company in Manila and Boracay from different levels of the organization (rank and file to managers). Of the 254 employees who participated in the survey, 126 were males, and 128 were females. There were 195 employees in the staff level while 59 were in the supervisory/managerial level. The average age for males and females were 27.2 and 29.7, respectively, with an overall mean age of 28.5.

Using Daniel Soper Statistics Calculator (a-priori sample size calculator for Structural Equation Models), the sample size of 254 yielded a statistical power of 99%.

### Instruments

Each participant was asked to complete the Satisfaction with Life Scale, the Purpose in Life Questionnaire, Inspiration Scale, and the Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Items.

**Subjective well-being.** Subjective well-being was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). The SWLS consists of five items that are rated on a 1-7 scale (1- Strongly disagree; 2- Disagree; 3- Slightly disagree; 4- Neither agree nor disagree; 5- Slightly Agree; 6- Agree; 7 - Strongly agree). Because it asks sweeping questions, such as “The conditions of my life are excellent” and, “I am satisfied with my life”, the SWLS shows good stability over time (Biswar-Diener, 2010). Initial and subsequent studies have examined the internal consistency of the SWLS, and alpha-coefficients have repeatedly exceeded .80.

**Inspiration.** Inspiration was assessed using an adapted version of the Inspiration Scale (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), contextualized in a corporate setting. The inspiration scale consists of four items that are rated on a 1-5 scale (1 no; 2 yes, slightly; 3 yes, somewhat; 4 yes, very; and 5 yes, extremely). The inspiration items were as follows: “Have you felt inspired? (and if so, how inspired did you feel?)”; “Have you encountered or experienced anything that inspired you? (and if so, how inspiring was it?)”; “Have you been inspired to do something? (and if so, how inspired [to do something] were you?)”; and “Would you say that you experienced inspiration? (and if so, to what extent?).” To contextualize the instrument in a corporate setting, the phrase “by your immediate superior” was added at the end of questions 1, 2, and 4, and the phrase “in your work” was inserted in question 3.

**Purpose in Life.** Purpose was assessed using three items from the Purpose in Life (PIL) scale (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964). McGregor and Little’s (1998) factor analysis of the PIL items yielded distinct Meaning and Happiness factors. The items selected for this study were those that loaded most strongly on McGregor and Little’s meaning factor. The PIL items have a

bipolar response format and were rated on a 5-point scale (for example, in my life: 1 -“I have no goals or aims at all”, and 5- “I have very clear goals and aims”). Responses were summed to form a purpose index.

**Gratitude.** Gratitude was measured using the items grateful and thankful, which were drawn from an established measure (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). The Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Items were rated on a 1-7 scale. (1- Strongly disagree; 2- Disagree; 3- Slightly disagree; 4- Neither agree nor disagree; 5- Slightly agree; 6- Agree; 7 - Strongly agree). It includes questions such as: “I have so much in life to be thankful for” and, “I am grateful to a wide variety of people”. Cronbach’s alpha for the six-item totals have ranged from .76 to .84.

### Data Analysis

To test the factorial validity of the four-factor model and to find out if the data will fit the model, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was done. The CFA has to be conducted since the Inspiration Questionnaire was contextualized in a work setting.

In ascertaining whether purpose in life and gratitude mediate the effect of inspiration on subjective well-being, a path analysis was deemed appropriate. Inspiration is the independent variable, purpose in life and gratitude are the mediators, and subjective well-being is the dependent variable.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

**Table 1**

Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach’s Alpha for the Scores on Satisfaction with Life, Inspiration, Purpose in Life and Gratitude

	M	SD	Cronbach’s Alpha
Satisfaction in life	4.73	1.09	.80
Inspiration	3.32	.78	.77
Purpose in life	3.93	.68	.74
Gratitude	4.99	.85	.69

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the different variables in the study. Gratitude and Satisfaction in life were both rated on a 1-7 scale while Inspiration and Purpose in life were both rated on a 1-5 scale. The results show that Gratitude has a higher mean than Satisfaction in life, and Purpose in life has a higher mean than Inspiration.

The Cronbach’s alpha of four instruments that were used in the study is also presented in table 1. Except for the Gratitude instrument, the obtained Cronbach’s alpha for the instruments used in the study were higher than .70 which indicates that the items for each instrument are within the acceptable range of consistency and that the items are correlated with each other. This signifies the acceptability and the reliability of the instrument.

## Correlation

Table 2 shows the correlation matrix of all the variables in the study. The data in the correlation matrix confirm the results of past studies about the relationships of most of the variables. There were significant relationships between variables being studied, except for the relationship between inspiration and gratitude.

**Table 2**

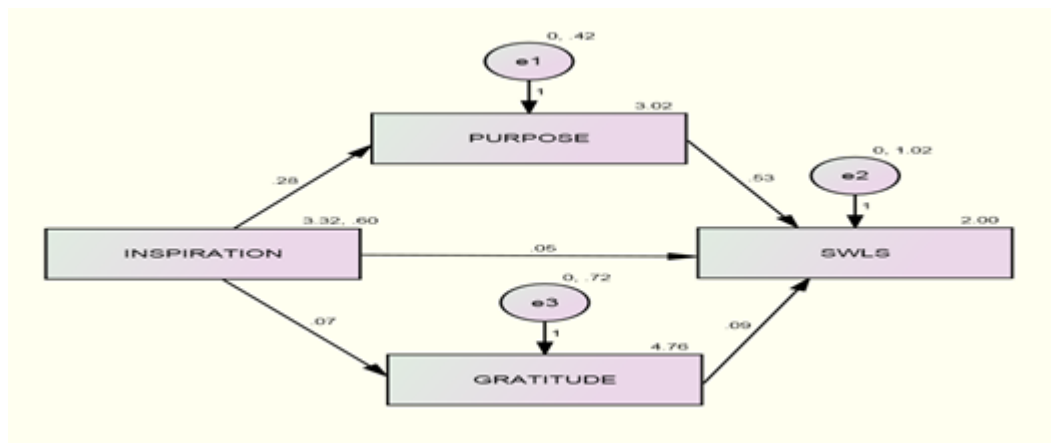
Intercorrelations of the Scores on Satisfaction with Life, Inspiration, Purpose in Life and Gratitude

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1 Satisfaction in Life	-			
2 Inspiration	.14*	-		
3 Purpose in Life	.38**	.31**	-	
4 Gratitude	.24**	.06	.50**	-

Note: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .001$

## Mediation Analysis

The main goal of the study was to test the hypothesis that when individuals are inspired to work by the Company and their immediate superior, the employees feel grateful and gains purpose in life, which in turn will heighten their subjective well-being. This effect was tested by doing a path analysis using subjective well-being as the dependent variable, inspiration as the independent variable, and purpose in life and gratitude as the mediators as shown in the path diagram below.



**Figure 1.** Mediation Path Diagram.

In the case of purpose in life as a mediator of inspiration and subjective well-being, the result of the path analysis shows that inspiration significantly predicts purpose in life (path coefficient = .28,  $p < .001$ ) and purpose in life significantly predicts subjective well-being (path coefficient = .53,  $p < .001$ ). This is consistent with the theory of Thrash and Elliot (2010) that inspiration promotes well-being because it enhances purpose in life, which in turn promotes well-being, and shows that purpose in life is a significant mediator of inspiration and subjective well-being. Furthermore,

since inspiration does not significantly predict subjective well-being (path coefficient = .05,  $p > .05$ ), then purpose in life fully mediates the effect of inspiration on subjective well-being.

In the case of gratitude as a mediator of inspiration and subjective well-being, the result of the path analysis shows that inspiration does not significantly predict gratitude (path coefficient = .07,  $p > .05$ ) and gratitude also does not significantly predict subjective well-being (path coefficient = .10,  $p > .05$ ). This does not support the theory of Thrash and Elliot (2010) that inspiration promotes well-being because it enhances gratitude, which in turn promotes well-being. This shows that gratitude is not a significant mediator of inspiration and subjective well-being.

Although the results of the path analysis showed that purpose in life fully mediated the effect of inspiration on subjective well-being of the Filipino workforce, gratitude did not mediate the relationship between inspiration and subjective well-being.

## Discussion

The results only confirmed one part of the researchers' hypothesis. That is, the effect of inspiration in the subjective well-being of the Filipino workforce, as significantly mediated by purpose in life. When inspired to work by the Company and their immediate superior, the employees gain purpose in life, which in turn heightens their subjective well-being. Thus, the

attainment of one's life purpose influences the subjective well-being. This is in agreement with Diener et al. (1998) who argued that purpose is a path to subjective well-being. Baumeister's (1991) study suggesting that purpose is a source of happiness and meaning also concurs with this finding. The finding is also in alignment with other studies showing that purpose is related to (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987; Ryff, 1989; Scheier et al., 2006; Zika & Chamberlain, 1987, 1992) or predicts improvements in (Smith & Zautra, 2004) positive affect, negative affect, and other aspects of well-being.

The above results have implications in the world of work as having a workforce that is inspired and happy often translate into productivity; thus, companies should work towards having a more inspired employees by constantly looking into their job satisfaction and employee welfare. Factors like the work environment, corporate values, culture, stress management, conflict resolution, team building, and the like could be focused on via the different employee interventions. In addition, companies should attract, hire, train and or develop good leaders that will inspire the general workforce through leading by example and good work.

The researchers' other hypothesis is that purpose in life would function as a partial rather than a full mediator because it primarily concerns the transcendent and motivational aspects of inspiration, was disproved. Purpose in life fully mediated the effect of inspiration on subjective well-being among the Filipino workforce. Inspiration did not have a direct effect on the subjective- well-being of the Filipino workforce. According to Thrash and Elliot (2010), the fact that inspiration is ascribed to someone or something beyond the self suggests that gratitude functions as a

second partial mediator. The results of the present study, however, failed to prove that assumption. Gratitude did not mediate the effect of inspiration on the subjective- well-being of the Filipino workforce. In other words, even when inspired to work by the Company and their immediate superior, Filipino employees seem not be grateful for it. More so, even if they feel grateful, it will not heighten their subjective well-being.

One possible reason why inspiration did not directly influence well-being was the contextualization of the instrument. An individual is “inspired by” and “inspired to” by several aspects of his life, including his family, and inspiration provided by his work, specifically his immediate superior, may comprise a “negligible” portion of inspiration that it does not influence the subjective well-being of the Filipino employees. The collectivist nature of Filipinos, especially within their group, may provide an inspiration that will influence their subjective well-being. Similarly, future studies may use the concept of family context as one source of inspiration.

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