CHAPTER 8

DOES HAPPINESS LEAD INTO IDLENESS?

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Summary
This chapter reports a one year follow-up study of 750 unemployed and 750 employed males and females, aged 30-50 years, in the Netherlands. It was found that: 1. happier unemployed had a higher chance of finding a job, 2. happier employed had a lower chance of losing their job. Although significant, the correlations were rather low.

A common objection against the ideal of promoting the happiness of the average citizen is that happy citizens will not work as hard as unhappy citizens. Happiness is seen to undermine labour motivation and work commitment. The decay of society would result. As indicated in the introductory chapter, this view draws on a `deficiency' theory of motivation, which assumes that people work only to avoid unhappiness. If happy, they will see little reason to work.

The other view is that happiness stimulates activity and work involvement. This view draws on the `abundancy' theory of motivation, which claims that people enjoy the use of their potentials.

These conflicting views are tested in an analysis of the relation between happiness and employment. This is done in a secondary analysis of a study on the health effects of (long-term) unemployment. We consider two questions: 1. Whether unemployed people have better chances of finding a new job if they are happy; 2. Whether employed people have less chances of losing their job if they are happy. Next we take the opportunity to check the hypothesis advanced in chapter 2, that happiness functions as a buffer against stress. We will consider whether the happy adjust better to long term unemployment. Below we will consider these questions in more detail.

1. QUESTIONS

1.1 Happiness and re-employment chances

How could happiness influence employment chances? Firstly by way of its effect on `health'. Veenhoven (1984: 268-271) shows that a positive appreciation of life tends to foster health. This has implications for employment chances. People in bad health are less in demand on the labour market. Kruidenier and Bakker (1985) conclude for instance that an important part of the decrease in sick-leave during the present-day recession is caused by the replacement of less healthy employees by more healthy ones. In a study in 24 companies they found that newly hired employees only had half the percentage of sick-leave as the employees who had been working in the company for a longer time. In contrast, employees who had been dismissed (even excluding those who had been discharged because of physical disability), had a sick-leave figure twice as high as the more permanently employed. Also in our own study indications for this effect were

found (Verkleij, 1988).

Secondly, happiness may affect employment chances by way of its effects on `activity level'. Veenhoven (1984: 282-284) mentions experimental evidence showing that good mood enhances alertness and zest. If happiness stimulates activity, it may increase one's chances of finding a job. Even in the application-process for a job active individuals are in a more favourable position. A positive relation between the number of application attempts and the chances of finding a job is demonstrated among others by Koopmans et al. (1976). Also so-called open applications are important. In 1984 a study was done of the recruitment behaviour among a sample of 572 companies. About 9% of the vacancies in these companies were filled by applicants who took the initiative themselves (Directorate-General for Labour supply, 1984).

Thirdly, happiness may affect employment chances through its effects on `social contacts'. There is broad evidence that happiness facilitates contacts with other people. (See Veenhoven, 1984: 254-258) and chapter 6 of this volume. If the happy have better social contacts this will increase their chance of finding a job. One learns faster about new vacancies and obtains good references in an easier way. Of the vacancies, 17% was filled by applicants who heard from the existing personnel about announcements of the company, and 17% from outsiders who had connections with the company.

Fourthly: even apart from this `patronage', happy individuals may very well give a better first-sight impression to the employer or job-recruiting officer. Veenhoven reports that happy individuals tend to have better social skills (p. 279-281), and there is a reasonable amount of experimental research which points to the conclusion that happy-natured people are valued more than depressed ones (i.a. Bell, 1978). Koopmans et al. studied the reasons for refusing or accepting applicants among 230 employers. The study applied to real application-attempts by unemployed individuals, and not to fake ones. The general impression of the applicant and his or her appearance appeared to be the two most important selection-criteria for the decision of the employers. About 40% of the employers mentioned these criteria in the first place (Koopmans et al., 1987). Feelings of happiness may thus play a role in this process in as far as they are expressed in the presentation of the applicant.

Little is known about the actual influence of happiness on employment chances. Research focuses on social-demographic factors like gender, age, education, ethnicity, former labour experience and physical health (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment Opportunities, 1983). Social-psychological factors considered mainly concern job-motivation. Van Wezel found that job motivation explains only a small percentage of differences in re-employment chances compared to social-demographic factors (Van Wezel, 1972). There is also some research on the relation between personality and employment, but happiness is not an issue in such studies.

1.2 Happiness and chances of dismissal

Similar effects may be involved here. In this case, the effects could go through the positive influence of happiness on respectively health, the quantity and quality of the `level of performance', or through a better personal `relation with colleagues and office-managers'. Next, one may expect that happier individuals are more capable of coping with `stress-situations' outside work, so that these are not, or in a lesser degree, transferred to the work-situation.

There is a lot of research on related matters. Studies in job satisfaction show that dissatisfied workers are more prone to be sacked (see Argyle's contribution in chapter 9) and studies on mental health and personality indicate that problematic and frustrated people have a greater chance of losing their job. However, there is as yet no such study that focuses on the effects of happiness.

Happiness and coping with unemployment

There are reasons to expect that unemployment hurts less among the happy than among unhappy persons. One reason is again that happy persons tend to have better social networks. Gore et al. (1972) have shown that network support helps in coping with unemployment.

Next, one could think of the `stress-accumulation'-theory which deals with the accumulation of negative life-events. Comparable to the `Mattheüs-effect' which says that wealth engenders wealth, one may assume that worries and problems in one realm of life lead to worries and problems in other realms of life (Deleeck et al., 1983). Accumulation of worries hampers coping. It is easier to cope with óne misfortune than with several at the same time. Among happier individuals less accumulation of worries would happen and thereby a smaller radiation-effect of these other worries on the experience of one's unemployment would take place. Besides, happier individuals would have better chances for experiencing positive life-events in general, but also during unemployment.

2. METHOD

Data are drawn from a longitudinal study on `unemployment, re-employment and health'. This study was designed to assess the influence of unemployment on several indicators of health and and psychological well-being among which feelings of happiness (Verkleij, 1988). Here we use the data to study the reverse effect, that is: the influence of happiness upon re-employment chances and the experience of unemployment.

Respondents

Participants in the study were 750 unemployed and 750 employed persons in the western urbanized part of the Netherlands. Three categories were involved: male blue collar workers, male white collar workers and female white collar workers. The sample was restricted to the 30-50 years age category. The subjects were interviewed in 1983 and were sent a questionnaire in 1984.[1] In the second round 1100 individuals participated (73%). The response among the employed (83%) was higher than among the unemployed (63%). The re-employment rate was 21%, the rate of dismissal among the employed was 8%. These rates are calculated with the assumption that there was no difference in re-employment and job loss between respondents and non-respondents in the follow-up study.

Indicators

`Happiness' was measured by Bradburn's Affect Balance Scale (ABS). This scale consists of two dimensions, viz. positive and negative affect, which, when added up, produce a balance-score (Bradburn, 1969). In this article the balance-score will be used. A high score means that positive feelings outbalance negative feelings.

To measure `coping with unemployment' the respondents were requested to fill in a list with 26 possible consequences of being on the dole. In this article only the total-score of the negative consequences has been used. A high score means a high number of negative consequences. For further details about the study-design, measurements and results see Verkleij et al (1985, 1986) and Verkleij (1988).

[1] There has been a third measurement point also, but those data are analyzed and described elsewhere (Verkley, 1988).

Analysis

In this analysis we consider the effect of happiness at T1 on employment chances at T2. As happiness is clearly not the only determinant of employment chances, we also consider the effect of other variables likely to be involved. These are: 1. Social demographic variables (e.g. education); 2. Unemployment variables (e.g. length of unemployment); 3. The subjective judgment of one's own chances on the labour market; 4. Health variables (e.g. health status in the past) and 5. Life-situation variables (financial problems, number of stressful life events last year). We will check whether happiness has any effect on employment chances independent of these other determinants. Through (partial) correlation analysis and LISREL-analysis two models will be compared: a model of direct influences (**Scheme 1**) and a model of indirect influences (**Scheme 2**).

3. RESULTS

3.1 Happiness and re-employment chances

To see if happiness has a favourable direct influence on labour-market chances, the correlation between the Affect Balance Scale and the re-employment was calculated first. This correlation was low, r=+.09, albeit statistically significant at the level of p<.05. Other factors clearly had more pronounced correlations with the re-employment. See **scheme 3** (page 85).

Length of unemployment and the subjective judgment of one's chances had the strongest correlations (p<.001). Significant correlations with a p-value <.001 further existed with education, health complaints (VOEG = Subjective Health Questionnaire) and amount of financial problems. More advanced age and bad health were subjectively seen as the strongest impediments for one's labour market chances. Many individuals answered that being 40 years old is already too old to have a fair chance of getting a new job. Other significant correlations (p<.01) existed with several other indicators of health complaints, feelings of loneliness and the amount of stressful life events in the past year. All these factors had higher correlations with re-employment chances than the Affect Balance Scale. A direct effect of feelings of happiness on the re-employment chances is thus not negligeable, but nevertheless rather small, unless the effect is masked by a third factor.

To find out if a masked effect exists, partial correlations have been calculated between the Affect Balance Scale and the re-employment chances, with all other predictors held constant separately (first order correlations). All these partial correlations were lower than the original one, which means that a masking of the effect of happiness by the other predictors does not exist. On the contrary, the real effect of happiness is even smaller than the zero order correlation suggests.

The hypothesis of model 2, which says that happiness, has an indirect effect on re-employment through an assumed positive effect on health, feelings of social belonging and optimism, which in turn have a positive effect on the subjective judgment of one's own chances, has been tested by means of LISREL-analysis. However, the model did not fit the data properly. The model with the best fit of the data is shown in **scheme 4a**: length of unemployment, the subjective judgment of one's chances and education appeared to be the only important direct predictors of actual re-employment.

However, as is shown in **Scheme 4b**, feelings of happiness had a significant effect on state of health (i.e. physical and depressive complaints) and feelings of loneliness, while depressive complaints had a modest indirect effect on re-employment. Happiness itself was determined by

education and the two life-situation indicators (financial problems and stressful life events). Of these three factors only education was an important predictor of re-employment. Integration of the happiness-model and the re-employment model (both models which had a good fit), gave rise to a bad fit and thus did not appear suitable. The conclusion which has to be drawn from this analysis is that feelings of happiness only play a marginal role in the prediction of re-employment.

3.2 Happiness and chances of dismissal

Among the employed an analysis has been made of the influence of happiness on the chances of being dismissed. As is shown in **scheme 5** the chances of dismissal are predicted significantly by: gender, health status, financial problems, work situation, expected pressure from bureaucratic institutions in case of unemployment, and feelings of happiness. The highest rates of dismissal are found among: women, individuals in bad health, persons who report a relatively high number of financial problems, those who are in a non-motivating work situation, those who expect only a small pressure of bureaucratic institutions in case of job-loss, and those having relatively little feelings of happiness. Happiness thus protects slightly against dismissal, although it is the least important factor.

In **scheme 5** only those predictors have been inserted which have a correlation with a p-value <.01. This boundary excluded some work history variables of which predictive power was hypothesized. If one lowers the significance level to p<.05, some predictors would be added: health status in the recent past, number of former dismissals, length of these former unemployment episodes, worries about the possibilities of dismissal, number of unpleasant life events, and feelings of being discriminated against. A striking result is, that the level of education and feelings of social isolation do not have a predictor power for the chances of discharge, while they do have this power for chances of re-employment.

The partial correlation analysis performed next did not show any masking of the influence of happiness on dismissal. The partial correlations between happiness and dismissal, with all possible confounding factors held constant separately, were lower than the original correlation. Because the analyses so far yielded results which were very much alike to those in the paragraph mentioned above, it was decided not to perform a LISREL-analysis to look for the possibility of indirect effects of happiness on chances of dismissal. A further reason to refrain from such an analysis is found in the relatively low number of dismissed people in comparison to the number of re-employed respondents. LISREL-analyses which are based on this small number would presumably yield less stable results.

3.3 Happiness and coping with unemployment

As pointed out in the introduction, research results suggest that unemployment has a negative effect on psychological well-being. Apart from that, there are a lot of indications that unemployment has a negative effect on physical health and feelings of loneliness as well (Spruit et al., 1987; Verkleij et al., 1987). If happiness gives some immunity against these negative consequences, this assumes a significant negative relation between feelings of happiness at T1 (1983) and the indicators for negative unemployment consequences at T2 (1984).

This analysis concerns respondents who were unemployed at T1 and T2. Indicators of negative unemployment-consequences were: 1. Low subjective health (number of depressive complaints, number of physical complaints, number of treated diseases); 2. Feelings of loneliness (also measured by the absence of feelings of social belonging) and 3. Negative feelings about the consequences of unemployment. The zero-order correlations with these indicators were in the predicted direction and reasonably high (see **scheme 6**).

Before one jumps to the conclusion that the hypothesis is confirmed, other possible models have

to be investigated. It then appears that there is as much proof for a competing model, in which happiness is seen as an effect instead of a cause of negative consequences of unemployment. This appears from the correlations in **scheme 7** (page 90).

In the competing model one assumes a causal path from the several indicators for negative unemployment consequences at T1 to the level of happiness at T2. All the correlations involved appear strongly significant, which is indicative for the hypothesis that negative feelings about one's unemployment, a high number of health complaints, and a high level of feelings of loneliness may lead to a diminished level of happiness.

The two correlation-analyses, taken together, suggest reciprocal influences: happiness on the one hand and unemployment-feelings on the other hand, influence each other mutually. This raises the interesting question which of the two causal paths is the more important? Statistical analysis can not offer an answer to this question because of the high correlations which exist between all variables concerned. An example may make this clear. **Scheme 8** (page 91) shows the mutual correlation between happiness (ABS-score) and the amount of negative unemployment consequences experienced on both measurements points.

The symmetry in **scheme 8** is salient. The correlation-arrow between unemployment consequences at T1 and happiness at T2 is as high as the reversed correlation-arrow, r=-.44 versus r=-.45. The high correlations are partly explained by the high intercorrelation of both variables at T1. This is shown by the fact that the partial coefficients which portray the direct effect, are substantially lower, respectively r=-.26 versus r=-.16. The fact that the first-mentioned partial correlation is the highest one, might suggest that the influence of unemployment experience on happiness is stronger than the other way around. But this is presumably an artefact, caused by the fact that unemployment feelings are more stable (r=+.68) in the course of time than feelings of happiness (r=+.48).

In this example the amount of experienced disadvantages of unemployment is taken as an indicator for the consequences of unemployment to demonstrate the connection with happiness. However, comparable results are found if one takes one of the other indicators of possible consequences of unemployment, for instance the number of depressive complaints.

4. CONCLUSION

What do these results say about the controversy we started with? One conclusion is that the results do not support the anti-hedonistic theory which claims that happiness has a detrimental effect on work motivation and commitment. The results rather give some support to the `abundancy' theory. Happier people have slightly better chances to get a job and keep it.

The results do not tell us a great deal about the mechanisms which underlie this finding. A causal model was tested in which happiness would lead to better health, closer feelings to network members and a more optimistic judgment of one's labor market chances. This model did not fit the data. Other study designs, causal models and mechanisms should be explored therefore. One idea is to set up a laboratory experiment, simulating job application talks, to study the direct effects of happiness on the chances of being given a job.

As to the question whether happiness buffers the stress of unemployment, it was found that happier people react less negatively to job loss. This result was also found with partial correlation analysis.

Though not impressive, the results of this analysis can be taken as a piece of evidence stimulating a less pessimistic view towards the promotion of happiness.

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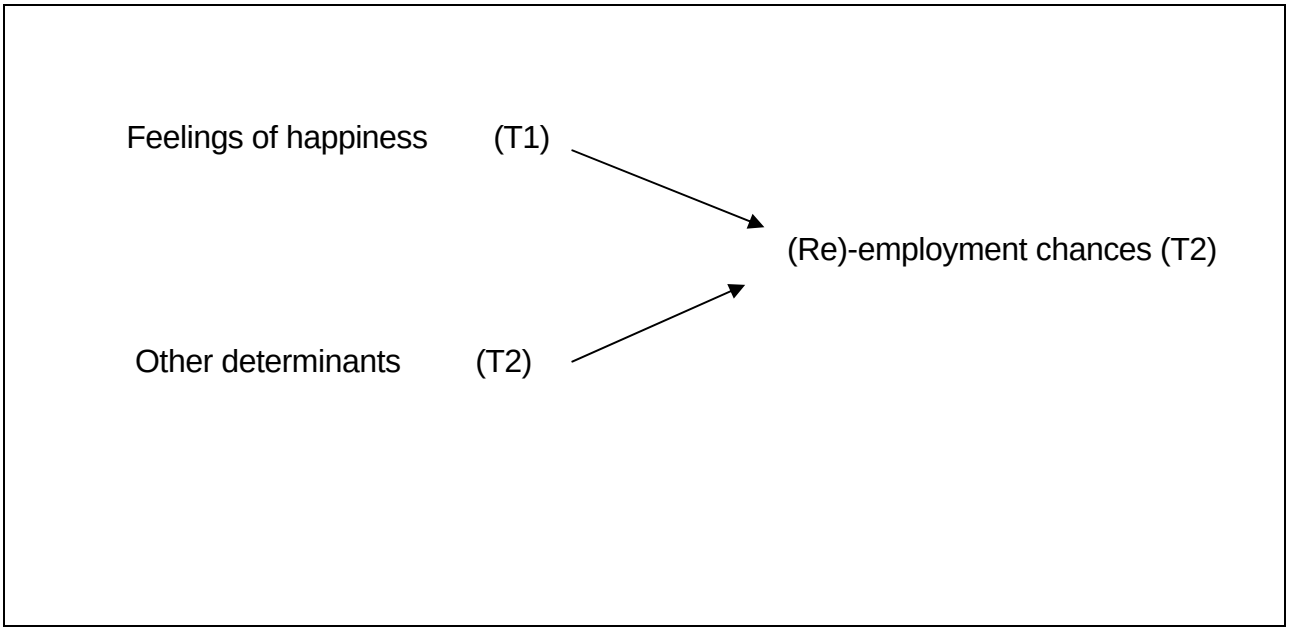
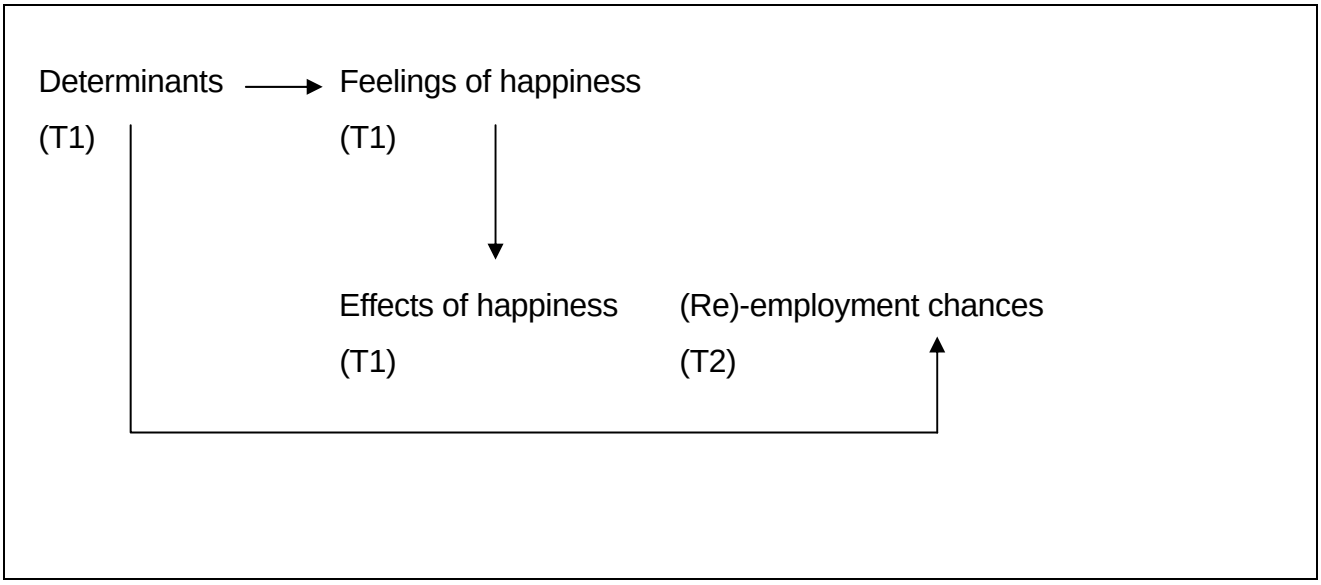
Scheme 1

Direct model



Scheme 2

Indirect model



Scheme 3

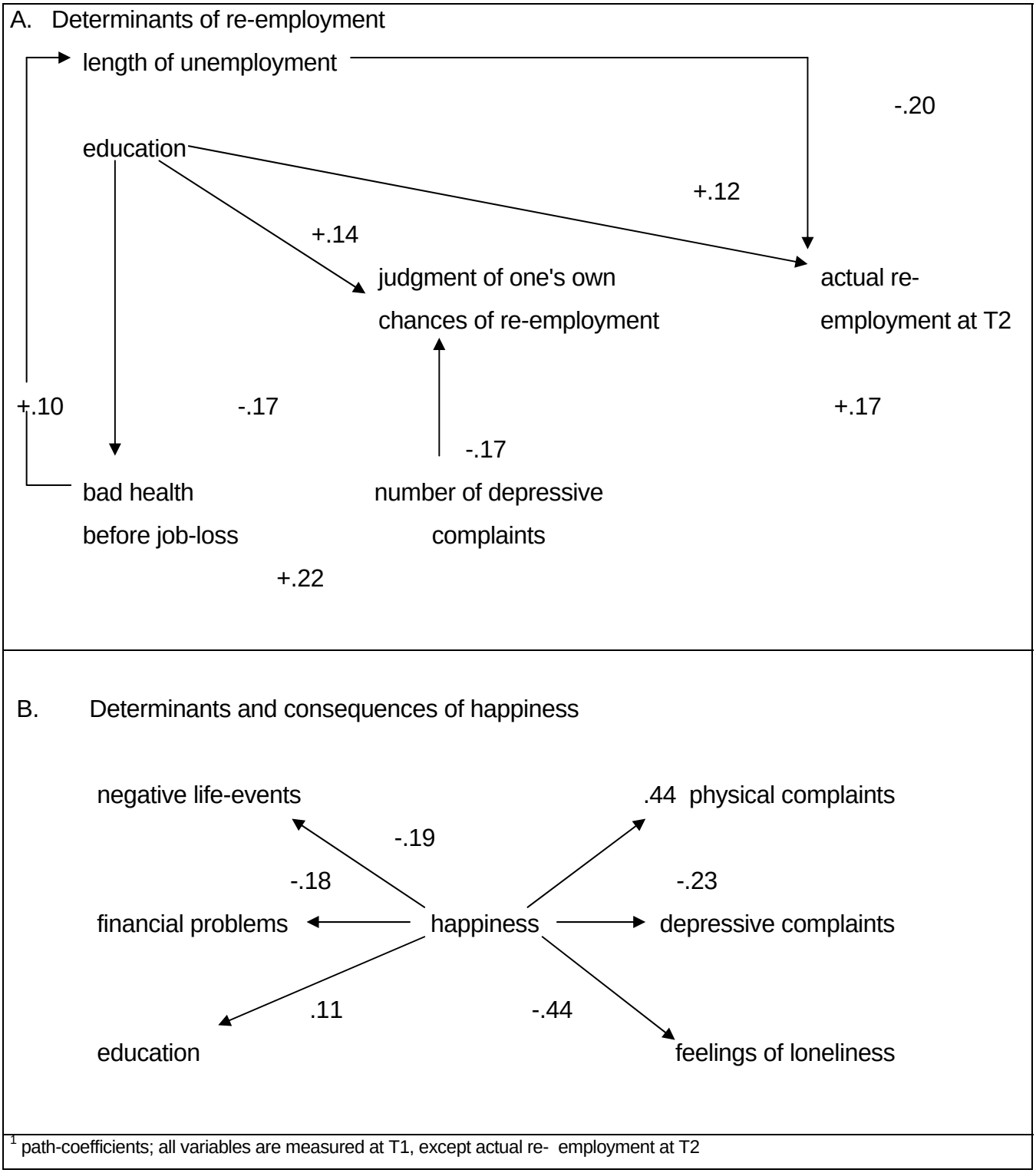
Predictors of re-employment (Pearson correlations, N=562)

Predictors at T1	Pearson correlation with re-employment at T2	p-value
Education	.15	.001
Health		
- bad health as a possible cause of unemployment	-.13	.002
- number of health complaints (VOEG)	-.16	.000
- number of depressive complaints (POF)	-.12	.005
- number of physical complaints (POF)	-.12	.003
- number of chronic complaints	-.13	.002
Life situation		
- feelings of loneliness	-.12	.004
- number of negative life-events in past year	-.13	.003
- amount of financial problems	-.14	.001
Unemployment situation		
- length of unemployment	-.24	.000
- chances of re-employment within 3 months[1]	.39	.000
- chances of never getting a new job	-.22	.000
- re-employment chances are small because of advanced age or bad health[1]	-.13	.002
- has no personal circumstances which lower chances of re-employment[1]	+.21	.000
Happiness (ABS)	+.09	.03

[1] According to the subjective judgement of the unemployed respondents themselves

Scheme 4

Determinants of re-employment (scheme A) and determinants of consequences of happiness (scheme B); simplified LISREL-model 1



[1] path-coefficients; all variables are measured at T1, except actual re- employment at T2

Scheme 5.

Predictors of job-loss (Pearson correlations, N = 603)

Predictors t1	Pearson correlation with job-loss T2	p-value
Gender (male=1, female=2)	.12	.001
Health		
- number of health complaints (VOEG)	.13	.000
- number of depressive complaints (POF)	.10	.006
- number of physical complaints (POF)	.14	.000
- number of chronic complaints	.10	.007
Life-situation		
- amount of financial problems	.14	.000
Work-situation		
- non-motivating labour-circumstances (poor payment, little possibilities for self-realization)	.14	.000
Unemployment-feelings		
- fear of pressure from bureaucracies in case of job loss	-.11	.003
Feelings of happiness (ABS)	-.09	.009

Scheme 6.

Happiness as a cause: Pearson correlations between happiness (ABS) at T1 and number of health complaints, feelings of loneliness and feelings of unemployment at T2

Possible consequences of unemployment measured at T2	Correlation with happiness at T1	
- number of depressive complaints (POF)	-.41	**
- number of physical complaints (POF)	-.34	**
- number of diseases under treatment (POF)	-.31	**
- feelings of social belonging	.26	**
- feelings of loneliness	-.42	**
- number of experienced advantages of unemployment	.29	**
- number of experienced disadvantages of unemployment	-.45	**

** = p<.001

Scheme 7.

Happiness as a consequence: Pearson correlations between health complaints, feelings of loneliness and feelings of unemployment at T1, and happiness (ABS) at T2

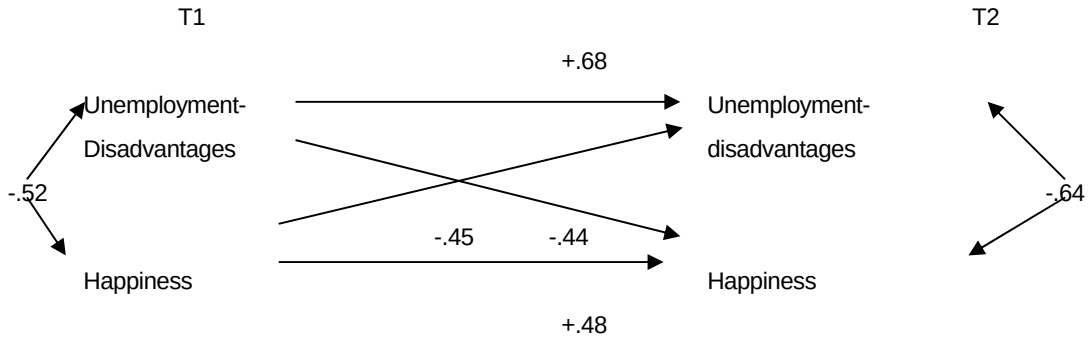
Possible determinants of happiness measured at T1	Correlation with happiness at T2	
- number of depressive complaints (POF)	-.40	**
- number of physical complaints (POF)	-.26	**
- number of diseases under treatment (POF)	-.22	**
- feelings of social belonging	.30	**
- feelings of loneliness	-.45	**
- number of experienced advantages of unemployment	.17	**
- number of experienced disadvantages of unemployment	-.44	**
- happiness (ABS)	.48	**

** = p<.001

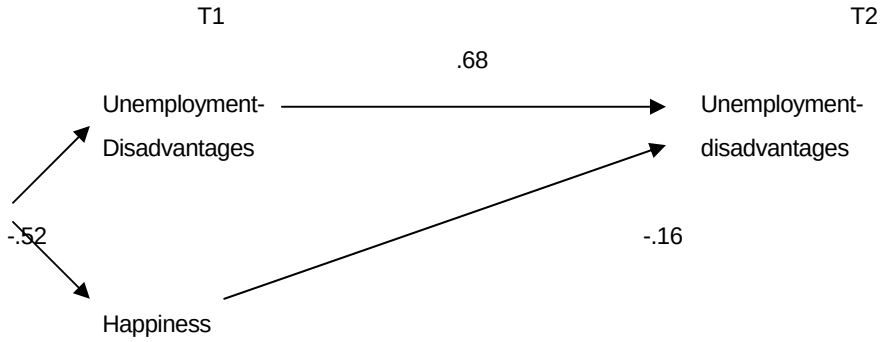
Scheme 8

Zero order and partial Pearson correlations between experienced unemployment-disadvantages and feelings of happiness (ABS) at T1 and T2 (N = 337 `continuously' unemployed at T1 and T2)

A. Zero order correlations



B. Partial correlations between Happiness at T1 and Unemployment-disadvantages at T2



C. Partial correlations between Unemployment-disadvantages at T1 and Happiness at T2