

Acceptance of Change in Workers: Personality Traits or Gratitude?

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the relationships between gratitude and acceptance of change, controlling for personality traits, in 213 Italian workers. The participants completed the *Big Five Questionnaire* (BFQ), the *Gratitude Resentment and Appreciation Test* (GRAT), and the *Acceptance of Change Scale* (AOC). Gratitude accounted for incremental variance beyond personality traits with respect to acceptance of change. This study opened future prospects of research and intervention for healthy organizations in strength-based prevention perspectives, emphasizing the value of gratitude as a positive strength for acceptance of change in workers.

Keywords

Acceptance of change, Gratitude, Personality traits, Workers, Strength-based prevention perspectives, Healthy organizations.

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Introduction

In the current working context characterized by insecurity and instability (Blustein et al., 2019), people need to be able to face change. For workers, understanding and accepting change is essential (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016b). Because, in today's fast-moving world of work, workers are requested to face change in a constructive manner, acceptance of change can facilitate them in finding adaptive modalities to meet challenges fruitfully. This could have positive implications for their well-being (Di Fabio et al., 2016, 2023) in a healthy organizational framework (Di Fabio, 2017a; Di Fabio et al., 2020), as well as in a sustainable development perspective in organizations (Di Fabio, 2017b; Di Fabio & Cooper, 2023; Di Fabio & Peiró, 2023).

The construct of acceptance of change (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016b) has been conceptualized as the tendency to welcome change rather than move away from it, because acceptance of change is considered positive for individual well-being. Acceptance of change refers to the fact that people can accept modifications in their work or other activities, considering the positive effect of changes on their working life or life as well as their resources (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016b). Acceptance of change can be seen as a dynamic and multidimensional construct, including the following aspects (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016b): support for change, the perceived social support received from others when coping with change; change seeking, the perception of having the tendency to search for change, including the perceived ability to acquire and keep information, looking for different inputs; positive reaction to change, the perception of positively reacting to change, considering gaining benefit from it; cognitive flexibility, and the perceived ability to shift between various concepts or to adjust cognitive processing plans.

Acceptance of change is a promising individual strength when faced with the challenges of the current working environment (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016b). Since the acceptance of change construct was conceptualized (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016b), it was studied, controlling for personality traits, in relation to different variables that could be increased in strength-based prevention perspectives (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2021) and in a primary prevention perspective (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2021; Hage et al., 2007). For example, in relation to workplace relational civility (Di Fabio et al., 2016), intrapreneurial self-capital (Palazzeschi & Di Fabio, 2021), trait emotional intelligence and insight orientation (Gori et al., 2022). Following this perspective of research, gratitude could be introduced in relation to acceptance of change. Gratitude is a promising resource for healthy organizations (Di Fabio, 2017a; Di Fabio et al., 2020), contributing to promoting positive relationships at work, the well-being of workers and also efficiency, success and productivity in organizations (Di Fabio et al., 2017).

With regard to the definition of the construct of gratitude, in the scientific psychological literature, the cognitive aspect (Weiner, 1986) and the emotional aspect (Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994) emerged. The cognitive aspect

regards a process articulated in two phases (Weiner, 1986): the first phase is relative to the acknowledgement of having obtained a positive result associated to feelings of happiness; the second phase concerns the attribution of these feelings of happiness to sources other than oneself. Regarding the emotional aspect, gratitude is an empathic emotion because it is related to the fact that individuals recognize what others do for them (Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994). In 2002, McCullough et al. referred to gratitude as a «generalized tendency to recognize and respond with grateful emotion to other people’s benevolence in the positive experiences and outcomes that one obtains» (p. 112).

On the basis of this definition, these authors considered gratitude as a unidimensional construct and developed the relative unidimensional instrument, the *Gratitude Questionnaire-6* (GQ-6; Italian version Di Fabio, 2022). Successively, a multidimensional definition of the construct of gratitude was developed by Watkins et al. (2003). This multidimensional definition includes three dimensions: sense of abundance, appreciation of simple pleasure and appreciation of others (gratitude for the support from others). On the basis of this multidimensional definition, the *Gratitude Resentment and Appreciation Test* (GRAT, Watkins et al., 2003; Italian version Di Fabio, 2016) and its short version GRAT-RS (Thomas & Watkins, 2003; Italian version Palazzeschi et al., 2022) were developed. This multidimensional conceptualization of the gratitude construct (Watkins et al., 2003) remained the most widely accredited in the literature. Gratitude was associated with both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Atad & Russo-Netzer, 2022; Portocarrero et al., 2020; Watkins, 2004; Zhang et al., 2023). Furthermore, gratitude is considered a positive resource beyond personality traits in relation to well-being (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2023).

From analysis of the literature, as far as we know, there are no studies that have examined the relationship between gratitude and acceptance of change, controlling for the effects of personality traits. Specifically, the hypotheses of the present study are the following:

- H1. A positive association will emerge between gratitude and acceptance of change.
- H2. Gratitude will account for incremental variance, beyond personality traits, with respect to acceptance of change.

Method

Participants

Two hundred and thirteen workers from Central Italy (39.81% males and 60.19% females; mean age = 53.57; $DS = 7.92$) participated in the study.

Measures

Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ; Caprara et al., 1993): 132 items (from 1 = «*Absolutely false*» to 5 = «*Absolutely true*») with the following Cronbach's alphas: Agreeableness .73, Conscientiousness .81, Emotional Stability .90, Extraversion .81, Openness .75.

Gratitude Resentment and Appreciation Test (GRAT; Watkins et al., 2003; Italian version Di Fabio, 2016): 44 items (1 = «Strongly disagree» to 5 = «Strongly agree») with the following Cronbach's alphas: Simple Appreciation .88, Appreciation of Others .87, Sense of Abundance .86, total score .89.

Acceptance of Change Scale (ACS; Di Fabio & Gori, 2016b): 20 items (from 1 = «Not at all» to 5 = «A great deal») with the following Cronbach's alphas: Predisposition to Change .83, Support for Change .79, Change Seeking .80, Positive Reaction to Change .75, and Cognitive Flexibility .72, total score .88.

Procedure

The administration of the questionnaire was conducted in groups by specialized personnel. Italian privacy laws (L.D.-196/2003; EU 2016/679) were respected. Informed consent was given by all the participants. The administration order was balanced.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics, correlations (Pearson's r) and hierarchical regressions were made used SPSS version 28.

Results

In Table 1 — Descriptive statistics and correlations (Pearson's r) are reported.

Table 1

Correlations among BFQ, GRAT, and ACS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Extraversion	-									
2. Agreeableness	.42**	-								
3. Conscientiousness	.23**	.40**	-							
4. Emotional Stability	.41**	.37**	.12	-						
5. Openness	.38**	.40**	.41**	.20**	-					

6. Sense of Abundance	.03	.32**	.12	.22**	.10	-				
7. Simple Appreciation	.14*	.05	.05	.09	.15*	.36**	-			
8. Appreciation of Others	.20**	.23**	.06	.12	.10	.15*	.42**	-		
9. GRAT Total Score	.20**	.20**	.06	.14*	.12	.49**	.78**	.74**	-	
10. ACS Total Score	.48**	.29**	.08	.39**	.23**	.15*	.34**	.38**	.42**	-

Note. *N* = 213. * < .05. ** < .01.

The findings of hierarchical regressions are reported in Table 2.

Personality traits explained 28% of the variance (first step), the GRAT dimensions added 12% of the variance (second step) (total variance of the model: 40%).

Table 2

Hierarchical regression: contribution of personality traits (BFQ) and GRAT dimensions in relation to Acceptance of Change

	Acceptance of Change
	B
Step 1	
Extraversion	.36**
Agreeableness	.07
Conscientiousness	.08
Emotional Stability	.21**
Openness	.06
Step 2	
Sense of Abundance	.13*
Simple Appreciation	.15*
Appreciation of Others	.16**
<i>R</i> ² step 1	.28***
ΔR^2 step 2	.12***
<i>R</i> ² total	.40***

Note. *N* = 213; * < .05, ** < .01. ****p* < .001.

Discussion

The present study examined for the first time, as far as we know, the relationship between gratitude and acceptance of change, controlling for personality traits, among Italian workers. The formulated hypotheses were supported by the obtained results.

Regarding the first hypothesis, positive associations emerged between gratitude and its dimensions and acceptance of change. The dimensions of gratitude (Watkins et al., 2003) that proved more related to acceptance of change were Appreciation of others and Simple appreciations, and to a lesser extent Sense of abundance. In the present study, workers who are grateful for the support and help received from others and for simple pleasure in life, and, even if to a lesser extent, for having receiving much in life, seem to have a tendency to conceive change as a challenge and an opportunity and not as a critical situation to be avoided (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016b).

Furthermore, gratitude explained incremental variance beyond personality traits in relation to acceptance of change, confirming the second hypothesis of the present study. These results showed the additional contribution of gratitude with respect to personality traits in relation to acceptance of change. At the level of gratitude, the dimensions Appreciation of others followed by Simple appreciations and then Sense of abundance emerged as being associated to acceptance of change, controlling for personality traits. It might suggest that being grateful could bring the workers of the present study to face changes with more trust, seeing changes as possibilities to learn and grow as well as opportunities to be grateful for. The incremental validity that we found for gratitude beyond personality traits in relation to acceptance of change, confirmed its potential, which has already been found in the literature for other positive variables, as for example workplace relational civility (Di Fabio et al., 2016), intrapreneurial self-capital (Palazzeschi & Di Fabio, 2021), trait emotional intelligence and insight orientation (Gori et al., 2022).

The present study presents some limitations. The participants were workers from Central Italy. Future studies should extend the research to workers of other regions of our country. Furthermore, the relationships between gratitude and acceptance of change could be examined in specific targets of workers, including workers in transition or vulnerable workers and other targets such as university and high school students. An additional limitation regards the cross-sectional design of this study, which demands longitudinal studies in the future. Moreover, further research could analyse the relationship between gratitude and other positive variables, as for example workplace relational civility (Di Fabio & Gori, 2016a), optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985), and hope (Snyder et al., 1991), controlling for personality traits.

Confirming the findings of this research in the future, perspectives for research and interventions could arise for gratitude with respect to acceptance of change. Because gratitude can be increased through training (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011; Rash et al., 2011; Siu et al., 2014), differently to the substantially stable personality traits (Costa & McCrae, 1992), gratitude could be considered as a positive resource in relation to the acceptance of change in workers for healthy organizations (Di Fabio, 2017a; Di Fabio et al., 2020; Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) in strength-based prevention perspectives (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2021).

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