

A Conceptual Framework of Happiness at the Workplace

Phathara-on Wesarat¹, Mohmad Yazam Sharif² & Abdul Halim Abdul Majid²

¹ Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus, Thailand

² School of Business Management, College of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

Correspondence: Phathara-on Wesarat, Dept. of Social Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus, Pattani, Thailand. Tel: 66-7-333-1304. E-mail: phatharaon-w@bunga.pn.psu.ac.th

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Abstract

Happiness at the workplace refers to how satisfied people are with their work and lives. The idea of happiness is related to individual's subjective well-being. Happiness at the workplace is crucial for improving productivity in any organization. Happy people are productive people while those people who are unhappy may not pay full attention to any task. Some scholars believe that organizations which are able to maintain long-term happiness at the workplace could probably increase and sustain productivity. Therefore, they should know what factors could affect employee happiness in order to effectively enhance happiness at the workplace. But research on employee happiness was rarely seen in the past. The issue of happiness at the workplace needs to be properly conceptualized so that useful research on it could be conducted. This paper presents a potential conceptual framework of happiness at the workplace that could give valuable contribution to future research in this area.

Keywords: conceptual framework, happiness, subjective well-being, workplace

1. Introduction

Work is one of important aspects of people's lives (Dulk, Groeneveld, Ollier-Malaterre, & Valcour, 2013). People perform their work in exchange for either monetary (e.g. salary and benefits) or non-monetary rewards (e.g. psychological fulfillment from work) (Stiglbauer & Batinic, 2012). In today's changing world, the world of work has been changing rapidly (Baran, Shanock, & Miller, 2012; Quinlan, 2012). The changing work environments (e.g. the increasing internationalization of business, new technology, and new organizational practices) lead to the changing nature of work (Connell, Gough, McDonnell, & Burgess, 2014; Koukoulaki, 2010). Nature of work is defined as "the actual content of the job or work characteristics" (Benrazavi & Silong, 2013, p. 129). From human resource management (HRM) perspective, HRM practices (e.g. downsizing, outsourcing, and temporary employment) influence the nature and scope of work (Colakoglu, Lepak, & Hong, 2006). Corporate restructuring and downsizing which aim to reduce the workforce for improving organizational performance probably can make employees feel unsatisfied with their jobs (Klehe, Zikic, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2011). Employees who perceive job insecurity have lower commitment to their organizations and they intend to leave their jobs (Silla, Gracia, Mañas, & Peiró, 2010). Employees' job satisfaction has an impact on organizational performance (Dalal, Baysinger, Brummel, & Lebreton, 2012). If they are satisfied with work, their productivity would be increased (Barmby, Bryson, & Eberth, 2012).

Generally, employers expect a high level of performance and productivity from their employees (Thompson & Goodale, 2006; Samnani & Singh, 2014). Most companies need productive workers to work for them so as they could attain organizational goals (Chong & Eggleton, 2007; Hales & Williamson, 2010). Many companies used managerial tools for the purpose of increasing productivity (Salis & Williams, 2010; Samnani & Singh, 2014). The studies by Salis and Williams (2010), Samnani and Singh (2014), and Tabassi and Abu Bakar (2009) considered HRM practices (e.g. compensation system, face-to-face communication) as the means to increase productivity. Moreover, maintaining happiness at the workplace can increase employees' productivity (Quick & Quick, 2004). The previous studies (e.g. Quick & Quick, 2004; Rego & Cunha, 2008) state that happy employees are productive employees. Conversely, unhappiness at the workplace reduces productivity (Fereidouni, Najdi, & Amiri, 2013). The happiness issues have been widely studied in various fields such as philosophy, religion, psychology, sociology, and economics (Aydin, 2012). The term "happiness" has been

discussed by many scholars (Björke, 2012; Johnston, Luciano, Maggiori, Ruch, & Rossier, 2013). “Happiness” is universal to all people in every culture because everybody searches for happiness (Aydin, 2012; Fisher, 2010). It is related to an individual’s subjective well-being (Angner, Hullett, & Allison, 2011; Jiang, Lu, & Sato, 2012) or life satisfaction (Van Praag, Romanov, & Ferrer-i-Carbonell, 2010). There is a close relationship between job and life satisfaction (Saari & Judge, 2004). Job satisfaction affects life satisfaction while life satisfaction also affects job satisfaction (Saari & Judge, 2004). Thus, happiness at the workplace refers to an individual’s work and life satisfaction, or subjective well-being at the workplace (Bhattacharjee & Bhattacharjee, 2010; Carleton, 2009). In this paper, the two terms “happiness” and “subjective well-being” are used interchangeably (Frey & Stutzer, 2000a).

Whereas happiness at the workplace is important to both individuals and organizations (Fisher, 2010; Simmons, 2014), the research on employee happiness in organizations is limited (Fisher, 2010; Hosie, Willemyns, & Sevastos, 2012; Sloan, 2005). It should be investigated further in order to provide sufficient knowledge to academics, practitioners, and those who are interested in the notion of happiness at the workplace (Hosie et al., 2012; Sloan, 2005). This paper therefore develops a conceptual framework of happiness at the workplace that could be used for conducting the research on this area. It begins with conceptual framework. It is then followed by discussion, and conclusion respectively.

2. Conceptual Framework

This paper focused on happiness at individual level (i.e. happiness of individual employees). Based on the literature review (e.g. Angner et al., 2011; Demir, Özen, Doğan, Bilyk, & Tyrell, 2011; Mohanty, 2009; Tadić, Bakker, & Oerlemans, 2013), happiness constructs at the workplace were identified. The interrelations between construct categories (such as employment status, income, friendship, and work activities) and happiness were supported by the previous studies (see Table 1).

Table 1. Happiness constructs at the workplace

Construct category	Findings	References to support the findings
Employment status	Full-time employment contributes to employee’s happiness positively.	Mohanty (2009)
	Unemployment brings unhappiness to people.	Alesina, Di Tella and MacCulloch (2004) Ohtake (2012)
	Unemployment is negatively related to subjective well-being.	Dolan, Peasgood and White (2008)
	Voluntary part-time employees are happier than full-time employees.	Nikolova and Graham (2014)
Income	Individuals’ personal income affects their happiness.	Tsou and Liu (2001)
		Pouwels, Siegers and Vlasblom (2008)
		Selim (2008)
		Biswas-Diener, Vittersø and Diener (2010)
		Knabe and Rätzel (2010)
		Angner et al. (2011)
Friendship	Positive friendship at the workplace influences employee happiness	Campbell (2013)
		Hamilton (2007)
		Demir et al. (2011)
		Naff (2012)
Work activities	Specific work activities are positively associated with happiness.	Bader, Hashim and Zaharim (2013)
		Snow (2013)
		Waryszak and King (2001)
Work activities	Individuals are happy when they perceive that their job duties are significant.	Tadić et al. (2013)
		Golparvar and Abedini (2014)

The above-mentioned constructs are the key factors which influence happiness at the workplace. This paper assumed that these factors can make employees happy, which in turn their performance would be improved (Atkinson & Hall, 2011). However, people in each region (e.g. Asia and Europe) or in each culture have their own philosophy of happiness (Schwartz, 2007; Trung, Cheong, Nghi, & Kim, 2013). This paper presents a conceptual framework which is composed of independent variables (employment status, income, friendship, and work activities), dependent variable (happiness at the workplace), and moderating variable (cultural values) (see Figure 1).

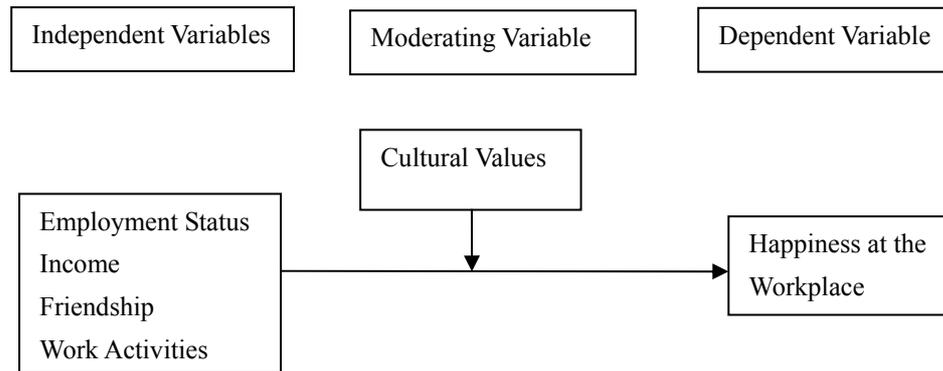


Figure 1. A conceptual framework of happiness at the workplace

Happiness at the workplace is hypothesized to be influenced by several factors such as employment status, income, friendship, and work activities. The relationship between these factors and happiness at the workplace is moderated by cultural values.

2.1 Employment Status

Employment status refers to an employment-related situation in which an individual is being held (Foroutan, 2011). Individuals' happiness depends on their employment status (Frey & Stutzer, 2000b; Ha & Kim, 2013) (e.g. employed or unemployed (Jiang et al., 2012), full-time or part-time employment (Berger, 2009)). Employees usually seek for employment security (Silla, De Cuyper, Gracia, Peiró, & De Witte, 2009). Unemployment status makes people unhappy (Escott & Buckner, 2013). Their experience of unemployment or fear of unemployment can reduce happiness (Ohtake, 2012). Particularly, individuals who value family relationships may be more unhappy with unemployment status if it causes their family difficulties (Campbell, 2013). A number of studies have confirmed that unemployment affects happiness, but part-time and full-time employment that may affect employee happiness are needed to be investigated further (Berger, 2009). A study of maternal employment and happiness by Berger (2009) states that part-time employees have lower life satisfaction than full-time employees. Nevertheless, voluntary part-time employees who choose not to work full-time are happier than those full-time employees (Nikolova & Graham, 2014).

2.2 Income

Income includes the wage and salary income earned by an individual (Mathur, 2012). A study of income and happiness by Caporale, Georgellis, Tsitsianis and Yin (2009) confirms that there is a strong relationship between a person's income and life satisfaction. This is because people who have higher income have more opportunities to buy desired goods and services (Frey & Stutzer, 2002; Schnittker, 2008). Even though people who gain higher income seem to be happier people, their happiness level is affected by working hours (Binswanger, 2006; Paul & Guilbert, 2013). People may be unsatisfied with their jobs if they have long working hours (Georgellis, Lange, & Tabvuma, 2012).

Furthermore, people compare their own income with others (Lembregts & Pandelaere, 2014; Oshio & Kobayashi, 2011). They are likely to be happy when they perceive income equality (De Prycker, 2010). Oshio and Kobayashi (2011) contend that individuals who experience income inequality are less happy. In contrast, Hopkins (2008) argues that income inequality can positively affect happiness of some competitive people who gain more income than others. This is because competitive people try to make the difference between their own and others' rewards (Brody, 2010). They may be happy with higher income even if it is unequal to those people (Hopkins, 2008).

2.3 Friendship

Friendship is defined as a close relationship among friends (Huang, 2008). People express their friendship through emotion and behavior (Huang, 2008; Spencer, 2012). Friendship at the workplace refers to individuals' friendship with their peers, subordinates, and superiors (Austin, 2009; Lee, 2005; Mao & Hsieh, 2012). Friendship at the workplace has a positive impact on organizational productivity and employees' work attitudes towards their jobs (Song, 2005). Many studies show the link between interpersonal relationship and happiness (Demir & Davidson, 2013; Søraker, 2012; Westaway, Olorunju, & Rai, 2007). Positive friendship not only influences happiness of employees but also affects productivity (Bader et al., 2013). Friendship groups are more committed to their work and lead to higher productivity (Dotan, 2007). Employees who have meaningful friendship are happier than those who are alone (Snow, 2013). Consistently, Wright (2005) asserts that lonely people are less happy. People who have significant friendships may be happy because good friends are willing to behave positively to each other (Simon, Judge, & Halvorsen-Ganepola, 2010). It should be highlighted that happy employees are mostly sociable people who have more friends (Ganser, 2012).

2.4 Work Activities

Work activities are the activities or duties that are performed by workers (Siccama, 2006). Some workers are happy with their work activities while some workers have negative experiences at work (Siegall & McDonald, 2004). Individual could have different levels of happiness during different work activities (Tadić et al., 2013). They may happy to perform specific work activities (Tadić et al., 2013; Waryszak & King, 2001). Martin (2008) argues that people feel happy when they pursue meaningful activities. Thus, managers should know how to manage the meaning of work for employees (Cleavenger & Munyon, 2013; Vasconcelos, 2008). If employees perceive significance and meaning of work, they may be happy to do their work (Dimitrov, 2012; MacMillan, 2009).

2.5 Cultural Values

Cultural values are "belief systems that a society is committed to and that are handed down from one generation to the next" (Hassan, 2011, p. 111). A study by Downie, Koestner and Chua (2007) presents that cultural values can support an individual's self-determination to the happiness in diverse countries. The study shows the mean level differences of happiness across countries (Downie et al., 2007). Similarly, this paper assumed that the above-mentioned factors (employment status, income, friendship, and work activities) do not have the same effect to employee happiness in different cultures. The conceptions of happiness may vary among different societies or cultures (Lu, Gilmour, & Kao, 2001). People from different cultures (e.g. Western and Eastern cultures) value different things (Goos, 2012; Lee, Scandura & Sharif, 2014). Western cultural values are mainly focused on individualism that views each individual as an autonomous person (Cho, Thyroff, Rapert, Part, & Lee, 2013; Goh, Lee, & Salleh, 2009). Individualistic people place a high value on self-interests and personal goals (Rego & Cunha, 2009). Hence, their happiness is based on personal factors (e.g. personal attitudes and beliefs) (Ram, 2010).

Eastern cultural values are emphasized on collectivism (Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). In collectivistic societies, group goals are more important than personal goals (Zhang, Van Doorn, & Leeftang, 2014). They believe that an individual's personal goals should not threaten group harmony (Ayçiçeği-Dinn & Caldwell-Harris, 2011). However, individuals can have both Eastern and Western cultures since they are exposed to one another's culture in their everyday lives (Leung, Hou, Gati, & Li, 2011; Parker, Haytko, & Hermans, 2009).

3. Discussion

Employees are happy when they experience stable employment (Scherer, 2009). Permanent employees seem to be more satisfied with their jobs than temporary employees (Ong & Shah, 2012; Scherer, 2009). Sora, Caballer and Peiró (2010) maintain that temporary employees perceive a high level of job insecurity. Unstable employment not only makes employees feel unhappy but also affects the rate of employee turnover and organizational performance (Dike, 2011). This is because temporary employees are more likely to intend to leave their jobs than permanent employees (Sora et al., 2010).

Many studies (e.g. Gebremariam, Gebremedhin, & Schaeffer, 2010; Rotaru, 2014) show the link between employment and income growth. Employment can be considered as an important source of income (Zuvekas & Hill, 2000). People who have better employment status (i.e. stable employment) gain higher income (Shlay, Weinraub, Harmon, & Tran, 2004). They may be happier than those who have lower employment status and gain lower income (Caporale et al., 2009). Furthermore, it should be noted that self-employed people seem to be more satisfied with work than those who are employed in organizations (Benz & Frey, 2008). Employed and

self-employed people have different work processes that might have an impact to their happiness level (Benz & Frey, 2008). As a result, this paper views work activities as one of happiness constructs. People find the kinds of work tasks that are matched with their interests (Porfeli & Mortimer, 2010). The individuals' interests can be concerned with meaning of work (Michaelson, 2011). Some people are probably happy to pursue the meaningful work (Grady & McCarthy, 2008). An understanding of factors contributing to meaning of work is useful for the organizations to provide employees with meaningful work (Michaelson, Pratt, Grant, & Dunn, 2014).

In addition to the three happiness constructs mentioned earlier, people value friendship at the workplace as important to their work life (Mao, Hsieh, & Chen, 2012). Friendship at the workplace facilitates the exchange of resources and ideas among employees (Chang, 2013; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2011). It enhances employees' attitudes towards work and work performance (Lin, 2010). Employees who are happy with work and have positive friendships at the workplace are less likely to leave their jobs (Dike, 2011). However, Mao and Hsieh (2012) argue that employees with different work levels may differ in friendship expectation. Higher-level employees had lower expectation for friendship at work (Mao & Hsieh, 2012). Thus, employees performing different work levels could differ in happiness of friendship as well.

Maintaining employee happiness is necessary to ensure availability of workforce (Asiyabi & Mirabi, 2012; Lindorff, 2010). According to the changing world of work, most employees change their jobs several times (Clarke, 2007; Sun & Wang, 2011). Many organizations have difficulties retaining the high talent employees who have high potential to accomplish organizational goals (Chaudhry & Shah, 2011; Kumar & Dhamodaran, 2013). It can be said that enhancing happiness at the workplace is a challenge for maximizing organizational productivity (Chaudhry & Shah, 2011).

4. Conclusion

In this paper, the relationship between independent variables and happiness at the workplace is hypothesized to be moderated by cultural values. Employee happiness may differ in different cultural contexts. The research on happiness issues should be explored further to include diverse cultures as well as various types of organizations (Sloan, 2005). Since the notion of happiness is crucial for organizational performance and productivity, HR managers need to design and manage a workplace to enhance employee happiness (Gavin & Mason, 2004; Rego & Cunha, 2008). Happy employees bring their happiness from the office to their home; likewise they also transfer their happiness from their home to the office (Asiyabi & Mirabi, 2012). This suggests that there is a possible close interrelation between an individual's work and life.

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