

Happiness at Workplace: Building a Conceptual Framework

Zerin Tasnim*

Many of the waking life of modern human beings nowadays are spent in some kind of work setting. So how happy we feel at work has a direct influence on the overall quality of life. Therefore, understanding what makes us happy or unhappy at work is very crucial. But, surprisingly; there is an absence of sound theoretical and conceptual framework for understanding such an important subject from the organizational perspective. For developing a conceptual framework for happiness at work, two components are relevant -the external work environment and the internal mental mapping .So to understand and formulate a theoretical framework for happiness at work, the phenomenon needs to be looked at from various dimensions. Such as, cognitive neuroscience, EP (Evolutionary Psychology) and an overall environmental influence in terms of work setting. Thus, in an attempt to foster happiness at a workplace, this paper reviews the causes of happiness and their consequences or effects at work from the perspective of psychological literature as well as external factors.

JEL Classification: M10, M14

Keywords: Evolutionary Psychology, happiness, Neuroscience, Eastern Philosophy, positive psychology.

Field of Research: Management

1. Introduction

The search for happiness is perhaps as old as human history. On the global stage, clear evidence exists that the psychological and philosophical study of happiness began for more than 2,500 years ago in China, India and Greece. Furthermore, in today's world, there is a resurgence of interest regarding issues of happiness in philosophical, psychological and even political domains - the exhortation of being 'happy and well' seems to be echoing till this present day. Though there is the preponderance of commoditized literature, only a few scientific research or theory building exercise has been undertaken from the organizational perspective. And a robust framework for application in the work setting is still missing (Cotton et al, 2006).

As such, there is still a huge gap between "what science knows and what business does", as stated by Dr. Bernd Irlen bunch of LSE. The lack of an inter-disciplinary approach has been a major obstacle in this area of research. Job holders spend on an average of eight to ten hours in their work or job-related activities. So whether a person is happy or not will largely depends on whether he is happy or not in his workplace.

*Zerin Tasnim, Lecturer, School of Business, Southeast University, Dhaka, Bangladesh,
E-mail: zerin_tasnim91@yahoo.com

Tasnim

There are two components of happiness:

- The internal motivational factors.
- The external stimuli factors.

But, surprisingly, there is an absence of sound theoretical and conceptual framework that discusses such an important subject from the organizational perspective. As happiness or unhappiness at one's workplace is a complex, multilayered phenomenon, so developing a sound framework requires a systemic analysis using multiple perspectives. However, the current scenario of happiness research is that there are fragmented theories and methods from separate disciplines for example, philosophy, psychology, cognitive science, computational theory etc. But there is a lack of useful conceptual model or framework which unifies these various ways of analyzing human experience as a whole. The focus of this paper is to reveal that happiness is a multilayered phenomenon which is not only confined within external motivational factors as Job engagement, job satisfaction, safety at the workplace, freedom, valued social position, stress management, work-family conciliation and so on, but it is also confined within internal motivational factors, such as positive psychology, self-esteem and a person's well-being judgment.

The main objective of this paper is:

- To find the causes of happiness in the workplace.
- To find the effect / consequence of happiness at work in an organization.

For this purpose, this paper begins with a brief overview of the psychological literature on happiness. Then gradually it moves to a detailed explanation of the underlying factors responsible for happiness at work and the effect of these factors in their working life as well as in organizations. Finally, a conclusion about the current understanding of happiness at the workplace was drawn and some suggestions are also provided to bring true happiness in the workplace of individuals with a combination of both internal and external factors, philosophy and psychology.

2. Literature Review

According to Gavin & Manson (2004), happiness is not just about acquiring money, honors or sensual pleasure but happiness is also a holistic state of well-being. It entails doing well and being well. Provided the worker is happy and hence they are able to sustain their contribution to productivity. Another research reported that stress and the general well being of employees affect the employees' performance and thus happiness (Rego & Cunha, 2008). According to them, successful organizations help their workers to develop self-determination, competence as well as psychological well-being. A six-factor model that consists of open and frank communication with leaders, work-family conciliation, trust on leader, fairness and the spirit of camaraderie was also stated. These factors can influence the turnover rate, self-reported individual performance as well as happiness.

Danna and Griffin (1999) showed, for instance, that some researchers view mental and emotional issues somewhat separately from that of organizational design issues and the overriding factor is taken as the close coupling of OD with business economics and bearing in mind its cost-minimizing approach. By ignoring such basic mechanisms of human existence, the business has created work environments that are far from ideal. Research by Towers Perrin (Reported in WORKLIFE 2003) indicated that there is still a massive gap between

Tasnim

employees' current and ideal work experience and there is plenty of room for improvement in the Quality of work life (QWL) from the individual worker's perspective.

According to modern neuroscience, the brain is a connection machine. Our thoughts, memories, skills, and attributes are vast sets of connections or "maps" of bits of information joined together via complex chemical and physical pathways (Rock and Schwartz, 2006). A general term for this complex neural representation is the 'mental model'. The 'mental model' creates deeply ingrained assumptions and generalizations that influence how we see the world and ourselves and consequently how we react.

As the congruence model of Subjective Well-Being has shown, happiness occurs when there is congruence between this mental model and the external environment (Stones, Michael, et al, 2011). The idea of happiness remains one of the least understood organizational phenomena. This may be due to the fact that, within the framework of OB and HRM, satisfaction with work (a somewhat narrower scope than happiness) is a fairly recent concept and has evolved from the works of management thinkers like Mary Parker Follet, Chester Barnard and, Elton Mayo-whose work was defined by their ideas on human relations. The environmental mismatch theory formulated along this line, predicts the development of psychological pathology or stress within the person, given that a gap exists between the value system and the work demands, a view also supported by Cosmides and Tooby (2005). The trigger is when there is a perceived difference between the organizational and personal value inputs, then in minor instances, the individual is able to cope and reduce stress, and manage the mismatch through mechanisms such as cognitive dissonance and adaptation (Stone & Cooper, 2001). But when there is an unbridgeable gap between the personal and organizational values and needs, the attempt at reduction becomes less effective and that leads to some level of residual stress in the average person and, in major instances, behavioral pathologies surface. Research in modern cognitive neuroscience (Rock and Schwartz, 2006) also has shown that – such mismatch seems to arouse Amygdala. It is a structure closely connected with the brain's fear circuitry, resulting in a decreased ability to make rational comparisons among competing objects.

3. The Content and Causes of Happiness at Work

As stated by Aristotle in the Nicomachean Ethics, written in 350 B.C.E –'happiness is the only emotion that humans desire for its own sake and people seek riches, or honor, or health, not for their own sake but in order to be happy'. But the lack of serious research from the perspective of organizational management has led to an absence of an integrating framework or model. Thereby it results in an insufficiency not only with cross-fertilization of ideas but also with a model that is usable by practicing managers. Consequently, this lack may have led to the proliferation of large bodies of unscientific and commoditized literature and increased the popularity of 'self-help' books among management practitioners. Because they are left to seek answers from pop psychology rather than from what they were taught at business schools. Happiness depends on various factors and these factors have an impact on individuals in different ways. Some can be happier than the others. So to find out the causes of happiness the following factors are identified:

3.1 Job Satisfaction

Till date, the most significant cause of happiness at work is job satisfaction. Job satisfaction represents a combination of both positive and negative feelings that workers have towards their work. Job satisfaction gives workers a sense of achievement and success on the job. It is directly related to productivity as well as to personal well-being. Job satisfaction and subjective

Tasnim

well-being relationship are reciprocal and there is a significant effect of subjective well-being on job satisfaction (Bowling and Wang, 2010). Others have also reported that the methods which are frequently used to measure job satisfaction mostly ignore the effect and cognitive components (Brief and Weiss, 2002).

3.2 Job Engagement

Numerous employee performance outcomes reflect to what extent an employee is engaged in the job. In organizations, the ones with the highest level of employee engagement has the highest chance of performing above the company median while those with the lowest employee engagement have a very low chance of performing above the company median. It can be influenced by many factors as (1) to what extent an individual department contributes to company success (2) to what extent an individual's effort is needed to achieve the company's goal and (3) to what extent an individual get a sense of accomplishment from working at the company. Kahn (1992) has provided a significant conceptual basis for job engagement (1992) and according to his view, the more an individual gets engaged in work role, the more he/she will have the comprehensive understanding of performance. Also, in another research, it is mentioned that job engagement has a good relationship with performance than with any other concepts.

3.3 Safety at Workplace

Safety refers to catering for the well-being of workers by employers, trade union, as well as by governmental and non-governmental agencies. It largely depends on recognizing the unique place of the worker in the society and doing good to him or her by motivating employees, minimizing social evils and building a company's brand image which is based on employees' welfare and safety. Nahrgang et al (2011), supported the health impairment process and the motivational process through which job demands and resources relate to safety outcomes. Job demands such as risks and hazards and complexity impair employees' health and hence positively relate to burnout. Moreover, the support for knowledge, autonomy and safety are positively related to job engagement.

3.4 Freedom

Happiness mostly results from an individual's autonomy power or the ability to personally take decisions. People who choose working as a choice are happy. Roles therefore, should be assigned to individuals with discretion depending on their level of autonomy. In organizations where employers have no freedom to take decisions or use their discretion, the employees become demotivated and less effective. (Gavin and Mason, 2004)

3.5 Valued Social Position

Warr (2007) has explained that the basic features associated with happiness, includes the opportunity for personal control, the opportunity for skill use, externally generated goals, variety, environmental clarity, contact with others, availability of money, physical security, and a valued social position. According to him, the environmental features and happiness are not related in a linear fashion but there is a significant relationship between the environment and happiness.

3.6 Stress Management

According to Fairbrother and Warn (2003), work stress is associated with a low level of job satisfaction and personal well-being. It leads to other consequences as absenteeism, job hoping tendency, conflicts, lack of confidence and so on. Employees should be given the opportunity to discuss frankly with management, this helps to enhance competency and trust on their superiors. (Rego and Cunha 2008)

3.7 Work Family Conciliation

According to Rego and Cunha (2008), work family conflict reduces both career and life satisfaction and enhances unhappiness and stress. So the lack of work- family conciliation will lead to less productivity as the workers may see the workplace as less meaningful. Otherwise, when they feel conciliation between workplace and family, it may lead to happiness and thus, they become highly productive in the workplace.

3.8 Positive Psychology

The positive psychology helps to gain happiness and also saves the individual from aiming at the impossible (Joanne and Richard 2004). Positive psychology focuses on three levels: subjective experiences, individual traits and organizations. Subjective experiences aims to enriching and nourishing human experience, such as well-being and happiness. Because of the positive psychology, some individuals develop positive traits, such as interpersonal skill, self-confidence, wisdom and work ethics, which lead to happiness.

3.9 Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is strongly associated with happiness. Although the research has not clearly established causation, we are persuaded that a high self-esteem does lead to greater happiness and a low self-esteem is more likely to lead to depression under some circumstances. And hence, result in happiness and unhappiness. Still others find that a high self-esteem leads to happier outcomes regardless of stress or other circumstances (Baumeister et al 2003)

4. Effects/Consequences of Happiness

4.1 Happiness Widens Individual's Focus and Expands One's Thinking

Positive emotions like curiosity, joy, wonder, excitement, freedom and so on, increase an individual's ability to focus on anything or on any subject. When an individual is curious and happy about something then his or her mind opens up and he or she can think properly. When an individual thinks soundly, then numerous ideas come in his mind. Thus, an individual's creative ideas are highly appreciated by the company because it can result to a higher productivity for the organization. Meditation is a way which can help one to focus and think openly. The irony here is that the more clearly you think about your joy, the more it opens up new ideas.

4.2 Happiness Improves Your Problem-Solving Ability

When you are not happy and you are confronted with some challenges, all you need is a good laugh. Laughter unfreezes a "stuck" brain. Think of humor as a lubricant that allows the wheels — a person's thought processes — to once again move toward a solution. The mechanism

Tasnim

that underlies effective problem-solving is creativity, which is a person's intellectual ability to come up with the novel and unique answers to life's many challenges.

4.3 Happiness Builds Physical, Intellectual, and Social Resources: Positive Emotions Build the Following Resources

4.3.1 Physical resources: When an individual is happy, then he/she becomes playful and loves to play his/her favorite game. These happy individuals those are happy they like to exercise regularly for physical fitness. In contrast, the individuals who are not happy are unlikely to do physical activities and a reflection of this is illness.

4.3.2 Intellectual resources: Individuals learn better when they are in a positive frame of mind. In any company, the most efficient and successful employees are those who can enjoy doing his/her work. In any kind of job like teaching, banking, anchoring a program and speaking, the most wanted individuals are those who are entertaining as well as being knowledgeable about their work.

4.3.3 Social resources: It is a common phenomenon for individuals to enjoy the company of those who are positive and try to dissociate from those who are negative. If one behaves very badly and rudely to others, then others in the same vein will also treat him/her badly. And if one acts politely, then, of course, the others will give a gentle smile in return.

4.4 Happiness Counteracts Negative Emotions

Happiness is the solution to anger and negative thoughts. Happiness can broaden one's way of thinking by enabling one to think creatively. When a person's mind is occupied with positive thoughts, automatically, there is no space for negative thinking. If any negative emotions like anger, sadness and depression come to mind, it should immediately be replaced with a positive feeling and with something that give one excitement. Happiness protects your health: It is a renowned phenomenon that anger can cause several health hazards like heart attack, headache, stroke, high blood pressure and so on. But in contrast positive emotions can lower one's blood pressure, as well as lower the risk of heart injuries. Being happy can reduce stress and therefore, preserve one's health.

5. Findings and Implication

To create a healthy and happy workplace, the organization must focus on developing a positive psychology, self-esteem, Job engagement, job satisfaction, safety at workplace, freedom, valued social position, stress management and work-family conciliation. Organizations must be designed in such a way as to promote all the above-mentioned factors to promote happiness in the workplace. The organizations should focus on some external factors for happiness, such as freedom, valued social position, and work-family conciliation, safety at the workplace as well as internal happiness factors such as self-esteem, stress management and positive psychology. Happiness is not only bounded in materialistic sufficiency .It is also a worker's deeper inward aspirations for a good life. An organization can run smoothly and effectively when it can concentrate on areas that arouse an individual's extrinsic happiness such as wealth and other sensual pleasures and also on individual's intrinsic happiness.

6. Conclusion

Happiness is an umbrella concept that shades varieties of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. In the workplace, happiness is influenced by organizational, personal and social factors. Happiness is actually a combination of positive and negative emotions, philosophy, and psychology. But till date, most of the researches have focused on external factors such as wealth, position, power and so on. Therefore, there is a vast scope of research to build a usable and conceptual model by combining both intrinsic and extrinsic factors of happiness as well as give opportunities to the employees to find out their signature strength which can be beneficial to both the employees and organizations in the long run. There is also scope that unifies among various disciplines like eastern philosophy, like MUGA, Zen, Evolutionary psychology, modern neuroscience and other social factors, to find out the true strength of individuals which in turn, is capable of promoting the ultimate happiness of individuals in an organization as well as provide them a good life. This paper is also very timely and appropriate in the current context of a stressful work life of people in the present day, who strive to find happiness in their daily busy schedule.

7. Limitations and Future Research

This study is based on qualitative research and hence, I get the results were gotten by qualitative analysis of the factors that can affect happiness. The result would be more credible and effective; if I could do the quantitative analysis based on some factors, by collecting data from multiple sources and analyzing those using statistical tools besides my present qualitative analysis.

Also, most of the research nowadays concentrates on the external happiness of individuals in organizations. But in the future, organizations should focus on the intrinsic happiness as well, in order to get the best outcome of an employee. They should find out the signature strengths of an employee that would make them involved in relevant works. By so doing this, the organizations can enhance their productivity as well as they can ensure their worker's happiness. In eastern philosophy such truly happy states are defined as 'Dao/Tao', 'MUGA' or 'ZEN' states which can assist people to find genuine happiness during a state of consciousness called 'Flow'. In this state, they are completely absorbed in an activity, especially an activity which involves their 'signature strengths'. From the evolutionary and neuro-scientific perspective this seems to be supported by the brain and it is related to a behavioral and mental activity that are in tune with inherent tendencies will be supported by the brain, and are thus expected to be pleasant. Moreover, keeping the mind engaged in this way might also help the individual avoid discords and get perfect happiness.

Reference

- Attridge, M 2009, 'Measuring and Managing Employee Work Engagement: A Review of the Research and Business Literature', *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*, vol.24, No. 4, pp.383-398.
- Baumeister, RF, Campbell, JD, Krueger, JI and Vohs, KD 2003, 'Does high self-esteem cause better performance, interpersonal success, happiness, or healthier lifestyles?', *Psychological science in the public interest*, vol.4, No. 1, pp.1-44.
- Boehm, JK and Lyubomirsky, S 2008, 'Does happiness promote career success?', *Journal of career assessment*, vol.16, NO. 1, pp.101-116.

Tasnim

- Bowling, NA, Eschleman, KJ and Wang, Q 2010, 'A meta-analytic examination of the relationship between job satisfaction and subjective well-being', *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, vol.83, No. 4, pp.915-934.
- Brief, AP and Weiss, HM 2002, 'Organizational behavior: Affect in the workplace', *Annual review of psychology*, Vol.53, No. 1, pp.279-307.
- Çekmecelioğlu, HG, Günsel, A and Ulutaş, T 2012, 'Effects of emotional intelligence on job satisfaction: An empirical study on call center employees', *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol.58, pp.363-369.
- Cheney, G 1995, 'Democracy in the workplace: Theory and practice from the perspective of communication', *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, Vol. 23, No.3, pp. 167-200.
- Danna, K and Griffin, RW 1999, 'Health and well-being in the workplace: A review and synthesis of the literature', *Journal of management*, Vol.25, No.3, pp.357-384.
- Dierendonck, DV 2004, 'The construct validity of Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-being and its extension with spiritual well-being', *Personality and individual differences*, vol.36, No. 3, pp.629-643.
- Fairbrother, K and Warn, J 2003, 'Workplace dimensions, stress and job satisfaction', *Journal of managerial psychology*, Vol.18, No. 1, pp.8-21.
- Gavin, JH and Mason, RO 2004, 'The Virtuous Organization: The Value of Happiness in the Workplace', *Organizational Dynamics*, Vol.33, No. 4, pp. 379-392.
- Grinde, B 2002, 'Happiness in the perspective of evolutionary psychology', *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol.3, No. 4, pp.331-354.
- Gropper, DM, Lawson, RA and Thorne, JT 2011, 'Economic freedom and happiness', *Cato Journal*, Vol. 31 No. 2, pp.237-255.
- Kahn, WA 1992, 'To be fully there: Psychological presence at work', *Human Relations*, vol.45, pp. 321-349.
- Laland, KN, Kendal, JR and Brown, GR 2007, 'The niche construction perspective: Implications for evolution and human behaviour', *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*, Vol.5, No. 1, pp.51-66.
- Macklin, DS, Smith, LA and Dollard, MF 2006, 'Public and Private Sector Work Stress: Workers Compensation, Levels of Distress and Job Satisfaction and the Demand-Control-Support Model', *Australian Journal of Psychology*, Vol.58, No. 3, pp.130-143.
- McMahon, B 2007, 'Organizational commitment, relationship commitment and their association with attachment style and locus of control', Thesis In Partial Fulfillment Of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Science in Psychology, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta.
- Nahrgang, JD, Morgeson, FP and Hofmann, DA 2011, 'Safety at work: a meta-analytic investigation of the link between job demands, job resources, burnout, engagement, and safety outcomes', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol.96, No. 1, pp.71-94
- Rego, A and Cunha, MP 2008, 'Authentic climates and employee happiness: Pathways to individual performance', *Journal of Business Research*, Vol.61, No. 7, pp.739-752.
- Rich, BL, Lepine, JA and Crawford, ER 2010, 'Job engagement: Antecedents and effects on job performance', *Academy of management journal*, vol.53, No. 3, pp.617-635.
- Robinson, D, Perryman, S and Hayday, S 2004, *The drivers of employee engagement*. Report-Institute for Employment Studies, Mantell Building Falmer Brighton BN1 9RF, UK, viewed 24th August 2015, <<http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/408.pdf>>.
- Rock, D and Schwartz, J 2006, *The neuroscience of leadership. strategy+ business*, Booz & Company, New York, Viewed 4th November 2015, <<http://strategy-business.com/article/06207?gko=6da0a>>

Tasnim

- Rowden, RW and Conine Jr, CT 2005, 'The impact of workplace learning on job satisfaction in small US commercial banks', *Journal of workplace Learning*, vol.17, No. 4, pp.215-230.
- Stone, J and Cooper, J 2001, 'A self-standards model of cognitive dissonance', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 37, No. 3, pp. 228-243.
- Stones, MJ, Kozma, A, McNeil, JK and Worobetz, S 2011, 'Subjective well-being in later life: 20 years after the Butterworths monograph series on individual and population aging', *Canadian Journal on Aging*, Vol. 30, No.3, pp.467.
- Tooby, J and Cosmides, L 2005, 'The theory of evolution by natural selection has revolutionary implications for was', in David M Buss (ed), *The handbook of evolutionary psychology*, pp.5.
- Warr, P 2009, *Work, happiness, and unhappiness*, book review, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy book review, Viewed 30th August 2015, <http://www.the-iacp.com/assets/CBTBR/cbtbr-vol_55a.pdf/>.
- Xanthopoulou, D, Bakker, AB, Demerouti, E and Schaufeli, WB 2009, 'Work engagement and financial returns: A diary study on the role of job and personal resources', *Journal of occupational and organizational psychology*, vol.82, No. 1, pp.183-200.