

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE, ECONOMICS & MANAGEMENT

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HAPPINESS MAKES GOOD BUSINESS SENSE

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ABSTRACT

Although there is a lot of emphasis on happiness in our lives but somehow we haven't considered it important in our professional lives, given the fact that one-third of our waking life is spent at workplace. Considering this, the present paper attempts to establish the inevitable role of individual happiness in organisation's prosperity and also present a roadmap for contemporary HR professionals on how they can work to map happiness quotient of employees.

KEYWORDS

happiness, professional lives, working life.

INTRODUCTION

Everywhere in this universe, in one respect man's condition is the same. No matter how vastly different he may be in the outer appearance of his life, different countries, different races, different cultures, different languages, different ways of living, eating, dressing, etc., he may be completely different in all of these aspects, but there is one thing that is the same to all human individuals. And it is this factor that binds them into a global unity. If analyzed, it will be discovered that all humanity is engaged ceaselessly, day after day, from the cradle to the grave, only in trying to attain that which gives them happiness (Bhattathiry).

Being happy is of great importance to most people, and happiness has been found to be a highly valued goal in most societies (Diener, 2000). The meaning of term 'happiness' as perceived by people now-a-days has given a very surface description of a subject which is actually very deep in content. We do not recognize its worth or relevance in our lives, probably because we have started equating it to or confusing it with pleasures that we seek in our daily routines.

In our initial encounters with corporate professionals on the subject, there was an absolute disagreement or disregard to the very idea of studying happiness in relation to management. People do not seem convinced on 'happiness studies' contributing to the discipline of management anyhow. Although there is a lot of emphasis on happiness in our lives but somehow we haven't considered it important in our professional lives, given the fact that one-third of our waking life is spent at workplace. If we believe that our work has meaning and that we are valued for what we do, this encourages us to remain involved and to seek the next level of achievement. Also there is ample evidence in the past that support the commercial reward of happy employees at workplace. Hence, the imperative purpose of the present research paper is to establish the inevitable role of individual happiness in organisation's prosperity.

CONCEPTUALISING HAPPINESS

Past few decades have seen a tremendous growth in the research work focussing on happiness, which traditionally used to be described as simply 'feeling good', indicating to the idea that perhaps it's not just about feeling good but indeed impacts other significant facets of human life like health (Deiner & Chan 2011), relationships (Myers & Diener 1995) and work (Lyubormirsky, King, & Diener 2005) so much so that governments and policy makers across the world are considering happiness as a significant indicator of quality of life in a nation, parallel to other established indicators like GDP. The new field of 'happiness economics' further corroborates the fact that happiness studies now contribute to a wide range of other disciplines and organisational behaviour is one such discipline.

The popular dichotomy revealed in most happiness studies being whether happiness is an 'outside-in' or an 'inside-out' phenomenon, let us through a review of literature on the various concepts of happiness try to gain a deeper insight into this.

For the purpose of this paper we are using the terms happiness and wellbeing interchangeably and the concepts of happiness reviewed are particularly the ones written, discussed and applicable in the context of workplace only, as the idea is to establish the role of happiness studies in organisational behaviour.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Browsing over the various available literatures, the following notions about 'what happiness is?' were observed:

There are roughly three philosophical literatures on "happiness," each corresponding to a different sense of the term. The first one termed 'Eudemonism', considers man as a complex being whose identity is interwoven in its social and political environment. "My good", therefore, is inextricably interwoven with the good of others and of the community as a whole. Consequently, an essential theme in the Greek's teachings was that in order to achieve the good life people need to live in a good society, one that nurtures and supports them and helps them flourish. Hence Happiness is associated with virtue.

The second one termed Hedonism encourages pursuance of pleasures to attain Happiness. Pleasures explained to be both pleasure of senses and pleasure of entire mind.

The third philosophy on happiness finds its roots in eastern philosophies; defining Happiness as a State of Being. Let us now look at them in greater details and see how these philosophies hold relevant at workplace.

HEDONISM

There is both a narrow and a broad concept of hedonism that comes across from the literature wherein on one hand former focuses on pursuance of physical or sensory pleasures the later focuses on pleasure of mind. The popularly identified tool for measuring hedonism which is the emotional state of mind is through SWB (subjective wellbeing that is one's evaluation of one's own wellbeing) that primarily constitute judgement on following three elements – 1) Life satisfaction, 2) Positive moods, 3) Negative moods.

EUDEMONISM

Aristotle recognized happiness as an active pursuit rather than a passive state. He describes the latter, passive, hedonistic form of happiness— the life of pleasure seeking and accumulation— as "a life suitable to beasts" (Aristotle, 2001 version, 1095b 20). The notion of active, eudemonic happiness is, perhaps,

most famously embodied in Thomas Jefferson’s words, “ the pursuit of happiness” (Independence Hall Foundation, 2008, 2), in the Declaration of Independence (Brockman, 2004). This happiness— dyed deep in the fabric of Western culture— is a happiness of virtuous participation in a civil society.

The activity of eudemonic happiness is not aimless. It is directed toward the good and virtuous. To understand this notion of the good, it is important to differentiate between the good specifically and some good in general. Aristotle’ s (2001 version) *Nicomachean Ethics* begins; “ Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim” (1094a 1-3). Thus, he declared good to be the motivator for all that we do. However, there must be some highest aim, some chief good, for without this, “ the process would go on to infinity, so that our desires would be empty and vain” (Aristotle, 2001 version, 1094a 20-21). He declared the object of the highest good is political science, which “legislates as to what we [as citizens in a civil society] are to do and what we are to abstain from” (1094b 6-7). Eudemonic happiness consists of the two elements already discussed: virtuous activity directed at the good. The good and virtue are inextricably linked. The good is the organizing principle for civil society. It is that which aims at the sustenance of society and its citizens. Therefore, the good must belong to the context of civil society. It is defined by civil society through the art of politics. Virtue belongs to the citizen context since virtue is achieved by individual citizens performing virtuous activities for virtuous reasons.

Blurring the distinction between hedonic and eudemonic view: However the contemporary philosophers have tried to present an understanding of the concept of happiness which has aspects borrowed both from previously discussed philosophies of Hedonism and Eudemonism, this has even given rise to a new discipline of study described as Positive Psychology, the pioneer contributor to this area of psychology have been Martin Seligman, Waterman, Csikszentmihalyi and others.

Seligman (2002) based on his past research and theory had given three distinctive orientations to happiness endorsing three different ways of being happy: through pleasure, through engagement and through meaning which later on being tested by Peterson, Park & Seligman (2005) found that these orientations are distinguishable, but they are not incompatible and thus able to be pursued simultaneously, and that each is individually associated with life satisfaction. As previous research has shown, either hedonism or eudemonia can accompany a satisfying life, and so too can engagement.

Although positive psychology not just advocates virtuous and meaningful activities for attaining happiness but also extends to explain how certain interventions in behaviour and attitude can further increase one’s happiness such as practising gratitude (Emmons & McCullough, 2003), forgiveness (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000), and thoughtful self-reflection (King, 2001; Lyubomirsky, Sousa, & Dickerhoof, 2004) can bring about enhanced well-being.

HAPPINESS AS STATE OF BEING

Where Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, Schkade (2005) in their paper titled ‘Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change’ identify that out of the three believed factors that influence happiness, enunciated as follows: a genetically determined set point for happiness, happiness-relevant circumstantial factors, and happiness relevant activities and practices, the activity category offers the best opportunities for sustainably increasing happiness, Ancient philosophies of east years and centuries before had proposed the ways for permanently increasing happiness through practice, but the practice along with certain other workable domains identified as described by an article based on the paper published in PMC (PubMedCentral) of the U.S. National Institutes of Health’s National Library of Medicine which compares Wisdom in Ancient Indian Literature with Modern Views are:

- Knowledge of life
- Emotional Regulation
- Control over Desires
- Decisiveness
- Love of and Faith in the God
- Duty and work
- Self-contentedness
- Compassion and Sacrifice
- Yoga (Integration)

As also James (2006, 2007, 2008) presenting the spiritual teachings hailing from Buddhist philosophy explains that “All the unhappiness, discontent and misery that we experience in our life is caused only by our ignorance or confused knowledge of who or what we really are. So long as we limit our self by identifying a body as ‘I’, we will feel desire for whatever we think is necessary for our survival in that body, and for whatever we think will make our life in that body more comfortable and pleasant. Likewise we will feel fear and dislike of whatever we think threatens our survival in that body, and of whatever we think will make our life in it less comfortable or pleasant. When we do not get whatever we desire or like, and when we cannot avoid whatever we fear or dislike, we feel unhappy, discontented or miserable. Thus unhappiness or suffering is the inevitable result of desire and fear, or likes and dislikes. Desire and fear, and likes and dislikes, are the inevitable result of identifying a body as ‘I’.

Thus the theory that underlies the science and art of self-knowledge enables us to understand that all we need do in order to experience perfect and unlimited happiness is to attain true self-knowledge, and that the only means to attain true self-knowledge is to practise keen scrutinising self attention.

Howard along with Dalai lama in their authored book “the art of happiness” converging the theories of east and west discusses that no external conditions is responsible for happiness and it’s an internal phenomenon which is learned through practice-“Training the mind to develop inner resources”. They also suggest values of compassion, contentment, inner discipline, self worth, developing a supple mind and certain others.

But the big question that arises here is, since the present paper is looking at happiness which is being discussed in the context of workplace, how significant and valid would be these constructs. For that, let us study these constructs in relation to the available models of happiness at workplace, proposed and used in time, across the world as the antecedents to happiness at workplace.

MODELS ON HAPPINESS AT WORK

- 1) The first model is based on Ryff and Keyes’ (1995) psychological wellbeing theory whose factors were reinterpreted by Brown (1996) to make it applicable in organisational set up and later recited by Albano (2010) as the dimensions of Workplace happiness Index developed by him. The dimensions of workplace happiness, along with their associated factor from the Ryff and Keyes (1995) six-factor model of psychological well-being are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1: THEORY-BASED DIMENSIONS COMPRISING WORKPLACE HAPPINESS

Workplace Happiness Dimension	Associated Well-Being Factor*	Description
Meaning	Purpose in Life	The belief that one’ s work is purposeful and Meaningful
Autonomy	Autonomy	A sense of self-determination in the means by which work is accomplished
Behavioural Norms	Environmental Mastery	The capacity to understand and successfully interact in the prevailing social norms of the workplace
Feedback	Self-Acceptance	The ability to receive and make constructive use of feedback about the work one performs
Supportive Relations	Positive Relations With Others	The possession of supportive relationships with superiors and co-workers
Personal Growth	Personal Growth	A sense of continued growth and development as a person

Note. *Based on “The Structure of Psychological Well-Being Revisited,” by C. D. Ryff and C. L. M. Keyes, 1995, *Journal of Personality and Social psychology*, 69(4), p.720.

DISCUSSION

This model seems to draw its factors from all three philosophies about happiness that we have understood earlier. Where factors like autonomy, behavioural norms and supportive relations are the external conditions favourable to ones working environment hence find their roots in Hedonism, Meaningful or purposeful work was explained by Eudemonism as well as in Positive Psychology and on the other hand Constructive approach towards feedback, Personal growth are the practices highlighted in ancient eastern philosophies on the path to happiness.

- 2) The second model is proposed by psychologist Seligman (2010) through his book titled 'Authentic happiness' and 'Flourish' wherein he provides the acronym PERMA describing the following factors for happiness at work. **Pleasure** (the process of maximising positive emotion and minimising negative emotion and is referred to as the pleasant life which involves enjoyable and positive experiences), **Engagement** (or flow, the absorption of an enjoyed yet challenging activity), **Relationships** (social ties have turned out to be extremely reliable indicator of happiness), **Meaning** (a perceived quest or belonging to something bigger) and **Accomplishments** (having realized tangible goals).

DISCUSSION

Here again we see that Pleasure, Relationships and Accomplishments are hedonic components on the other hand, Meaning is a eudemonic component and Engagement is a practice of positive psychology and also a practicing principle of karma yoga.

- 3) Another understanding of happiness at work is given by Fisher (2010). She notes in particular that definitions of happiness at work "refer to pleasant judgments (positive attitudes) or pleasant experiences (positive feelings, moods, emotions, and flow states) at work". Where former is described by her as 'cold cognitions' and later as the hedonic state or emotional state of mind. Further, she also identifies three level analysis of happiness which is (1) transient (or within-person), (2) personal (or individual differences), and (3) unit level; she points out that happiness definitions vary qualitatively between levels. Based on this she recommends that researchers focus on three proxies of happiness (**job satisfaction, engagement, and affect**) as representative of different facets of happiness at work.

DISCUSSION

In her representation she has given an understanding of happiness at workplace where it is a function of a range of factors from hedonic state to individual attitude to even environmental determinants as explained by three levels, indicating a mix of philosophies (Hedonism and Positive psychology) referred by our literature.

Apart from the enlisted three, a range of self help books have been published on the topic where in they have presented doable solutions stemming from components given by hedonism, eudemonism as well as positive psychology, but there is a dearth of work representing the eastern philosophies of "happiness as a state of being", which I believe holds a route towards permanent or chronic levels of happiness and hence must be explored in the context of workplace and this has even begun as we talk about it here.

RELEVANCE OF HAPPINESS

Now let us move to gather evidences which assert, corroborate and confirm our title of the present paper where we say "happiness makes good business sense" and give HR professionals reasons as to why they should put their organisation's happiness quotient under check.

A rich wealth of researches has proved that if employees are happy they tend to be more productive, generate new innovative ideas, try to do the same job with different innovative methods to save time and enhance effectiveness. There is a well-established research tradition on the role of emotions in organizational research (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989, cited in Xanthopoulou et al, 2010). Shawn Achor in his article Positive intelligence (Achor) in January-february edition of Harvard business review states that Research shows that when people work with a positive mind-set, performance on nearly every level—productivity, creativity, engagement—improves. Yet happiness is perhaps the most misunderstood driver of performance. For one, most people believe that success precedes happiness. "Once I get a promotion, I'll be happy," they think. Or, "Once I hit my sales target, I'll feel great." But because success is a moving target—as soon as you hit your target, you raise it again—the happiness that results from success is fleeting. In fact, it works the other way around: People who cultivate a positive mind-set perform better in the face of challenge. I call this the "happiness advantage"—every business outcome shows improvement when the brain is positive. I've observed this effect in my role as a researcher and lecturer in 48 countries on the connection between employee happiness and success. And I'm not alone: In a meta-analysis of 225 academic studies, researchers Sonja Lyubomirsky, Laura King, and Ed Diener found strong evidence of directional causality between life satisfaction and successful business outcomes.

Article "happiness and the bottom line" provides the following figures, For companies, happy employees mean better bottom-line results. Employees who score low in "life satisfaction," a rigorously tested and widely accepted metric, stay home an average of 1.25 more days a month, a 2008 study by Gallup Healthways shows. That translates into a decrease in productivity of 15 days a year. In a study of service departments, Jennifer George and Kenneth Bettenhausen found that employees who score high in life satisfaction are significantly more likely to receive high ratings from customers. In addition, researchers at Gallup found that retail stores that scored higher on employee life satisfaction generated \$21 more in earnings per square foot of space than the other stores, adding \$32 million in additional profits for the whole chain.

Also, In her book, —Make More Money by Making Your Employees Happy, Dr. Noelle Nelson, clinical psychologist, bestselling author and business trial consultant cites a study from the Jackson Organization, a survey research consultancy, since acquired by Healthstream, Inc., which shows, —companies that effectively appreciate employee value enjoy a return on equity and assets more than **triple** that experienced by firms that don't. (www.forbes.com)

Evidences are available in numbers to support the implication happiness has both on successful work performance and also on successful life realisations but what is required I believe is to place the concept more firmly for studying empirically and at least should be given a fair chance to be explored if not embraced.

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