

THE BOUNDARIES OF WORKPLACE HAPPINESS TOWARDS ETHICAL PRACTICE: EVIDENCE FROM THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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ABSTRACT

The formation of the Ministry of Happiness and Wellbeing in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) shows the government's strong commitment to ensuring that the basic human feeling of 'happiness' is attained and strived for. The purpose of this research is to investigate the perception of middle managers (n=333) on happiness. A qualitative descriptive survey and interview method was employed to gather data on the subjective well-being of the respondents. Out of 350 questionnaires distributed, 333 (95%) were completely gathered and analyzed. The research-made questionnaire was distributed to 10 private multinational organizations through accessibility sampling and was analyzed through descriptive statistics. The results of the study show that the majority of the respondents claim that they are 'happy' with their current job, willing to make an effort to be happy and positive in the workplace and staying because of the quality of life in UAE, better community ties and cultural activities, quality of education for their children, and better retirement options. The respondents also identified some indicators that employers can consider improving workplace happiness like promotion, salary increase, training, and orientation of work rules as part of promoting the ethical practice.

Keywords: Workplace Happiness, United Arab Emirates

INTRODUCTION

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a host to expatriates from all over the world and has one of the fastest-growing economies in the Middle East hence many has described it as a liberal and open society with much freedom and work opportunities for all (Almutairi, 2016; Michael, 2015). Most people find UAE as a favourable place to work and live in terms of their happiness perception, which is define based on some factors like jobs, health, education, future, and the economy of the country (Helliwell, 2015). The question one would ask therefore would be to understand in detail the well-being of individuals living and working in UAE.

Currently, there are over 150 nationalities living and working in UAE. They are from various backgrounds, beliefs, and race yet they live happily and associate with one another. Emiratis, on the other hand, are small in population as compared with the expatriates but still hold their traditional customs and cultural values (Prayag et al., 2013; Kotsi & Michael, 2015). Most of the expatriates are from the Indo-Pak subcontinent that includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal; other expatriates are from the Philippines, China, Egypt, Morocco, and countries in Northern Africa and North America. Due to this multicultural dimension in the workplace environment in UAE, workplace happiness has become a major focus of the government and most organizations which led to the formation of the Ministry of Happiness to ensure people are happy in the country. Moreover, more studies concluded that happiness is a by-product of work-related engagement and its meaning, which most of the workers can exemplify through engagement while, at the same time,

applying their strengths at that work and finding meaning in using the strengths to aim higher (Davis, 2016). Smart leaders in the business world have realized that happy workers tend to be very productive and ultimately help in benefiting the hiring organization (Waggoner, 2013).

As the UAE tries to adopt this era of globalization, a vast number of expatriate workers are still drawn to aid in the accomplishment of what Emirati leaders see as the vision of the future for the country's development agenda (Kotsi & Michael, 2015). Building on the country's most important resource that is oil, the country is the focus in developing and investing more on its industries and infrastructure with the aim of diversifying revenue from resources. Consequently, the country is undergoing rapid growth, which can be noticed by comparing the past and current state of cities and sceneries. People from all walks of life, carrying forward their different cultural aspects, travel to UAE for various motives, especially for work opportunities. From an organizational viewpoint, different nationalities with different cultural practices are getting recruited for various jobs in different companies in the country (Agwa et al., 2015). For this aspect—taking into consideration the closer complex population of the components and structure of the UAE organizations—there is a need to make selective decision when determining or acquiring the most valuable assets, resources, and people because what applies to a given nationality may not apply to another due to cultural differences. Therefore, it results in a difficult scenario for government and employers. They need to be aware of the various complexities due to the high turnover in different positions, to boost the work morale and to enhance productivity in various sectors (Scott, 2015; Haladay, Sergio, Makki, Zarim & Ismail, 2017).

Due to the publishing of the happiness index of the world, it is very intriguing to conduct more research which aim at finding out if there is a true presentation of the people in the report that policy makers can use to build a body of knowledge for developing policies important in determining the mainstream population of the country in terms of pay scales (Sergio & Rylova, 2018).

High turnover is the problem that employers and the government face because happiness means different things to different nationalities, and because little has been done in this particular field. This study identifies the factors which determine happiness to various nationalities to help organizations and the government to align policies for creating social good and satisfaction, which are necessary for building skills of people rather than just providing services. This is achieved by defining what happiness means to people of diverse culture and nationality since happiness in people can be feasible and fully justified. It can be measured. According to many studies, happy people live longer, are more active, produce more, and can drive economic development in a given country. In fact, its evaluation is already the subject of many studies and programs (Agwa, et al., 2015; Hoffman & Sergio, 2020). The happiness of various employees, individuals, and families as well as their satisfaction towards their lives and the optimism for the future, play a very crucial part in the development, which cuts across many sectors in the economy. Through this research, guidance is created for following up for both private and government institutions for the appropriate provision of leadership to create a society where people's happiness is paramount through the creation of favourable working conditions for all nationalities based on the core values of national development (Manning et al., 2016; Haladay, Sergio, Opulencia & Antiado, 2016; Haladay & Sergio, 2016; Sergio, Dungca, Ormita & Gonzales, 2015).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study aims to answer the following research objectives:

1. To find out the general perception of the respondents on workplace happiness; and
2. To ascertain indicators to improve the workplace happiness as perceived by the respondents.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The following review of related literature contributes to the background of the study.

Perception of Well-Being and Happiness

Well-being has been studied and defined broadly by many researchers and organizations. It recently emerged as one of the most important aspects of an individual's life in any given scenario regarding health, development, and workplace among others. The well-being of a person has been found to influence the person's way of life either positively or negatively. Therefore, the definition has been broad as components that make physical, mental, social, and environmental status interact differently, either positively or negatively, at each given level and impact differently in individuals (Kreitzer, 2014). Kreitzer further states that it is a complex concept encompassing aspects of community interactions, health, security, purpose, and environment; culture is a major factor.

In other places, worksite wellness programs have been developed to take care of this aspect in individuals (Soto, 2015; Brannan, Biswas-Diener, Mohr, Mortazavi & Stein, 2013; Sergio & Rylova, 2018). According to Clifton (2013), in cases where people have a good sense of well-being, societies tend to be affected positively even though the phenomena of well-being is difficult to measure, so it is sometimes measured using the factors of satisfaction among people at their workplace. And to this extent the broad definition made by Kreitzer (2014) will be used in this research to investigate the feeling of satisfaction, which probably leads to happiness, to understand the workplace environment and what employers and the government ought to do to meet the satisfaction of people at their workplace.

Framework of Organizational Happiness

In any business environment, various organizations are started with goals targeted to increase the rate of return, even though new management theories have incorporated the need to meet the needs of the employees which will enhance their satisfaction and happiness. This framework will help to develop the human resource method of management, which recognizes that people's knowledge and skills, energy, attitudes, and commitments can either help in making or breaking an organization (Davis, 2016; Sergio et al., 2017; Gernal, Sergio & Shuali, 2013; Caranto, Sergio & Oribiana, 2020; Shabbir et al., 2021; Al Rawi, Gernal & Sergio, 2011). Organizations that aim to improve their production, as well as their bottom-line success to cover a large market share, will probably invest in their employees' satisfaction and happiness; this automatically encourages managers to communicate effectively to their employees during the process of developing cohesive teams, which should be preferably based on personal attributes and responsibilities of an individual.

Most employees, who have worked for long and have knowledge in the managerial field, will mainly focus on improving employee job satisfaction by promoting positive attitudes and happiness; this aspect requires organizations to relay information properly in a two-way group and effective individual conversations (Kultalhati, 2014). This will further require employers to formulate and determine the level of communication needed by employees to perform their duties perfectly and enjoy maximum satisfaction in their workplace. Good working relationship ensures employee longevity, communication efficiency within the organization, bottom-line success, and productivity. These are the issues that need to be reconsidered in the review of the effect on employee attitude and job satisfaction, which makes the happiness of any organization (Caranto et al., 2020). The many years of research in the field of happiness, attitude, and communication have varying effects on the organizational way of communication to employee attitudes, organizational success, and personal achievements. It is a fact from studies that all organizations derive their

benefits from employees who have increased job satisfaction and positive attitudes and therefore maximizing the rate of return and enhancing customer confidence. Organizations may consciously work to improve job satisfaction by using motivation techniques that are consistent with Herzberg's Motivation Theory or other best management practices and ethics for organizations (Rile et al., 2016).

Happiness Constructs in the Middle East

Studies were conducted in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region to establish job satisfaction, which can be built through motivation and happiness of employees. However, the studies present mixed results with few researchers showing little interest in this particular field (Ganesan et al., 2014). The areas of concern have been leadership in effective communication, empowerment of staff and rewards, effective organization structure, and relevant work policies which UAE needs to adopt to be in line with the current booming development. The GCC region is embracing globalization, which requires many expatriate workers. Emiratis are in the minority in providing all the required services and this has led to low job satisfaction in certain areas (Jamal, 2015). This section, therefore, will be examining literature reviews concerning employee satisfaction and defining what happiness means to people in UAE, which hosts many nationalities. This section will proceed with the discussion of culture, workplace environments, and well-being.

According to the research (Froese, 2013; Sergio et al., 2015) that investigated the effects of nationality on job satisfaction based on national and non-national managers in financial institutions, Emirati managers had higher satisfaction ratings compared to expatriate managers due to various factors. Higher satisfaction ratings, which were observed in areas of job denoted by general satisfaction, was as a result of the availability of promotional opportunities, quality of supervision, compatibility of job characteristics, and relationships with co-workers. The Emiratis have successfully integrated into this system and thrived relatively well in financial institutions through the outward display of unity in a national address, speaking the common language with the common dialect, and sharing a common value system. On the other hand, the dissatisfaction of non-national managers in financial institutions are attributed by the practices in which the Emiratis are given the preferential treatments regarding job hiring and promotions. These always make them feel general isolation, resentment due to language barrier, and cultural insensitivities which cause low job satisfaction.

On the other hand, Daleure's study (2015) investigated the links among demographic factors like sex, age, education, and income and their relations to an individual's job satisfaction. The satisfaction ratings were found to be similar to the institutions—in both the private and public sectors—where the study was carried out. Regarding education, the result shows that employees who are educated beyond the secondary level are more satisfied with their jobs than the ones who attained a secondary level. Younger employees also tend to be less satisfied with their jobs as opposed to older employees since they work with more experience, and so only a few make it to the entry level.

In general, the satisfaction driven by happiness tends to increase with salary increment. The study, which is gender based, also shows a different perspective of satisfaction. Emirati women prefer female-only work environments as opposed to other nationalities where this is normal. To the Emiratis, the female-only environment is more comfortable and free from cultural pressures, which are being exerted on them by men in their workplaces, making it more difficult for them to balance between home and work life, or required tasks which some perceived as immodest. Therefore, as stated in vision 2020 of UAE, “efforts to prosper will not come at the expense of Emiratis' strong and healthy emotional balance” even though culture, traditions, and language are still rated as the crucial issues of national pride. There has been an evolution of economic systems in various sectors,

particularly in public and semi-government sectors; the private sector has created various economic challenges due to high immigration rate from various nationalities with different cultural practices. This calls for the application of various interventions to overcome these drawbacks to ensure full employment and tolerant and culturally friendly work environment for both Emiratis and expatriates to meet job satisfaction, which can be measured through worker's happiness (Daleure, 2015; Sergio & Rylova, 2018). This will include the creation of a favorable environment for workers through good policies, legislations, salaries/wages, peaceful co-existence, and unity promotion among others to drive the economic growth to reach the vision 2020.

Defining 'Happiness' in a Multicultural Dimension

The meaning of happiness differs among people of various nationalities and is influenced by structures, beliefs, and social interactions that are defined by cultures of given individuals (Pedrotti & Edwards, 2014). From the conducted studies, it has been noticed that there are various forms of specific culture shaping experience and comprehending happiness. This generation construction of culture to happiness reflects the indigenous understandings rooted in cultural context which is still imperative hence they are very critical to take into consideration since they have implications for practice and research (Uchida et al., 2013). In a close checkup of the happiness perspectives from individuals, different views emerge. For example, White Americans emphasize on autonomy and self-enhancement in a way that achievement of goals positively for oneself forms the self-form perception of happiness from people. On the other hand, Asian Americans emphasize on acceptability, belonging to, fitting in, and fulfilling various obligations to one's social and familial group and for them, this forms the basic happiness of an individual. According to various researchers, Westerners view happiness differently; for example they emphasize that happiness is something valuable to be pursued, while Asians view it as something that is a tempting fate or something entailing negative impacts through invitation of jealousy or social disharmony (Uchida et al., 2013).

In the cultures of European-American, happiness is considered to involve a sense of personal achievement, high self-esteem, and agency whereas in the cultures of the East Asian it is about the optimization of relational views which are focused on social support, interdependence, relationship harmony, and ordinariness of given individuals. Therefore, these studies show that there are interpersonal variables upon which happiness depends on given the continuum such as personal pleasure, independence, individual achievement and control, and interpersonal relations for example, social obligations and interdependence in opposing poles (Uchida et al., 2013).

In studies examining Islamic cultures, happiness is given a different perception as in the western secular views (Joshnloo, 2013). It is closely tied to religion where the state of happiness is the secondary relationship one has with God as it is stated that one of the basic needs of the mankind is to live virtuously according to the codes of conduct in Islamic principles and to worship God (Nasr, 2014). In this way, impacts and hedonic pleasures that one likes to achieve do not accomplish the definition of happiness rather the rewards that await a person in the afterlife because of serving God during one's life on earth (Joshnloo, 2013); therefore, happiness is attained through servitude to God first and others in the form of obeisance to certain ritual, espousing spiritual beliefs, in addition to living with others peacefully to bring about a state of tranquility. Therefore, an Islamic perception of happiness is tied to their religion and social group of oneself, which stresses the idea that happiness is not implicit across cultures, and also it is not an individual pursuit frequently upheld as characteristic of mature, well-developed, and highly functioning individuals in the society.

Various studies traditionally examined employees at their workplace which includes but not limited to engagement, motivation, commitment, and satisfaction which eventually leads to general

happiness; in such cases, an employee is mandated to evaluate the aspects of their activities at the workplace to develop the attitude. For example, a case where an employee feels engaged at work when assessing that they have a feeling of pride and happiness in their role; therefore, it could be suggested that employees may have a positive attitude at their work despite having negative attitudes towards their work in the future (Williams et al., 2016a). On the other side, positive attitude at work may also support more positive attitudes toward work (Williams et al., 2016b). Of late, the perception of happiness has become a major topic of concern at workplaces and various studies have tried to examine workplace-related happiness and its meaning as a by-product of engagement, commitment, motivation among others which are exemplified by employees by finding their strengths and meaning for the high purpose (Davis, 2016).

The conceptualized constructs of happiness derived from these aspects are not only limited to genetic happiness but can also increase proportionately with these aspects (Davis, 2016), and for a better understanding of workplace-related happiness, various studies have been carried out in the business discipline to expand knowledge. Engagement has been expanded to mean the systematic process of conducting to accomplish the task besides working with others in a supportive environment (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2016). Those engaged in their work are more satisfied and happier than those experiencing low levels of burnout which consequently reduces the levels of happiness. They also concluded that psychological need satisfaction by way of happiness that will mediate the time taken on engaging employees in various work activities. Workplace happiness is measured as a moment-by-moment operation that examines different kinds of thoughts, behaviors, and feelings throughout the day (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2016; Scott, 2014; Scott, 2015). Their study supports that those whose psychological needs are met through engagement in their workplaces are happier than those with high levels of burnout whose psychological needs are not met; therefore, it is recommended that the management creates, or provides, a more resourceful environment to support employees with various opportunities and development since one of the most salient forms of engagement in any given organization is personal resources which can be defined by the level of vitality, confidence resilience, and happiness (Davis, 2016; Scott, 2015). This can enhance individual's happiness through engagement.

The work of Slemp & Vella-Brodrick (2014) further contributed to the work of Davis (2016) through the concept of job crafting where they found that there is a relationship between job crafting and the well-being of employees. They concluded that satisfaction would otherwise mediate this relationship between job crafting and well-being, leading to happiness. Happiness is an important factor for employees and their organizations through engagement and motivation which need not be neglected (Davis, 2016). For work-related happiness to be achieved in any given organization, both the employer and the employee have to take responsibility through engagement and finding meaning in their work (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2016); (Slemp & Vella- Brodrick, 2014). According to Etkin & Mogilner (2016), understanding the balance between stimulation and productivity requires employers to leverage tasks with the aim of promoting workplace happiness among its employees which have also been supported by Davis (2016); Sergio & Rylova (2018).

METHODOLOGY

This paper employed the qualitative descriptive survey and interview method through primary research data. The answers obtained through 19 closed-ended questions with multiple choice answer options were gathered and analysed. The questionnaire was approved before administering it for 10 multinational private organizations in UAE. Through accessibility sampling, 350 target respondents were issued with the questionnaire and only 333 (95% acceptance rating) middle managers who have completed the questionnaires were considered for interview and as the official respondents of the study. The respondents from 10 multinational organizations were also

informed prior the interview that the participation was all voluntary and that the information collected were anonymous and would not be subjected to identification of the information being collected. The preliminary questions were concerned with the personal background of the participants followed by questions focusing on living in UAE, happiness (or subjective well-being), and perception of how organizations can make employees happy. The descriptive statistics enabled the researchers to draw assumptions through percentage and frequency count.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following results and discussion are presented:

The General Perception of Respondents on Workplace Happiness

Out of the 333 respondents, 210 (63%) claim that they are 'very happy' with their current job and 310 (93%) were willing to make an effort to be happy and positive in the workplace. Among the ones willing to stay, 220 (66%) of respondents chose to stay because of the quality of life in the UAE, 50 (15%) reasoned out better community ties and cultural activities, 34 (10%) cited quality of education for their children; and 30 (9%) considered better retirement options. This implies that the respondents perceive that workplace happiness abounds and it is worth to stay in UAE.

Indicators to Improve Workplace Happiness: Towards Ethical Practice

From the data gathered, the indicators of workplace happiness are as follows: promotion, salary increase, training, and orientation of work rules towards ethical practice.

Promotion

The findings indicate that 73% (or 243) of the respondents agreed that career ladder helps in making employees happy in the workplace. Dictionary (2012) defines career ladder as the structured or organized sequence of job positions where an employee progresses in the work institution. Promotion in the workplace, whether accompanied with a salary increase or not, motivates workers in one way or the other, thus keeping them fit and happy in their respective areas of work. Promotion is critical in motivating employees and giving them an incentive to keep working hard (Sergio & Rylova, 2018; Sergio et al., 2015; Sergio et al., 2017). The majority of workers are lured away from an institution to a competitor because of better opportunity, thus firms need to offer promotional resources to facilitate retention. Offering an employee, a future with the corporation is enhanced through the career ladder. Career ladder opportunities are the lifeblood of staffing and maintenance in the enterprise scene. Without the best possible utilization of motivations and coaching, the work force is probably going to cease from keeping up associations with a business for a broadened timeframe. Competitors take the best ability from different organizations by offering people upgraded pay and advantages. Advancements supply these sorts of rewards to staff with the goal that they don't want to leave their employers. The availability of career ladder in an organization compels employees to work harder and strive to impress their employers. In the company level, career ladder enhances overall performance expectation besides giving the workers a reason to excel and reach for the few opportunities (Francis & Collins-Dodd, 2004; Gernal et al., 2013; Haladay et al., 2017).

Salary Increase

The 11% (n=37) of the respondents believe that salary increase would enable them to feel happy in the workplace. This section focuses on the importance of salary increase on employee's welfare while at the same time examines why salary increase does not necessarily bring happiness to employees as the smaller percentage shows. Incentive pay, given the amount of work delivered as opposed to the time spent at work, is especially useful for expanding employees' productivity. Salary connotes a set wage based on a set of expected duties to be performed. Hourly wage falls under the group of salary and are based strictly on time spent at work. A base salary guarantees employees with security, acknowledging they will get paid irrespective of their production. According to Dee & Wyckoff (2015), salary raises based purely on time spent with the company can be a disincentive for workers to pull up their socks, while salary raises based on performance motivates higher performance. Incentives as part of salary boost also work in different ways.

Training

A total of 8% (n=27) of respondents pointed out the need for training that would contribute to workplace happiness. Frustrations, accompanied by technical challenges in the workplace, can be a stress to employees and thus lower their production capability. This section, therefore, focuses on the importance of training for employees which, in one way or the other, eases the work activities and thus make them flexible, competent, and happy in their respective areas of work. According to Certo (2015), the majority of employees receive poor job training in their first year of work; thus, they lack skills, training, and development as the working principle to deliver the best. Considering the cost of turnover, untrained workers can make the company's production slip, resulting in decline of sales; this clearly shows that there are benefits accompanied with staff and employees training. Training addresses weakness in the workplace skills. A training program always allows strengthening skills that employees need to improve in different areas. Giving the vital training makes a general proficient staff with representatives who can assume control as required, work in groups or work autonomously without consistent help and supervision from others.

Orientation of Work Rules

The 8% (n=27) of the respondents expressed the need for work rules orientation as it contributes to their well-being or happiness and thus the employers should cling to it. Orientations lay a crucial foundation for new employees especially at the time of employment, if missed on the day of reporting, progressive orientation can be of help. The first impression on the day of employment is paramount because they establish the basis for everything that proceeds. Without orientation, new employees may probably feel uncomfortable in their new position and it may take longer to reach their full potential. This part thus focuses on the importance of job orientation with the aim of making employees happy. Ellis et al., (2014) claim that orientation program is designed for the initial job introduction, meeting fellow employees, and getting an insight on the entire organization. They further clarify that firms ought to use their orientation programs to enhance better communication and create a clearer view of the institution's expectation regarding policies and regulations. The orientation program will give the new representative a feeling of hierarchical culture, helping him or her to learn, fit, and adjust to the work environment; this will expand mindfulness and comprehension of the organization's qualities, particularly as far as building client loyalty and connections. Having a viable procedure is imperative to the new workers and the association; this guarantees normal issues with an introduction—for example, program data overburden and negative correspondence—are stayed away from (Wilkinson & Johnstone, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Majority of the respondents feel happy with their current job and are willing to make an effort to be happy and positive in the workplace. The factors why the respondents are willing to stay in their current jobs, or in the country, are as follows: 1) the quality of life in UAE, 2) better community ties and cultural activities, 3) quality of education for their children; and 4) for better retirement options. As per the response to the things that employer can do to ensure that there is happiness within the diverse workforce, respondents have identified the following: 1) promotion, 2) salary increase, 3) training, and 4) orientation of workplace rules. It can be clearly seen that happiness can be increased by the aspects mentioned by the respondents. Providing promotion at large is a motivational criterion. It makes employees feel appreciated and therefore encouraged; it makes employees feel more valuable, and this elicits the feeling of happiness. Training equips employees with better skills that also make them feel accepted, understood, and at home. A good orientation program policy also eradicates the tension at the workplace and therefore the workers feel free to interact and feel happy. These insights from the respondents support the ethical practice in the workplace.

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