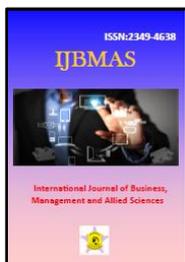

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WORKPLACE HAPPINESS: A POINT OF VIEW

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ABSTRACT

An average individual spends around 90,000 hours at work during their lifetime. Therefore, it is of interest to make time spent at work to be happy a priority. Simply having the right set of employees is not enough. If the workforce is demotivated then there will be more absences, higher attrition, and subsequently a decrease in performance and productivity. Successful business gurus agree that happy employees are considerably more productive than the norm, and almost twice more productive than their unhappy peers. Creating a pleasant workplace full of happy and engaged employees contributes directly to the bottom line of the organization. According to a study by the University of Warwick, when leaders invest in promoting happiness in the office, productivity levels can rise up to 12 per cent [4]. The HR professionals in any organization play a key role in defining and implementing the roadmap for a happier workplace.

Keywords: Happiness, Workplace Happiness, Well-Being, Productivity Organizational Productivity, Employee Well-Being.

Introduction

Increasingly countries are recognizing that to maintain a true welfare state it is not sufficient for the state to only deal with politics and economy, it must pay attention to its citizens' happiness as well. The necessity of happiness has been recognized by Bhutan which measures prosperity by gauging citizens' happiness quotient and not the GDP. It is even more evident by the establishment of The Ministry of Happiness in United Arab Emirates in Feb 2016 to oversee the government plans, programs and policies to achieve a happier society. India is not far behind, Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan in March 2016 announced the establishment of a 'happiness ministry' to measure the state's progress.

Happiness at workplace has traditionally been considered a desirable by-product of work, rather than a pathway to success in business, this despite the fact that a large body of psychological research has gone into the relationship between happiness and positive productivity.

Numerous studies have shown that happy people are less stressed; they get more and frequently promoted, and are additionally more creative, productive and lead a healthier life. One

such study indicates that happy salespeople sell 37% more, take fewer sick days, their productive is 12% more than others and they stay longer in their jobs.

The focus of this work is not to examine happiness initiatives in any specific sector or industry. Instead, it is to encourage every individual to take personal responsibility for their happiness, especially in the workplace.

What is Happiness?

An agonizing question asked for centuries - What is happiness? Only in the recent decades have science been brought into the picture to weigh in and get an answer.

Speaking in terms of philosophy, happiness translates into the Greek concept of "Eudaimonia", that refers to "good life" or more accurately "human flourishing", rather than simply an emotion.

Psychologically happiness is a mental state of well-being or an emotional state for a human being which is characterized by pleasant emotions ranging from satisfaction to intense joy.

Active research on happiness has been conducted since 1960 by researchers in varied disciplines, including clinical and medical research, social psychology, gerontology, and happiness economics.

Possibly the best way to start defining happiness is by understanding what it is not. Sometimes we confuse pleasure with happiness, pleasure is momentary and fleeting, and it must be, if it is to continue to be pleasure for us. If it's not fleeting, our brain will adapt and turn pleasure into something that is routine and it will no longer be pleasurable for us.

If pleasure is not happiness, what is happiness - to put in simple words - Happiness is when life fulfills our needs. In other words, we feel happy when our needs are fulfilled and we feel satisfied. It is the feeling of contentment that we have a life as it should be.

While perfect happiness is a utopian concept and may be hard to achieve, and even harder to maintain, the concept of happiness is not binary - that is either Happy or Unhappy. There are a whole lot of intermediate states and degrees of happiness between the extremes of bliss and the hopelessness of dejection and depression. If not all, most people fall somewhere in between the two - closer to the middle than the extreme edges.

When people are quizzed about what makes their lives worth living, the answer rarely is about their mood or mental state of well-being. The most likely answer is about things that they find meaningful, like their work or relationships.

Workplace Happiness

"Happiness is a pre-cursor to success" - Shawn Achor founder and CEO of Good Think, Inc.

An average individual spends around 90,000 hours at work during their lifetime. Therefore, it is of interest to make time spent at work to be happy a priority.

Employees are the most important assets for any organization or business. It hardly matters if you build the best product in the world and have millions in funding - without the right set of people, the organization will never achieve the desired long term success.

Here's the twist ... Simply having the right set of employees is not enough. If the workforce is demotivated then there will be more absences, higher attrition, and subsequently a decrease in performance and productivity.

Businesses need to ensure everyone is happy and motivated to succeed. Without a clear drive to achieve and sustain workplace happiness, everyone's true potential will not be maximized. Happy employees are highly engaged, motivated and productive.

Successful business gurus agree that happy employees are considerably more productive than the norm, and almost twice more productive than their unhappy peers. Creating a pleasant workplace full of happy and engaged employees contributes directly to the bottom line of the organization.

While essentially happiness is not linked to attaining sensual pleasures and monetary gains, these can significantly stimulate the feel good factor of an individual at the workplace [1].

Unhappy persons' brains tend to disengage, thereby decreasing their capacity for creativity and critical thinking.

Extensive research has revealed that freedom and autonomy at workplace has the most effect on the employee's levels of happiness [1] as well as the scope to gain knowledge and ability to influence one's individual working hours leading to a healthy work-life balance.

We will delve deeper in to the factors of a happy workplace in the subsequent sections.

Importance of Workplace Happiness

For a very long time, work and happiness weren't related to each other. Work was a place where you were supposed to come in, get the job done and be done with it. Happiness was for your personal free time outside of work.

Many people feel that success at work will automatically translate into happiness. According to Shawn Achor, founder and CEO of Good Think, Inc., it is just the reverse. It's vital to become happy, which will ultimately help you become successful.

It's important for organizations to have happy employees, and it is not just for the wellbeing of the employees themselves. "The greatest competitive advantage in the modern economy is a positive and engaged workforce," Achor says [2]. And happiness as a concept is not yet clearly understood, inside and outside of the workplace. In his book, Achor defines happiness as "the joy we feel striving after our potential." [2]. It occurs along the way to achieving one's potential, not just when that potential has been achieved.

iOpener Institute for People & Performance is an Oxford-born international consultancy that helps organizations all over the globe enable their people to give their best at work [3]. Here are some observations from their research -

- Happy employees stay with their companies four times longer than their unhappy counterparts.
- Employees that are happy in their organization commit twice as much time to their tasks than those that aren't happy.
- Happy team members have 65 per cent more energy than unhappy employees.

According to a study by the University of Warwick, when leaders invest in promoting happiness in the office, productivity levels can rise up to 12 per cent [4].

In a compilation of case studies titled "Healthy People = Healthy Profits" [5] conducted by Business in the Community across twenty organizations cutting across industry verticals, a growing number of UK employers have recognized employee health and wellbeing as a strategic priority, particularly during challenging economic times. Each of the featured organization has documented business benefits which followed the introduction of health and wellbeing interventions in their workplaces.

Here are some notable quotes -

At Google, we know that health, family and wellbeing are an important aspect of Googlers' lives. We have also noticed that employees who are happy ... demonstrate increased motivation ... [We]... work to ensure that Google is...an emotionally healthy place to work. Lara Harding, People Programs Manager, Google.

Supporting our people must begin at the most fundamental level -their physical and mental health and well-being. It is only from strong foundations that they can handle... complex issues. Matthew Thomas, Manager -Employee Relations, Ernst and Young.

Some of the key reasons why creating a work environment that people love is critical and worthwhile for success of any business:

1. Happiness has a proliferating effect
2. Happy employees are more effective
3. Low stress results in higher productivity
4. Happy employees are supportive of each other

5. Happy employees take chances and are not afraid to make mistakes
6. Happiness inspires creativity
7. People like to work with happy people

Factors influencing Workplace Happiness

A job, by its definition, does not necessarily include fun, or is supposed to be enjoyable. Dealing with work and work related stress regularly is hard. Finding a balance between the stresses and pressures of work and life outside of work is hard. Creating an environment that can offset this imbalance by creating a place of work that is tuned to our well-being is essential for our sanity, our success - and ultimately the success of our business.

Multiple researches conducted across industries and in different countries have time and again brought to the fore factors that directly determine employee happiness at the workplace -

1. **Interesting work** - Work isn't always fascinating and fulfilling, but there is nothing worse than being bored at work. This is what Google addressed by setting aside 20% of time for their employees to take up interesting projects and we are all reaping the benefits of Gmail and AdSense.
2. **Work Life Balance** - Most people don't live to work. Life and life events don't exactly follow the 9-5 workday and it demands flexibility. The ability to fit work around life is one of the necessities many companies have come to recognize. The benefits of a flexible schedule for employee happiness and productivity is recognized and is being taken up seriously by organizations.
3. **Potential for Growth and Professional Development** - Everyone loves to grow, so encouraging an individual to explore his potential and grow is one of the key measures that a company can take to make them feel good.
4. **Autonomy** - The easiest way to make someone unhappy is to try to micro-manage their work. This may give short term results, but in the long term it does more damages than good. Autonomy when accompanied with unambiguous goals and clear expectations leads to a happy and productive workforce.
5. **Rewards and Recognition** - No one wants to work without any rewards or recognition for their hard work. To be noticed and appreciated for the hard work is a big motivation for any individual to excel further.
6. **Transparency and Inclusion** - Gone are the days of isolated work areas, welcome the open floor plan offices. Employees working in a transparent and communicative setup usually feel more invested in the overall goals of the organization and have effective associations with colleagues and management, which leads to the overall success of the organization.
7. **Benefits** - An employee generally has a standard set of benefits like medical insurance, HRA, etc. but beyond that there are some benefits like food coupons, health club membership, and other wellness programs which makes life little bit easier for the employees. These additional perks go a long way into making a happy and satisfied employee.

Measurement of Workplace Happiness

Quite a few surveys are used to measure the happiness or well-being level of people in different countries such as the World Happiness Report (measure of happiness published by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network.) [6], the Happy Planet Index [7] and the OECD Better Life Index [8], there are no specific surveys that measure happiness in the specific context of any workplace. However, surveys and assessments are created to assess the job satisfaction level of employees by different organizations. Job satisfaction is a concept that is different, but it is positively related to happiness and influences subjective well-being. [9]

The noteworthy and popular job satisfaction scales are -

- The Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) [10] - JSS assesses nine aspects of job and overall satisfaction. The facets include -

- o pay and pay raises
- o promotion opportunities
- o relationship with the immediate supervisor
- o fringe benefits
- o rewards given for good performance
- o rules and procedures
- o relationship with coworkers
- o type of work performed and communication within the organization

The JSS scale contains thirty-six line items and uses a Likert Scale.

- The Job Descriptive Index (JDI) [10] - The JDI scale assesses five facets -

- o work
- o pay
- o promotion
- o supervision
- o coworkers

The scale contains seventy-two lines with nine or eighteen items per subscale. Each item is an evaluative adjective or short phrase that is descriptive of the job. The answer options being "yes", "uncertain" or "no" for each of the items.

- The Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) [10] - The MSQ has two variations, a complete set of one hundred item and a shorter version with twenty item. It covers twenty facets -

- o activity
- o independence
- o variety
- o social status
- o supervision (human relations)
- o supervision (technical)
- o moral values
- o security
- o social service
- o authority
- o ability utilization
- o company policies and practices
- o compensation
- o advancement
- o responsibility
- o creativity
- o working conditions
- o coworkers
- o recognition and achievement

The difference between the long form and the shorter form is - the long form contains five items per facet, while the short one has just one.

Different organizations use one or more of these scales to measure the happiness in their respective workplaces. Sometimes specific variations are also made to these scales to cater to unique nature of work in an organization.

Conclusion

Creating a happy and fun work place and work environment is not easy, but in the long run the dividends of a happy workplace will pay many times for the efforts it takes to establish.

Happiness is a continuous process and cannot be a set destination, it's a moving target, organizations will do good to maintain a continuous approach to maintaining happiness in the workplace to maintain and enhance the job performance, address absenteeism and reduce employee turnover.

Given the current uncertainty in the global socio-political and socio-economic situation and the intense competition in the market, it has become almost mandatory to maintain a level of happiness at work for all business establishments.

The mission of human resources professionals in any organization should be to improve individual and organizational performance and to enhance employees' well-being. The HR professionals can enhance employees' happiness not only in their work and careers but also in their lives by improving their perceived organizational support in the form of growth opportunity, performance management, and compensation system and skill development through proper staffing, training, and deployment of manpower.

Workplace happiness is a key factor for any organization to succeed so any investment in that area will yield abundant results is a given outcome.

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