

Importance of Being Happy at Work

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Abstract - Happiness has its own importance in everyday life. However, recently it has gained much attention due to its emphasis in organizational studies and the impact it has on overall employee performance. This paper attempts to focus on the relevance of being happy at work.

Keywords – Happiness, Work

I. WHAT EXACTLY IS HAPPINESS ?

In common language, a “good” feeling that can be derived from something extra ordinary, like achieving the goal for which one has put in lot of efforts or receiving a great news or it can just be obtained by helping someone or from a plain sight of “something”, which instantly gave a “good” feeling and which one can remember, admire and become happy.

This feeling of happiness or joy has been brilliantly described by William Wordsworth in his masterpiece, *The Daffodils* :

In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

William Wordsworth (Daffodils)

Happiness, thus, can be derived from simply anything. Happiness has attracted the attention of philosophers since the dawn of written history (McMahon 2006), but has only recently come to the fore in psychology research (Fisher, 2010). In 1776 U.S. Declaration of Independence declared that all men have a right to “the pursuit of happiness.”, 1926 The song “Happy Birthday” is composed, 1963 Smiley face is invented; 1977 McDonald’s introduces the Happy Meal (Sterns 2012).

This magical word, Happiness, recently, seem to have hit the chord. In the United Nation's first ever World Happiness Report, Denmark has taken the top spot followed by Finland, Norway and the Netherlands. The 158-page report, published by Columbia University's Earth Institute, was commissioned for the United Nations Conference on Happiness in order to "review the state of happiness in the world today and show how the new science of happiness explains personal and national variations in happiness."

Advertisement agencies try to attract attention from the most happening ideas. Happiness, thus has become the buzz word in most of the advertisements being aired with “Happiness” slogans, like Dominos slogan “Khushiyon ki Home Delivery”, Coca-Cola promoting its soft drinks with "Open **Happiness**", Zappos.com "Delivering **Happiness**", Vodaphone, “Happy to Help”, Cadbury’s “Kuch Meetha Ho Jaye”, Hershey’s has even recently marketed a dark chocolate bar that has *happiness* imprinted all over it. Consumers are presumably meant to believe happiness will engulf them with each morsel. However, happiness is not solely synonymous with intense pleasure; that is too shallow a conceptualization (Clark et al, 2008, cited in Alipour et al 2012).

Happiness is much deeper. Aristotle’s notion of eudaimonia is an example. Eudaimonia (i.e., happiness) comes from the Greek *eu* (good) and *daimon* (God, spirit, demon). Aristotle maintained that eudaimonia comes from identifying one’s virtues, cultivating them, and living life in accord. Happiness is beyond *feeling* good; it is about *doing* good (Di Tella et al, 2006, cited in Alipour et al, 2012). Happiness is a natural byproduct, a gift in itself (Frey et al, 2002). According to Martin Seligman "Happiness is made up of three factors: positive emotions; being completely engaged; and feeling you are part of something meaningful."

Dr. Martin Seligman, uses happiness and well-being interchangeably. His definition of happiness is: *both positive feelings (such as ecstasy and comfort) and positive activities that have no feeling component at all (such as absorption and engagement)*. In his happy life formula, Dr. Seligman defines a happy life as a life filled with positive feelings and activities. He says the degree to which you experience these feelings most of the time is your level of enduring happiness. Another positive psychologist, Dr. Barbara Fredrickson, defines happiness as, *the fuel to thrive and to flourish, and to leave this world in better shape than you found it*. Guillaume Duchenne, an early happiness researcher, looked at the quality of people's smiles and found that truly happy people had a smile that not only turned up the corners of their mouths, but also crinkled the skin around their eyes, happiness is also a genuine smile that includes your eyes. According to Dalai Lama, *Happiness is determined more by the state of one's mind than by one's external conditions, circumstances or events- at least once one's basic survival needs are met*. In her book, *Happy For No Reason*, Marci Shimoff agrees with Dalai Lama that happiness is a state of mind more than a reflection of circumstances. *Happy for no reason is a state of mind that is open, expansive and friendly no matter what the circumstances.* (www.happylifeu.com)

Happiness, is thus a state of mind with much deeper meaning. Let us now focus from happiness and the importance this magical word derives to the importance of being happy at work.

II. IMPORTANCE OF BEING HAPPY AT WORK

Happiness in the form of pleasant moods and emotions, well-being, and positive attitudes has been attracting increasing attention throughout psychology research. The interest in happiness has also extended to workplace experiences (Fisher, 2010). Happiness and subjective well-being have been in the focus of attention of both psychologists and sociologists for many decades (e.g., Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Haring, Okun, & Stock, 1984; Veenhoven, 1991, cited in Xanthopoulou et al, 2010). 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). Past researches have demonstrated a strong relationship between happiness and workplace success. It suggests that happy and satisfied individuals are relatively more successful in the workplace; compared to their unhappy peers. Happiness has also become the central focus of the emergent

positive psychology movement (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Researchers have found that the attainment of such factors as social support from colleagues and supervisors (Iverson, Olekalns, & Erwin, 1998), favorable evaluations by a superior (Cropanzano & Wright, 1999), helping fellow workers (George, 1991) in the workplace causes a person to be happy (Boehm and Lyubomirsky, 2008). Whereas clinical psychologists have historically examined human frailty, positive psychologists are studying human strengths and arguing that psychological strength is different from the absence of weakness (Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, cited in Sachau, 2007). A glaring similarity can be found in so called obsolete theory of Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory and Positive Psychology Movement. Herzberg's idea, that satisfaction with one's job or with one's life (Herzberg & Hamlin, 1961) was more than the absence of dissatisfaction, is remarkably similar to this basic tenet of positive psychology (Sachau, 2007). Positive psychology shifted the attention from the study of malfunctioning to the study of those positive qualities in people that help them flourish. As a consequence, the field of positive organization behavior (POB) has been developed (Xanthopoulou et al, 2010). A handsome salary package cannot always make the employee happy. Sometimes, rather most of the time, it is few words of appreciation, a pat on the back; recognising publicly the efforts put in by the employee or simple facial gestures of acknowledgement that play potential role in boosting the morale of an employee and making him/her happy. This, in turn, doubles the energy of an employee to do his/or her job effectively and efficiently. Examining employee happiness is crucial both for theoretical and practical reasons, because it contributes to a more integrated understanding of working life (Xanthopoulou et al, 2010).

In her book, "Make More Money by Making Your Employees Happy," Dr. Noelle Nelson, clinical psychologist, best selling 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)

Organisations, globally, therefore are focusing on making their employees happy. Dr. Nelson, in her book explains "When employees feel that the company takes their interest to heart, the employees will take company's interests to heart". (www.forbes.com). This may result into putting of extra efforts for the betterment of the company.

In 2011 after wrapping up a record-setting year, new Apple, Inc. CEO Tim Cook rewarded employees by giving them paid vacation through the week of Thanksgiving. In a memo to employees Cook wrote, "In recognition of the hard work you've put in this year, we're going to take some extra time off for Thanksgiving. We will shut down with pay on November 21, 22 and 23 so our teams can spend the entire week with their families and friends." (www.forbes.com)

Happy people are also more satisfied with their jobs compared with unhappy people (Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2000 ; George, 1995; Fisher, 2002; Judge & Ilies, 2004; Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999; Mignonac & Herrbach, 2004; Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & de Chermont, 2003; Weiss, Nicholas, & Daus, 1999, Boehm and Lyubomirsky, 2008). Someone has rightly said, "Happiness is contagious, go spread it".

Happiness is deep rooted, it is not something superficial, it comes from within. A happy employee can find positives out of negative circumstances as well. If an employee enjoys his/her job or the work, s/he will find out ways to accomplish the task even under most demanding and challenging situations. It is therefore argued to love thy job. If the employee is happy and enjoys the work, even the toughest of jobs or situations can be dealt with easily. Noticeable difference can be observed in the behavioral pattern and negotiation skills of happy and unhappy workers. Whereas unhappy employee may be short tempered or may get irritated at slightest of pretext or be pessimistic about the results, happy negotiators have been found to be initially more optimistic about the outcome of negotiations (Forgas, 1998).

All these behaviors are interconnected; they improve an organization's performance and connect with positive emotions.

III. POSITIVE EMOTIONS

Fredrickson (1998) describes four distinct categories of positive emotions: joy, interest, contentment, and love. He refers to these as emotional families because other emotions are encompassed within each category. He says that "the often incidental effect of a positive emotion is an increment in durable personal resources that can be drawn on later in other contexts and in other emotional states". In other words, we can stockpile positive emotions and call on them at later times as needed. Furthermore, when there is a sharing of positive emotions, be it a smile or a joyful event, a sense of bonding occurs among those involved. (Rotter, 2000).

Research suggests that positive emotions are more associated with approach-oriented behavior (Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Watson, Wiese, Vaidya, & Tellegen, 1999), for example, people in a good mood are more likely to enter novel situations, interact with other people, and pursue new goals (Carver, 2003). They display more warmth and friendly attitude, which leaves a positive impact. Positive emotions also signal that life is good and that no threats are readily apparent (Cantor et al., 1991; Carver & Scheier, 1998, cited in Boehm and Lyubomirsky).

Happy people are more likely to help fellow workers and customers than unhappy people (George, 1991, Boehm and Lyubomirsky, 2008). And there is an increasing managerial emphasis on customer service, which involves employees' ability to express positive, upbeat emotions to customers, a process called "emotional labor" (Erickson & Wharton, 1997; Hochschild, 1983, cited in Gibson 2006). Now a days, the customers have become much more demanding than ever before. To deal with them, patiently, definitely requires peace of mind and heart, so that one may not lose his/her temper on their, sometimes, unreasonable demands. If an employee is happy at work, s/he may ignore minor shortcomings or undesired behaviours. But if the employee is dissatisfied or unhappy, even minor happenings may spark discontentment resulting into unwarranted acts or behaviour, thereby incurring huge losses. Even the number of hours a person volunteers for organizations outside the workplace is related to higher well-being (Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). People who experience more positive emotions receive more social support from both colleagues and supervisors (Iverson et al., 1998, cited in Boehm and Lyubomirsky, 2008). Happy people tend to be more popular and likable than unhappy people (Bell, 1978; Feingold, 1983). Colleagues feel happy in interacting with such employees. It has also been found that people find it easier to seek help and advice from such employees; they do not hesitate in seeking it.

Various surveys are being conducted to find the Happiness and /or satisfaction level of the employees.

According to a survey conducted by **Gallup Management Journal** happy employees are better equipped to handle workplace relationships, stress, and change. Companies that understand this, and help employees improve their wellbeing, can boost their productivity. (gmj.gallup.com)

Fortune is a global business magazine published by Time Inc. The magazine is especially known for its annual features ranking companies by revenue. CNNMoney.com is the online home of *Fortune*, in addition to *Money*. (en.wikipedia.org)

To pick the 100 Best Companies to Work For, *Fortune* partners with the Great Place to Work Institute to conduct the most extensive employee survey in corporate America; 280 firms participated in this year's survey. More than 246,000 employees at those companies responded to a survey created by the institute, a global research and consulting firm operating in 45 countries around the world. The survey asks questions related to their attitudes about management's credibility, job satisfaction, and camaraderie, Institute's Culture Audit, which includes detailed questions about pay and benefit programs and a series of open-ended questions about hiring practices, methods of internal communication, training, recognition programs, and diversity efforts. (money.cnn.com)

Google has been ranked first with 33% growth rate and 18500 employees in the 100 best Companies to work for in US as well as in India with 1535 employees, followed by Intel Technologies, NTPC Limited, Make My Trip etc. (money.cnn.com)

But what exactly does a great place to work for mean? According to Great Place to Work Institute, Trust, pride and camaraderie i.e., trust the people they work for, have pride in what they do and enjoy the people they work with may form a great place to work for. A great place to work may eventually result into: better recruitment, higher engagement, lower turnover, greater innovation, higher productivity, more loyal customers and higher profits. (www.greatplacetowork.in). All these factors are directly proportional to the good health of the organisation.

Greater optimism is evident when happy people are working on a solitary task as well, people induced to experience positive affect set higher goals for themselves (Baron, 1990; Hom & Arbuckle, 1988), persist at a difficult task longer (Sarason, Potter, & Sarason, 1986), evaluate themselves more positively (Sarason et al., 1986), and rate their performance as stronger (Barsade, 2002; Wright & Mischel, 1982, Boehm and Lyubomirsky, 2008)

Happy people are more satisfied with their jobs and report having greater autonomy in their duties. They are less dependent on others. They even do not complain or blame the external factors for the delays or failures. They also do not easily give up under demanding situations. They perform better on assigned tasks than their less happy peers and are more likely to take on extra role tasks such as helping others. (Boehm and Lyubomirsky, 2008) They receive more social support from their coworkers and tend to use more cooperative approaches when interacting with others. (Boehm and Lyubomirsky, 2008). According to Professor Diener the evidence suggests that happy people live longer than

depressed people. It has been found that happy people are physically healthier, live longer, and cope more effectively with challenges (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005)—characteristics that undoubtedly make it easier to accomplish more in their careers. Accordingly, overall, happy people enjoy greater workplace success, and engage in more behaviors paralleling success, than do less happy people. (Boehm and Lyubomirsky, 2008).

The crux of the matter is that one must start by liking what one does. The most efficient way to increase the productivity is **to be happy at work**. The happiness that comes from within, the flow of ideas and the spirit to achieve only comes when one starts enjoying the job s/he is doing.

In short, it has been found that Happy people work better with others, are more creative, fix problems instead of complaining about them, have more energy, are more optimistic, are way more motivated, get sick less often, learn faster, worry less about making mistakes and consequently make fewer mistakes, and make better decisions.(http://positivesharing.com). Importance of being happy at work may be seen from three different angles; from organisation's point of view, management and of course from individual employee's point of view. It has different benefits for different category viz organisation, management and individual employee.

So far benefits for the organisation are concerned, it helps in increased production, decision making ability enhancement, and clients experience happiness, decreased absenteeism and sick leave, more energy toward work, communication enhancement, teamwork improvement, commitment to the business (http://www.happinessclub.com)

Benefits for the management may be seen in the form of being ahead of the competition, higher profits, and employees cherishing their jobs, supervision enhancement, and leadership values. (http://www.happinessclub.com)

Last but not the least, benefits for the employee may be happiness at home, emotional intelligence, increased focus, loving work, valuing their positions, and feeling appreciated. (http://www.happinessclub.com).

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