

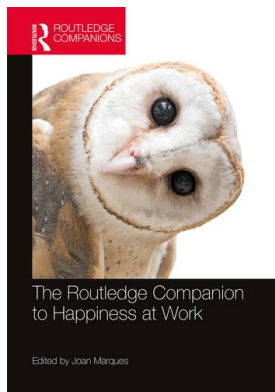
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The Routledge Companion to Happiness at Work

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1

INTERNALIZING HAPPINESS

At Work and Anywhere Else

Joan Marques

Happiness: One Goal, Many Appearances

Arguably one of the most dramatic inconsistencies amongst humanity is its perception of happiness. While most people will say that they would just like to be happy, they pursue a plethora of other goals, such as wealth, fame, and prominence, and subconsciously substitute the achievement of these goals with being happy. Over time, there have also been numerous descriptions of happiness launched, equating this phenomenon with a variety of mental states, from elation and euphoria to contentment and wellbeing. There are definitions that mention success, safety, and luck in the same sentence as being happy. And this is exactly what makes defining happiness so complicated: it means different things to different people. To illustrate this, Bojanowska & Zalewska (2016) conducted a study amongst 785 individuals in Poland, in an effort to find out what concepts men and women generally associated with happiness, and to explore whether and how these concepts might be related to wellbeing. The study yielded that participants primarily associated happiness with health and relationships, and at a lesser stage also with knowledge, work, material goods, and freedom. Bojanowska and Zalewska's study further found that people who associated happiness with work were generally more positive; those who associated it with relationships generally felt greater life satisfaction, and those who associated happiness with material goods noted lower satisfaction.

A Moving Target

Happiness has often been described as a moving target, implying that what makes us happy today may not mean much to us tomorrow. This makes sense when we consider that our mental states change over time, influenced by our surroundings, circumstances, and experiences. So, ideas of what would constitute a happy life at one time may widely differ from those at a later stage. In fact, even the notion of success, which is also associated with happiness, is a very subjective one. While a large number of people associate success with wealth, fame, or prominence, the ones who have accomplished those feats may differ in opinion when they reflect on the mishaps, health problems, or other sensitive losses they may be suffering. Easterlin (2002) posts a cautionary note when it comes to people's perception of happiness over time. Focusing on the US society, he finds that when people progress in financial affluence, they perceive their happiness standards of five years ago as inferior to their current standards, whereas the opposite happens when their economic

circumstances decline: then they perceive their happiness standards of five years ago as superior to current standards. This accentuates how closely happiness gets associated with economic wellbeing in some societies. And indeed, in a 2005 publication, Easterlin shares the opinion that he considers the terms well-being, utility, happiness, life satisfaction, and welfare interchangeable, but in a 2012 article, Raibley strongly opposes this notion, affirming that, while happiness can be an important determinant of wellbeing, it is conceptually, metaphysically, and empirically distinct from well-being.

Compartmentalizing Happiness

Happiness has also been compartmentalized. There are, for instance, descriptions of material happiness, physical happiness, sensual happiness (including mental happiness), intellectual happiness, and spiritual happiness (Limbasiya, 2015), indicating that one can be happy in one regard, yet not in another. Reviewing each of these compartments within a variety of Indian scriptures, Limbasiya (2015) finds that:

- material happiness implies that whatever makes our life convenient brings happiness, whether this is our food, car, traveling, partying, or anything else;
- physical happiness relates to the physical joys we aspire, whether in clothing, interacting, feeding ourselves, or other ways;
- sensual happiness relates to the five senses, seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling and smelling, thus making this perspective of happiness particularly popular for marketers to entice the public with their products, with the interesting aspect of our mental state, oftentimes considered the sixth sense, as the controlling factor in how we choose to perceive things;
- intellectual happiness is described as a result of the ability to perceive similar experiences in either positive or negative lights, based on one's intellectual stance;
- spiritual happiness dives into the query of one's true self or consciousness, which is unselfish, and void of desires, wants, anger, lust, or ego.

Due to the fact that we harbor all these aspects within us, perceiving happiness within compartments becomes a complicated and confusing endeavor, especially when we consider that our intellect ultimately decides, on the basis of long term and short term aspects, what our course of action should be in any matter that we can exert influence on.

Individual versus Collective Happiness

Aside from the above described notion of happiness, which is more *individual* in nature, there is often also reference made to *collective* happiness. This phenomenon is usually considered in view of communities, and therefore measured in terms of social and economic welfare. Several authors (e.g. Diener et al., 2009; Kahneman & Deaton 2010) have pointed out, however, that economic aspects within a society affect satisfaction, but not necessarily happiness, which they relate more to social relationships. Evaluating the effect of the 2008 economic downturn on the citizens of Iceland, Gudmundsdottir (2013) substantiates this view, stating that, while there was loss of trust in local financial institutions (dissatisfaction), the social relationships (happiness inducing) in Iceland did not suffer from the economic meltdown, but actually became a support mechanism to cope with the economic catastrophe. Also considering happiness in a collective sense, Ott (2005) found that perceived inequality affects the sense of collective happiness in nations. This means that when there is a high level of inequality, collective happiness is lower than when there is a low level of inequality. According to Ott (2005), “[w]ealth contributes to higher levels of happiness and creates ample possibilities to reduce inequality

in happiness, including possibilities like social security and transfers and subsidies to neutralize potential negative effects of more income inequality” (p. 414).

Wealth and Happiness

While many people will readily admit that having more money does not increase happiness, there is an interesting dichotomy visible in most of our actions. After all, even though we say that more money doesn't bring more happiness, a statement that has been supported by numerous studies from economists, many of us hold multiple jobs, seek to do overtime, or find other means of supplementing our income, in order to gain a financially sound position in life. Lee (2006) examines this human contradiction, and comes to the conclusion that wealth does bring more happiness to people, otherwise they would not continue to try to acquire it after all the time we have been philosophizing about it. Lee questions the argument of some economists that citizens' income should remain limited, based on their notion that more money doesn't bring more happiness. He particularly has a problem with the economists' reasoning that, in areas of increased earnings, taxes should be heightened in order for government spending to augment. At the same time, Lee admits that, in societies such as the US, higher average income over decades has not resulted in higher percentages of happiness. Reflecting on his own situation, he admits that, while his own bank account has tremendously grown since his student years, he doesn't feel happier today than when he was a practically penniless student. Still, reflects Lee, it may be the practice of *striving* for more wealth that is the most appealing aspect in increasing happiness. Referring to the sense of accomplishment many people feel when reaching higher degrees of performance and earning, he concludes that this may be the manifestation of happiness so many of us pursue. Ahuvia (2008) largely agrees with Lee, adding that people at all income levels seem to be driven to earn more money, and that this may be motivated by something else than the mere pursuit of happiness. Ahuvia argues that there are three factors that lead us toward acquiring more income: 1) there is more at stake in working hard than just becoming happy, 2) we add immense value to the short-term benefits of being financially more affluent, and 3) we have a desire to maintain more resources than we really need, to be attractive, and to adhere to a positive identity within our social relationships. Ahuvia feels that each of these points, but especially the last, may explain the ongoing human quest to earn more money.

Happiness at Work: Possibility or Utopia?

When happiness is reviewed within the context of work, the elements that come to the surface are focused on making employees feel content enough to increase their productivity, maintain or deepen the team spirit, and refrain from leaving the workplace. Naturally, these elements are all directly related to the organization's wellbeing: contented workers feel good about their current workplace, and will be more willing to cooperate with others, while chances are – albeit unconfirmed and sometimes even refuted – that contented workers may have a higher propensity to perform. Of equal importance is retention: keeping a decent existing employee at work prevents the time-consuming task of hiring someone new, finding out whether he or she fits within the culture, and teaching him or her the ropes all over again. Sethi (2016) underscores a point earlier made in this chapter, pertaining to the complexity of ensuring that each worker is happy, since people differ, and what may truly please one, another may not care for. Sethi shares a valuable piece of advice from Shawn Achor, a Harvard psychology researcher and author of *The Happiness Advantage*, entailing that we should never equate happiness to success, because success is definitely a moving target that redefines itself as soon as the previous success measure has been accomplished. Therefore, Achor suggests, happiness benefits more if it is unrelated to success, but rather offered in random ways and on unexpected, in-between days.

Sethi (2016) eloquently offers a series of considerations to increase a sense of happiness at work, varying from the maintenance of a satisfactory work–life balance where people feel that their time off is honored and even encouraged, to nurturing the organizational culture, which may change as an organization evolves, but should not be destroyed, and from keeping employees involved, since that enhances a sense of ownership and belonging, to promoting transparency, whereby people are not left in the dark about major developments in the organization; and from granting satisfactory benefits toward time off, health care, and retirement, to career support, where employees are assisted in their personal and professional development.

Uttley (2014) first underscores Raibley's (2012) earlier shared opinion that happiness and wellbeing are interrelated but not the same. The main difference, as she explains, may lie in the fact that wellbeing is more perceived as a solid proficiency, which in the realm of work, is equated to decent healthcare and retirement accommodations, while she sees happiness as more transient in nature. Uttley subsequently expresses a sentiment similar to Sethi when she refers to flexible work schedules to enhance work life balance, and employee engagement to increase a sense of ownership. She also adds recognition to the list of happiness enhancers, and labels it a simple, yet often overlooked way of making immense progress in cultivating employees' happiness levels at work. She warns thereby not to confuse happiness with job satisfaction either. Job satisfaction is job related, while happiness is a universal phenomenon, and transcends the bounds of work environments.

Saunderson (2014) adds some interesting aspects to consider when aiming to enhance workplace happiness. Providing people with work they love is a huge one, and not always possible, of course. But when and where it can be done, it is a major motivator and a strong source of happiness for employees. He also cites reputable resources that have commented on the business sense of keeping employees happy. There seems to be a clear correlation between happy workers and long life, better performance, and being better citizens, while it has also been proven that disengaged employees are very costly in multiple ways, such as spreading a negative atmosphere, oftentimes performing less, taking more sick days, and negatively affecting productivity. What should also not be underestimated is the fact that reaching out and helping colleagues at work is not only benefiting the receiver, but also the grantor. Finally, states, Saunderson, we should be aware that being happy enables people to learn better, which in return, enhances their chances to make career progress.

Reviewing the findings of a comprehensive study amongst more than 12,000 US and Canadian workers, O'Bannon (2016) posits that when working people are proud of their workplace, they are at least three times happier than those who are not. When working people feel appreciated and respected, they also report feeling happier at work, while those who feel that they are a poor fit report a desire to leave. People who work in smaller work environments seem to be happier than those who work in major corporations. Similarly, those who work in creative sectors, such as education, marketing and design, reported higher levels of happiness than those in finance or legal sectors. Those in senior executive positions seemed to be happier than those at lower echelons, such as sales and customer service. There are also divergent parameters within professions and generations to determine happiness. For instance, while accountants want to feel appreciated, marketers want to engage in work they consider worthwhile, and whereas millennials want to impress, those around their 30s yearn for a sense of accomplishment. Older workers generally feel happier than younger ones, and men feel more influential than women in work related decisions, which also determines their sense of gratification about their work (O'Bannon 2016).

Valentic adds an aspect that could be easily overlooked as a factor to enhance happiness: the tidiness of a workplace. While mainly focusing on manufacturing workplaces, Valentic underscores that employers should ensure safe and hygienic workplaces if they want to keep a happy workforce. Baek-Kyoo Joo & Lee (2017), who equate work engagement, career satisfaction, and subjective well-being (SWB) to happiness, expanded this aspect from safety and

hygiene to the entire package of organizational support. They found from a study with 550 employees in a conglomerate in South Korea that perceived organizational support (POS) and psychological capital (PsyCap) resulted in increased employee work engagement, greater career satisfaction, and an augmented sense of well-being in their lives. To clarify, POS refers to the investigation of positive attributes, positive dynamics, and positive outcomes in organizations (Luthans & Church, 2002), while PsyCap is an individual's positive psychological state of development (Luthans et al., 2007). Not to be overlooked is the psychological innovation of workplaces as a source of increased employee happiness. Rekha Shetty, managing director of consulting firm Farstar Distribution Network in India, points out this frequently underestimated, yet highly influential aspect. An example of psychological innovation is the shift in created perception from a hospital as a place for the sick as a hospital as a place to get well, and the creation upgrade of the physical environment, such as placing fascinating ceiling patterns to provide happy impulses to those who have to lay on their back watching hospital ceilings all the time (*"In a happy space"* 2011).

Internalizing Happiness

There is an old story about a kitten running in circles to chase its tail, while her mother observed this act with amusement. Finally, the mother asked the kitten what she was trying to do. The kitten answered that she had learned that happiness resided in her tail, so she was trying to get a hold of it. The mother chuckled and replied that, when she was young, she had heard the story as well, and for a while, she too had tried to chase her tail, but after some time, she realized that if she just left it as it was, her tail was following her wherever she went.

There is something important in each of the arguments presented in this chapter so far. Happiness can be related to almost anything, and indeed, there are different strokes for different folks, meaning that what makes one person happy, will not be meaningful for another. It is also important to realize that happiness is not a constant state of bliss, because life will always bring some dark clouds along the way, to challenge us toward becoming stronger. So, how do we ensure happiness in our lives? The most sensible answer is that, through reflection, each of us could produce a set of actions and behaviors that would safeguard the most enduring sense of happiness in most circumstances, at work, as well as in other areas of our lives. The following nine practices could serve as an initial exercise toward internalizing happiness, and reduce the chance of becoming negatively affected by situations as they arise.

Honor every experience as a valuable lesson toward personal growth

In his seminal Stanford commencement address, Steve Jobs (2005) presents a series of life insights, among which his realization of the usefulness of every experience we go through. He recalls taking a calligraphy course as a college dropout, simply because he wanted to learn about fonts, spacing, and the beauty of using letters in an artistically subtle way. At the time he did so, he never fathomed that years later he would apply the knowledge acquired from this course, to create different fonts for his Macintosh computers. His lesson excerpted from this experience was that we only learn to connect the dots of our experiences at later stages in life. There are so many people who complain about their current job, some of the courses they have to take toward their degree, an encounter that they consider unpleasant or downright a waste of their time. How simple is the step to keep in mind from now on that even those currently worthless or useless perceived occurrences will turn out to serve a good purpose in the future? Maintaining this mindset may help alleviate a lot of frustration and infuse understanding, patience, and even a sense of gratitude in our minds instead.

Act every day as if it were your last.

In the same Stanford speech mentioned above, Steve Jobs refers to a quote he read as a teenager, entailing this message. He subsequently explained that he took this advice to heart, realizing that this very thought would one day become reality. As a result, he adopted the habit to refrain from doing dreadful things too long, since life was simply too short to make it an ongoing sequence of suffering. Of course we should be realistic about the fact that we cannot exit situations at the first instance of distress. Life is full of ups and downs, and it would be unwise to exit a job that enables us to pay our bills and bring food to the table at the first disagreement with a supervisor, colleague, or client. Yet once we realize that the feeling of aversion has turned into a structural one, and we cannot find passion or pleasure for an extended period of time in the place where we currently are, it is time to start planning for our next move. While many people realize this, they are often overcome by fear of the unknown, and stay in dreadful situations far too long, thus creating their own enduring misery.

Pass along good thoughts, even to those who seem to despise you.

While it seems easier to hold grudges toward those that did us wrong, it is much healthier to release negative emotions and wish every living being well, regardless of who or what they are. Releasing grudges is liberating for our psyche. It is freeing, and creates peace and joy, as well as a positive flow of energy (Storer, 2008). In his book *Forgive for Good*, Luskin (2003) explains that hopelessness suppresses our immune responses, a major factor contributing to depression. “Anger compromises the immune system’s ability to regulate our nervous system, making it the most harmful emotion for our cardiovascular system” (Muha, 2019). Indeed, walking around with emotional burdens causes unnecessary stress, which can lead to mental and physical concerns. Referring to a psychology-based research project on holding grudges, McKinney (2010) reveals potential negative effects on blood pressure, back pain, and blood sugar increase, to name a few. Moreover, walking around with grudges affects our behavior and transforms us from a kind person into one that is in perpetual retaliation mode. Yet, releasing grudges requires reflection. The reflection could pertain to the fact that we, too, have caused others pain, through which they may now hold grudges against us. Since we would rather not have others harbor negative emotions toward us, we could surmise that we should also release negative emotions toward others, and even take this a step further: send those others thoughts of wellness. If our actions toward others return to us in due time, there is also an immediate advantage to harboring positive thoughts to every other living being.

Practice excellence in whatever you do.

No one knows better what we are capable of than we do. Exerting our very best effort in all our actions is the least we owe to our sense of internal satisfaction. Nurturing happiness is closely related to our self-perception. What do we think of ourselves when we evaluate our performance of today, last year, or five years ago? It is important to keep in mind that we will most likely remember, long after others forgot, how we performed at various occasions. Did we practice excellence? If not, we may get confronted with regret, guilt, shame, or even self-anger, all of these being emotions that we could perfectly live without. A well-known statement from the Greek philosopher Aristotle is that we are what we repeatedly do. Dwelling on this statement, Iannarino (2013) invites us to consider the massive degree of mediocrity we see and experience all around us, and to reflect if we would like to be thrown on that heap. While it is easy to be mediocre, Iannarino states, it is

far more rewarding to practice excellence. Excellence gives meaning, as it is built on passion, and shows our care to those we demonstrate it to. Most importantly, it instills a deep sense of pride in ourselves, which contributes to our overall sense of happiness.

Infuse some humor in the way you look at things: there's a bright side to most anything.

In analyzing its influence on our wellbeing and happiness, Páez et al. (2013) describe humor as the ability not to take life or oneself too seriously. They further explain humor as an adaptive form of coping that enhances pleasure and feelings of control, which helps us to integrate conflicting emotions and thoughts. Martin (2007) presents four styles of humor that can be useful in coping with the situations we encounter: 1) affiliative humor, which is mainly used to amuse others and create a positive and socially supportive atmosphere, 2) self-enhancing humor, which helps brighten our outlook on life and reduces stress, thereby regulating negative emotional effects we could suffer, 3) self-defeating humor, which is a form of making fun of ourselves (self-disparaging), possibly to entertain others, but often a form of self-blame or a low level of well-being, and 4) aggressive or ironic humor, which entails making fun of others and blaming them for unfavorable outcomes. Páez et al. (2013) recommend, based on their studies, to primarily adhere to self-enhancing humor, as this form enhances our overall well-being, and may therefore contribute to our general sense of happiness. This finding is corroborated by Leist & Müller (2013), who underscore that self-defeating and aggressive humor may not be as constructive or beneficial to our own happiness. And even without the psychological distinctions presented above, it simply makes sense to keep a lighthearted outlook on things, and refrain from taking everything excessively seriously. Leist & Müller (2013) add that humor, which we know as a habitual behavior with the general tendency to laugh or tell funny stories, is useful in cheering up ourselves and others.

Navigate through life with mindfulness (reflect).

Mindfulness has been studied and described to a larger and more detailed extent in recent years, due to increased global awareness of the positive effects that behaving mindfully can have on the quality of our lives. Bishop et al. (2004) define mindfulness as a form of awareness that arises from attending to the present moment in a non-judgmental and accepting manner. Coo & Salanova (2018) report that several studies in the field of cognitive neuropsychology have shown that engaging in as little as ten minutes of daily mindfulness meditation can result in structural changes in regions of the brain associated with executive information processing, attention, and self-regulation. Coo & Salanova add that mindfulness enables people to better deal with stressful situations, as it promotes better emotion regulation, and that both, mindfulness and happiness are positively related to work engagement and performance. Chang, Huang, & Lin (2015) report that, based on a mindfulness study they conducted, they found that individuals with high levels of mindfulness (with no mind wandering) overall experienced higher degrees of happiness. They therefore draw the conclusion that being and remaining present in the moment adds to one's overall wellbeing.

Earn respect by giving it.

Respect is one of those interesting phenomena that is gained by giving it to others. The more we respect others, the more willing they generally are to return the behavior. Similar to sending good thoughts, even to those who do us wrong, granting others respect, even if

they seemingly don't deserve it, is a sign of greatness that some may not understand, but all will appreciate. Respect is not automatically given when we step into a prominent position. It is determined by the way we behave. Flaxington (2018) explains that positions can be acquired through manipulation or nepotism, but what we do when we interact with others will ultimately determine how they look at us. While we can all relate to giving respect to people who have special talents, or who accomplished something major, there is a specific category of earning respect that pertains to the way we behave. When we treat others with compassion and care, others often make a mental note of that, and start respecting us in return in a way that no special talent or major accomplishment might have worked. In repeating the old adage, "actions speak louder than words", Flaxington reminds us that this goes for any kind of treatment we apply to others. When we show respect to others, our awareness that we are doing the right thing causes a sense of acknowledgement within that we are doing the right thing. Doing the right thing makes us feel good about ourselves, and adds to the ultimate feeling of satisfaction, contentment, and well-being, all of which contribute to our happiness.

Support other beings wherever and however you can.

There is a saying that says, "A little fragrance sticks to the hand that gives the flowers". This statement captures the essence of how supporting others makes us happy. When we do something right, whether that is giving respect, sending good thoughts, or lending a helping hand, there is a positive impact to our brains, causing them to release oxytocin, serotonin, and dopamine. These hormones have the effect of boosting our mood and counteract the effect of cortisol (the stress hormone). Hopper (2014) takes this explanation a step further, and shares the insight of social psychologists that supporting others doesn't only make us happier with ourselves and the world, but can even expand our lives! Elaborating on the nature of helping others, Hopper does alert us that we should be cautious in giving support. Sometimes, the very thought of receiving support may depress others, so we may have to consider ways that make the support invisible and implement it in a way that those others are not aware of it, especially during their downtime. It's also



Figure 1.1 Internalizing happiness at work, home and anywhere else.

important to consider the type of support we give to others. Not every support is useful or appreciated at all times. Sometimes people just need responsive support, which is what we do when we show care, understanding, and validation. It exudes that we are taking the other party seriously, and can relate to their concerns. Sometimes support is given in the form of celebrating windfalls with others, rather than finding all the potential negatives that could accompany the windfalls. The message is clear: giving support is great, but it makes all parties involved happiest when it is also appropriate.

Smile regularly, especially to yourself

Smiling has always had a great reputation, and for good reasons! Smiling is the universal language of kindness, and at the same time that we express this warm way of communicating, we stimulate our facial muscles and trick our brain into happiness, thus boosting our health. Several studies over time have yielded that the act of smiling can lift our mood, lower stress, boost our immune system, and possibly even prolong our life (Spector, 2017). A similar positive brain impact, as described above when discussing support, is also applicable to smiling: the chemical reaction that a smile triggers in the brain releases hormones such as dopamine, which increases our feelings of happiness, and serotonin, which reduces stress. This means that the act of smiling can lead our brain to believe that we are happy, thus resulting in actual feelings of happiness (Spector). Bringing up the science of psychoneuroimmunology, which is the study of how the brain is connected to the immune system, it has been found that happiness boosts our immune system, thus making us stronger and healthier. Since our brain thinks we are happy when we smile, we get all the workings that happiness causes simply by smiling. So why not do it more often?

Concluding Thoughts

When we internalize happiness, we take ownership of our wellbeing and the quality of our life. Internalizing happiness will not protect us from the surprises that life has in store for us, but it will help us cope better with them, and reemerge more swiftly from challenges. When we internalize happiness, we expand our internal locus of control, which means that we reduce the influence other beings and occurrences have on our psyche, and demand responsibility for our physical and mental fortitude.

While all happiness perspectives shared in this chapter are valid and sensible, the process of internalizing our happiness safeguards us from the negative effects we might otherwise suffer from work-related, personal, or social stresses. Most of us only recollect this life and no other, so why not make this journey a happy and rewarding one with the single tool that no one can take away from us: our attitude?

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