

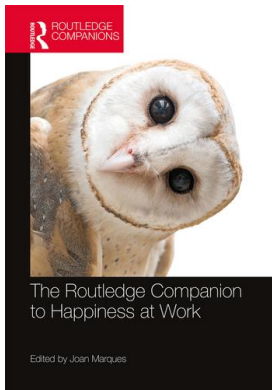
This article was downloaded by: 10.2.97.136

On: 20 Mar 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



## The Routledge Companion to Happiness at Work

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### Behind the Happiness Mask

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429294426-19>

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**Published online on: 23 Oct 2020**

**How to cite :-** Lisa Linzbach, Ilona Suojanen. 23 Oct 2020, *Behind the Happiness Mask from: The Routledge Companion to Happiness at Work* Routledge

Accessed on: 20 Mar 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429294426-19>

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## 19

## BEHIND THE HAPPINESS MASK

*Lisa Linzbach and Ilona Suojanen*

**Introduction: The Growing Importance of Happiness at Work**

A shift has taken place in the workplace, from aiming to maximize physical efficiency of one's workforce to recognizing that a human's full potential is reached by focusing on both mental and physical well-being. This recognition was driven by the economic costs of mental health issues that were impacting companies increasingly over recent decades, leaving them struggling with employee absenteeism and high turnover (Davies, 2011). Public attention has created pressure for companies to be recognized as caring employers, enabling them to attract and retain top talent. Employers that dedicate their efforts to employee well-being understand the close link between unhappiness and disengagement, which can create severe losses in the productivity of a company (Gallup, 2013). In addition to these developments, there has been growing evidence that happy employees are more successful as they tend to be more engaged (Hoxsey, 2010), have higher performance levels (Johnson, Robertson, & Cooper, 2018) and experience lower levels of job withdrawal (Rath & Harter, 2010). Consequently, companies are increasingly investing time and resources in the happiness of their employees through various well-being initiatives. Among other prominent actions is the creation of dedicated happiness functions, such as the "chief happiness officer", or the provision of benefits as free food, in-house gyms, and flexible working hours (Frenking, 2016). By designing happy workplaces, employers aim to reduce stress levels, position themselves attractively, and benefit from productivity gains.

Although surveys are the most common approach to measure employees' happiness, the growing interest in happiness has led to some organizations attempting to monitor happiness in more detail. For example, Hitachi developed a sensor in 2015 to track the movements of their workers 50 times per second during the day (Frankel, 2016). Based on this data, they created an algorithm to measure their employees' happiness (Frankel, 2016). In another Japanese company, workers' smiles are checked upon arrival via facial recognition, informing employees if their smile is below what is expected, potentially resulting in a denied access to work that day (Adelstein, 2018). There have also been cases in Japan where employees have been refused job offers due to their lack of enthusiasm (Adelstein, 2018). Similarly, in the quest to enhance the overall happiness level at his firm, Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos, recommends dismissing the 10% of employees that are least enthusiastic about the firm's happy culture (Smedley, 2012). These scenarios show how in extreme cases, a lack of happiness can damage one's career or even cost employees their jobs. They outline where happiness initiatives can head, when the achievement of happiness is at the forefront of management and approached from a commercial perspective.

While the objectives of happiness initiatives are clear and generally positive, some practitioners like Davies (2015) and Cederström & Spicer (2015) argue that the growing dedication to happiness can lead to a moral obligation to be happy, which they term “the wellness command”. They state that happiness initiatives could backfire, as employers gradually introduce “happy work cultures” along with the expectation that employees should indeed be happy. Coupled with observations that a happy appearance results in higher supervisor ratings (Wright & Staw, 1999), a greater probability to get promoted (Achor, 2010), and superior incomes (Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994), this increases pressure to achieve happiness to enjoy various professional benefits. There is a risk that employees increasingly self-regulate their emotions by displaying cheerful and happy behaviors to fulfill the professional expectations in their environment. This phenomenon is called a “*happiness mask*” (Suojanen, 2017).

This chapter discusses observations on the wellness command further by shedding light on the happiness mask based on two qualitative studies on young professionals (Generation Ys, born in 1979–1994) and happiness in the workplace that were conducted in the UK and the Netherlands (more details at the end of the chapter). It outlines how the pressure to be happy in the workplace can manifest in the form of a happiness mask in moments of unhappiness, or be observed when professionals act extroverted while being introverted by nature. While emotion regulation has been widely investigated, research has mainly focused on customer interactions (e.g. Grandey, 2000). Given the growing interest and investments in happiness at work, it is valuable to explore how emotion regulation is relevant in the context of happiness in organizations, and how authentic displays of emotions could be emphasized.

### The Happiness Mask as a Behavioral Phenomenon

*“Work is a part of performance: You put on a face and then you go in front of the audience as if you go on the stage. Like actors cannot be influenced by what is happening in their personal life, I learnt not to be influenced by my personal state.”*

*Alexandra, 29, education, UK*

Goffman (1959) suggested that humans try to control how others see them in social interactions, and compared them to actors in dramatic performances. According to him, by changing their appearance or manners, they aim to show the most positive aspects of themselves. Alexandra’s words—*performance, face, stage, actor*—show how the idea of wearing masks is still relevant today and influences how professionals behave at work. In order to understand the need to appear happier than one feels, it is useful to have a better understanding of what the happiness mask can look like in terms of behavioral characteristics. Two versions of happiness masks have emerged in our studies: “exaggeration of happiness”, and “display of happiness despite unhappiness”. Figure 19.1 provides a summary of the two masks and the emoticons visualize some of the major outward differences. In reality, these two masks cannot always be separated this clearly as feelings are subjective.

### Exaggeration of Happiness—Happiness Mask 1

When professionals exaggerate their happiness display, they generally feel well, but amplify these positive feelings by portraying traits and characteristics that are commonly connected to happiness. They appear engaged and committed (Fisher, 2010) by displaying excitement and high energy levels in an extroverted manner (Da Silva, Franca, & Sharp, 2014; Myers & Diener, 1995). They also tend to be very social, talkative and friendly towards their peers and frame every challenge positively in teamwork (Myers & Diener, 1995). This exaggeration can also manifest in frequent smiles and laughter. Hence, through this happiness mask, employees apply a more extroverted, social version of happiness than



Figure 19.1 Two versions of the happiness mask.

what would suit their personality or current state. However, it is not only those who are “more introverted by nature” who feel the need to act extroverted, but extroverts alike (Suojanen, 2017, p. 146). Wearing this mask might require more energy from introverts than extroverts though, and can feel more like a mask to them. Displaying typical happiness characteristics is seen as a tool to make general well-being and work satisfaction more explicit and easier to perceive for outsiders. It also shows how the manifestation of happiness supports the idea of being the perfect professional, who is engaged, satisfied, and committed to his or her work and organization.

Exaggeration of happiness can occur in different occasions, as a long-term strategy in daily interactions with co-workers or as a situational form of behavior, for example at internal company events, such as team dinners or office parties. Expectations to be happy can be strong, especially when employees from different levels and departments are involved, as these events can transmit a “*hyper-positive atmosphere, where not everybody is in that happy bubble at the moment*” (Roy, 34, tech, NL). Yet, a specific setting of the culture or an event can make them feel like they need to exaggerate their happiness as they do “*not want to be the only one not having fun*” (Stefanie, 25, tech, NL). In response to these perceived happiness requirements, employees might interact mainly with colleagues they know well, and hence lessen the extent to which they feel pressured to give in to these happiness expectations.

### Display of Happiness Despite Unhappiness—Happiness Mask 2

The perceived need to wear a happiness mask at work becomes even stronger in moments of sadness, anger, defeat, or unhappiness—negative feelings that many professionals feel obligated to hide. The more negative the true underlying feelings are, the harder it gets to display extroverted traits of happiness, and hence, the displayed emotions of this mask diverge from the first mask in their outward display. For example, employees are unlikely to replace the emotion with loud laughter or enthusiasm. Instead, they would rely on behaviors that require less effort, e.g. a smile or a friendly attitude. However, it can be “*quite hard to smile*” (Sarah, 25, consulting, NL) or to stay “*positive to the outside world*” (Roy, 34, tech, NL) when feeling the exact opposite. A typical behavior of this mask relies on pretending that everything is fine by “*acting normal, for example by having small-talk*” (Sarah, 25, consulting, NL). Not sharing unhappiness with others when being asked can also be perceived as faking happiness. The hiding of negative emotions is applied due to individual preferences, for example not wanting to involve colleagues with one’s own sorrows, but also in consideration of how one’s behavior affects others. Hiding one’s true feelings can be very tough and difficult to cope with and hence, some may try to prevent this internal conflict by avoiding social interaction.

*“I felt upset because I felt the need to continue being happy because you have to interact with people. I tried to cope with it by getting my work done, I put my headphones in and sat in front of my computer most of the time.”*

*Sofia, 24, marketing, NL*

This coping mechanism gives a first indication that this version of the happiness mask can be more difficult to uphold than the first mask.

To conclude, the happiness mask does not emerge as one single pattern, where unhappiness is simply replaced by extroverted happiness. Separating the two versions of the happiness mask—where one is linked to hiding unhappiness and the other one is based on exaggerated happiness displays—shows that the happiness mask can emerge differently depending on the personal context and situation. It is also in line with general distinction between the suppression of negative and the amplification of positive emotions (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Dedication to happiness by companies encourages the display of these masks in the work environment as debated in the introduction. Hence, there might also be other forms of happiness masks, which are yet to be discovered, or which will appear as the future creations of the current happiness trend and wellness command.

### **Elements Driving Employees to Wear a Happiness Mask**

If people struggle with upholding a happy face when it does not match their internal state, why do they feel inclined to do this within the professional environment? The process of managing one’s feelings to bring forward emotions appropriate to a given context, was first termed “emotion management” by Hochschild in 1979, and is widely discussed in academia and by practitioners until today (e.g. Bolton, 2005; Manz et al., 2016). Bolton (2005, p. 36) describes workers as “skilled social actors who offer a wide variety of emotion management performances depending on the context and motivation”. While various organizational antecedents for emotion regulation have been identified in previous studies, they were all developed in a customer-facing context, specifically in the airline or medical industry. Since professional behavior and friendliness towards customers are often part of the job description, fake displays of positive emotions inside organizations represent a new dimension that becomes increasingly relevant if happiness at work transforms into a social norm. Although the dedication to achieve happiness at work is very valuable from both an employer and employee perspective, it is important to understand what drives professionals to act happier than they feel to filter out which elements are beneficial and which drivers can cause psychological stress.

In our studies, we found four categories, namely *organizational culture*, *manager behavior*, *team dynamics*, and *perceived performance and image* that build the foundations for the drivers behind the happiness mask. They are represented in the downward pyramid in Figure 19.2. The downward pyramid shape is indicative for the top-down directional influences that each dimension has on the respective dimensions below, meaning that the organizational culture serves as the guiding principle for the other drivers. We will have a closer look at each of these categories in the following.

### **Organizational Culture**

When it comes to the organizational culture, a key driver to wear a happiness mask lies in happiness expectations that are present across the organization and which are often fueled through various happiness and well-being initiatives. The organizational climate provides the guiding principles as to what good leaders look like and shapes desired behaviors across teams in a company. The culture also influences whether happiness displays are linked to good perceived performance or are desirable in terms of image. While companies’ dedication to happiness is generally appreciated by employees, it can

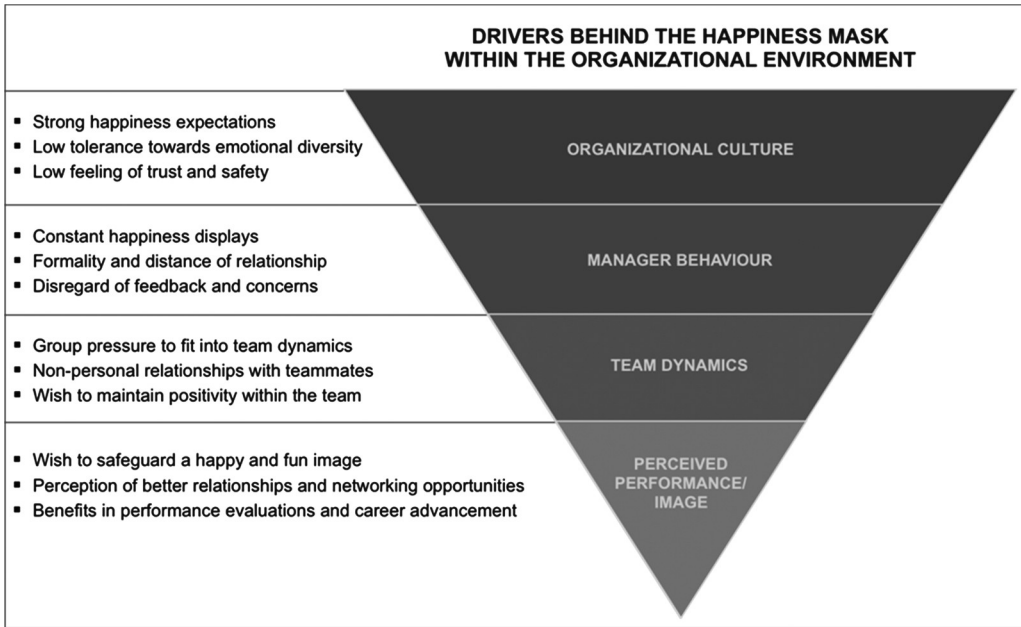


Figure 19.2 Drivers behind the happiness mask within the organizational environment.

transform happiness to a behavioral social norm, which can incline professionals to exaggerate their work satisfaction by displaying happiness.

*“They are on top of it that everybody needs to be happy. Every email you read is exaggerated and that expectation naturally makes everybody act happier. It is almost like the anchor point of happiness is a little bit above what you would normally display. The culture itself is about being happy with the American twist that it needs to be exaggerated happy.”*

Emma, 30, tech, NL

What drives these perceived expectations that one needs to act happy at work? Hochschild (1983) described a link between the level of organizational control and the emotional display of employees. Morris & Feldman (1996) later confirmed that the extent to which an organization has specific written rules for behavior towards customers increases the likelihood of “efforts to increase, maintain or decrease one or more components of an emotion” (Côté, 2005, p. 510). Yet, when it comes to behavioral norms inside an organization and happiness specifically, these expectations are significantly less explicit as companies “do not write down documents, where they say they expect you to be happy, they never officially consider this in an evaluation” (Carlos, 36, marketing, NL). Instead, these happiness expectations within the company culture represent professional norms or implicit rules within the organization that are already introduced in the recruitment process (Bolton, 2005). They are unique to each professional discipline and drive the socialization of employees (Strauss, 1975), thus relating to softer dimensions of organizational identity. While these “prescriptive” norms describe implicit feeling rules, they can become taken for granted after a while (Bolton, 2005).

*“It is really the DNA of consulting firms that they have this classic work hard, party hard culture. We feel pressured to display happiness to go along with that culture.”*

Tom, 29, consulting, NL

Perceived ‘unwritten rules’ on how emotions should be expressed sometimes require acting out by wearing a mask to meet expectations of a professional image (Bolton, 2005).

*“You create behaviors which are different from the natural way you would act, as you would like to fit into the culture of an organization and if the organization does not match you, then you try to smile even if you do not want to smile.”*

*Stefanie, 25, tech, NL*

Hence, “exaggeration of happiness” is about fitting in and not being different from others, an element that is picked up again when looking at team dynamics. The extent to which employees feel encouraged versus pressured to be happy depends on the flexibility within the outlined expectations and the range of emotions that are encouraged within the culture. When strong happiness expectations are coupled with low perceived tolerance for negative emotions, professionals are likely to hide moments of unhappiness, wearing the second version of the happiness mask. This is even more so the case when the level of trust and safety communicated across the company is low, as it creates difficulties for employees to open up about their true emotional state.

### Manager Behavior

Managers have a powerful role in making implicit feeling rules within the culture more explicit. As such, there is not solely a downward relationship in which the organizational culture provides the guidelines for good leadership, but also an upward relationship as leaders represent a central element in making the organizational values come alive. Managers have a strong influence on their reports and their behavior due to their responsibility for performance evaluations (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Our studies have shown that professionals feel inclined to adjust to the behavior of their managers. Hence, when we look at the first version of the happiness mask (“exaggeration of happiness”), it is especially those managers that seem to be constantly happy that can drive their reports to adjust to this positive behavior.

*“There are some project leaders who are very extroverted. As a consultant, I felt the pressure to adapt to that level of happiness.”*

*Tom, 29, consulting, NL*

These types of managers are often the most popular ones, as they are fun to work with and spread positivity in the team. Yet, their constant optimism or happiness subconsciously introduces happiness as a professional requirement and provides little room for any kind of vulnerability, dissatisfaction, or sadness—natural emotions in everyday work life—to take place. The more honest managers are about their personal feelings, the more likely young professionals are willing to express their true emotional states, rather than wearing a happiness mask.

*“It really makes a difference how people above your hierarchical level deal with it. At my prior organization, I never experienced something personal about them, for example what made them feel unhappy in that moment.”*

*Sarah, 25, consulting, NL*

When managers bring their authentic selves to work and communicate the importance of authenticity, it easily spreads over to other team members. It also nurtures a more personal relationship, which is important as a formal and distant relationship might make employees feel self-conscious about sharing moments of unhappiness.

*"I am hiding my unhappiness, because my manager seems very distant and there is no close relation [sic] with him. He will not fully understand me so I decide not to communicate how I really feel."*

*Maximilian, 26, tech, NL*

This concern is especially present if there are fears that being open and giving feedback about moments of unhappiness or dissatisfaction is punishable. In contrast, leader openness, availability, accessibility, and relationship are antecedents for psychological safety (Edmondson, Kramer, & Cook, 2004), which describes the extent to which individuals "are comfortable being themselves" (Edmondson, 1999, p. 354) "without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career" (Kahn, 1990, p. 708). The presence of psychological safety hence does not only help in voicing structural improvements (Edmondson, 1999), but also supports the voicing of causes for negative emotions.

### **Team Dynamics**

Team dynamics can enhance or reduce the need for a happiness mask in various ways. If co-workers are mostly happy, it can create group pressure to adjust to this happiness level. This holds for other social group norms as well, as people often feel inclined to adjust their behavior in order to be considered an in-group member.

*"When everyone around you is acting a certain way, you as a human being are just a group animal, so you kind of copy what people around you do."*

*Stefanie, 25, tech, NL*

Face-to-face interaction can lead to higher levels of emotional labor (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Hence, when employees interact with colleagues less frequently, happiness expectations embedded in the culture become less explicit. As a result, they might perceive the need to fake happiness less often. However, in today's ever more connected world, happiness displays are not limited to face-to-face interactions, but are equally relevant in emails or phone conferences. It shows that emotion regulation is far more complex than facial displays and body language as emotions is also transmitted through word choice, tone, and how employees bring across enthusiasm.

In contrast, co-worker support reduces the need for emotional labor in front of customers, under the assumption that it provides an increased tolerance in coping with stress and that it increases the chances for a positive work environment (Grandey, 2000). For internal interactions, this is relevant in the sense that more personal relationships counteract the emergence of a happiness mask, as employees are more open about moments of unhappiness and feel less inclined to give in to group pressure by exaggerating their happiness.

*"How you get along with co-workers and whether you trust them, this is a big part of whether you feel like you have to hide if you are unhappy."*

*Nora, 27, private equity, NL*

At the same time, the need to wear a happiness mask must not only be driven by external pressure or a lack of personal relationships with teammates, but can also result from an intrinsic motivation to maintain positivity within the team.

*"I believe that you are contagious with your behavior at work. If you are always grumpy, if you are not smiling, then this is a certain sphere you create around yourself. You will not see me with a lot of changes in my behavior, but that does not mean I am always happy."*

*Violeta, 31, telecommunications, NL*



Team dynamics as a driver behind the happiness mask fall under presentational emotion management “which is not controlled by an organization’s feeling rules”, but by the social feeling rules of individuals (Bolton, 2005, p. 133). It is strongly embedded in the organizational culture though, since the pressure—internal or external—to act and stay happy is likely stronger in those firms that emphasize happiness. While these elements describe rules of social interaction, they are resulting from prescriptive elements and expectations within the culture.

### Perceived Performance and Image

When happiness expectations are strongly embedded in the culture of the company, it can make it very desirable for professionals to safeguard a happy and fun image through the happiness mask. Faking one’s happiness can be a tool to reap social rewards, for example by “*act[ing] positive to make sure people like you*” (Bram, 25, consulting, NL). This in turn can help to strengthen relationships, as it makes it easier to connect with colleagues and the management team, which is important “*in order to grow your network within the company*” (Tom, 29, consulting, NL). The happiness mask is further used as a means to realize benefits in performance evaluations and, hence, career advancement, especially if there is a strong sense of being “*a better worker*” (Felix, 25, consulting, UK) when happy: “*we know when happy we perform better*” (Adam, 31, education, UK). This is when happiness is used to fulfill performance requirements.

*“My manager was telling me that people are more inclined to come to me if I smile at them, for example if I was finished with my work, my co-workers would be more inclined to come to me with further tasks if I smiled at them.”*

*Sarah, 25, consulting, NL*

However, the happiness mask is not only used to promote a positive image, but also to avoid creating a negative, for example with the intention of preventing becoming a topic of discussion in the office: “*People make comments about people who are not perceived to be so happy*” (Charlotte, 26, civil service, UK). The concept of psychological contract (Rousseau, 1989) can help to understand the urge to wear a happiness mask, not solely based on employees’ inner wishes to be happy, but also because of the felt expectations of a certain happy social behavior by others and the strong belief of also performing better. Being a happy employee and performing well can be seen as one’s part of the psychological contract, formed based on unspoken promises and expectations during the time employed in the company. Also, the aspect of breaching the contract (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994) is relevant here, when being unhappy is something that is not expected and hence needs to be hidden.

Although the drivers are introduced here separately, the perceived need to wear a happiness mask is stronger when those dimensions interact. Thus, the explicitness of happiness as a professional requirement depends on the extent to which organizational branding, manager behavior, and team dynamics match. At the end of the day, it always depends on the individual person as well, as some people are more likely to be driven by external expectations than others. Yet it is not only about fulfilling external demands, as wearing a happiness mask can also result from the strong internal need of wanting to be the perfect professional.

### Risks and Positive Effects of the Mask

Next to understanding why professionals feel the need to wear a happiness mask, a better comprehension of its effects is needed to manage it effectively. Being happy all the time can create challenges for some professionals and may make them feel uncomfortable as they cherish authenticity (Suojanen, 2017). Authenticity—the reflection of one’s true self and the consistent acting in line “with one’s genuine thoughts and beliefs” (Manz et al., 2016, p. 375)—allows workers to retain energy they would

lose pretending to be someone else (Simon-Thomas, 2018). Thus, when the gap between the outward happiness and the true underlying emotion is large, the happiness mask can cause stress and reduce productivity due to the consumption of mental resources and cognitive energy.

*“People will constantly be acting, using thoughts for something completely different than what they are supposed to do: their job and being themselves, perform[ing] at their best without constantly thinking about being happy.”*

*Stefanie, 25, tech, NL*

If employees cannot be their true selves at work, they can experience personal conflict, dissonance (Côté, 2005), and a higher risk of burnout (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). It is likely to be harder to hide unhappiness than to exaggerate happiness, as hiding negative emotions is more stressful than the amplification of positive ones (Manz et al., 2016). Moreover, when others notice that a person’s emotional displays are inauthentic, it can attract negative responses from receivers (Côté, 2005).

At the same time, professionals appreciate a positive working environment and dedication to happiness at work. While they admit that it can occasionally drive them to exaggerate their happiness, they also declare that they would not always refer to this as pressure. Instead, they also perceive it as an encouragement to approach life from a more positive angle. Hence, the happiness mask can represent a useful tool to distract oneself from negative thoughts and can consequently even increase productivity and heighten one’s real happiness. This is in line with emotional self-leadership, which focuses on directing one’s mind to positive and motivating thoughts through a variety of strategies (Stewart, Courtright, & Manz, 2011). As it adapts both the internal experience and external display of the emotion, it can then even enhance authenticity (Côté, 2005), which is not the case when one only acts on the surface to fit a context. Thus, it turns out that the risk is not the emphasis on happiness per se, but rather the extent to which happiness is forced. Apart from these positive effects on the individual, there are also benefits for the team atmosphere, as social bonds can be strengthened and a positive work environment can emerge.

*“I can feel myself if someone else comes into [work] displaying that he is not so happy, then I am also more inclined to get in a bad mood. I do not want other people to get into a worse mood than they already are, so that is also why I would always feel a bit pressured to display that I am happy.”*

*Sarah, 25, consulting, NL*

To summarize, whether the outcomes of the happiness mask are positive or negative is influenced by various contextual factors. These are the intensity of the mask (the gap between the actual and displayed emotion), whether happiness display is encouraged or pressured, and the frequency and length of the mask’s use.

### **Unknown Aspects of the Happiness Mask**

As these studies were the first attempt to uncover the happiness mask, there certainly still are unknown aspects of it. We acknowledge that cultural differences might play a role in the need for wearing a mask. Workplaces are increasingly consisting of a variety of people from different backgrounds, which may greatly affect their happiness expectations. While happiness is already subjective on its own and differs greatly by person, cultural aspects influence this perception further (Suh, 2002). For example, happiness is associated with self-esteem and achievement in western countries, which can create a strong motivation to display happiness as a professional requirement in contrast to eastern cultures, where it links to social harmony, community, and related duties (Uchida, Norasakkunkit, & Kitayama, 2004). However, cultures do change and so

do values. Due to the asymmetry in the cross-cultural impact, western values are more aggressively influencing other cultures (Lu & Gilmour, 2004), and happiness pressure already seems to be present in, for example, Japanese culture.

Happiness varies greatly among individuals, teams, office floors, and workplaces, firstly because happiness is a subjective experience, and secondly because especially younger generations are increasingly becoming citizens of the world rather than representatives of one particular culture. Dealing with intergenerational and cultural differences can be challenging. Although the data used in this chapter suggests a broader understanding of happiness among young professionals from different cultures, and represents generation Y, which has been referred to as “the second global generation” acting with global impact and sharing information across borders (Edmunds & Turner, 2005), it can still be seen as a western study. Another observation that we have made is that the external pressure to display happiness decreases with higher job status, depending on the person’s hierarchical position, time spent at the organization, experience, and performance. This is due to the fact that professionals develop their own professional identities, and perceive more rights to voice moments of unhappiness as they progress in status. Hence, the results might not be related to age or generation, but more on the level of career progression.

As our studies focused on professionals, we cannot comment on the pressure for the happiness mask in other, e.g. blue collar, jobs. Given that the happiness mask was often seen as an approach to be the perfect professional, it might be more relevant in jobs where the competition is fierce and expectations are high. Moreover, as the particular focus in the study in the Netherlands was on industries known to place a high emphasis on happiness initiatives at work, the findings might not be as relevant for other areas, for example factory workers. However, with happiness being one of the highest goals in many of today’s societies and a part of the definition for success (Suojanen, 2017), there might be a need to be happy to succeed in society, regardless of the profession.

Future research using participants from a wider range of cultures, types of jobs, and different age groups is needed before these results could be considered representative of a wide cross-section of people. New forms of happiness masks and alternative drivers could also be found. Working on, for, and against the happiness mask is a continuous process.

### **Conclusion: Fueling a Climate of Happiness Without Masks**

Focusing on happy employees might increase the pressure to be one (Cederström & Spicer, 2015), especially for those with the strong ambition of being a perfect professional (Suojanen, 2017). The internal motivation to always display positivity turns into an ambition to achieve certain “professional characteristics” to secure some of the proven benefits of happiness. While the dedication to happiness is beneficial and can increase the overall well-being of employees, a risk emerges once it is emphasized too strongly. It raises concerns of unhappiness being seen as a moral fault, where an unhappy person is perceived as a bad person (Zupančič, 2008). This could eventually result in a new categorization of people as happy and unhappy, and could one day be monitored in recruiting processes, as happy employees provide more assets to companies (Fanti, 2017). Thus, the concerns raised by practitioners in the introduction are relevant, but disregard the positive effects of happy cultures. Hence, the questions goes: how can the authentic display of happiness be encouraged in organizations, while avoiding professionals feeling pressured to hide when they are unhappy?

The pressure to be happy at work even in moments of unhappiness is strongly violating the need for authenticity. Being constantly happy “*is possible only for a devoted Buddhist*” (Jack, 36, education, UK), but for others being persistently happy can be a challenge or requires wearing a mask. As authenticity has a great impact on the quality of work experience, individual’s happiness, engagement, and performance (van den Bosch & Taris, 2014; Manz et al., 2016), behaving against one’s true nature by pretending happiness is not sustainable. To create an environment where diversity of emotional displays is encouraged, all levels of organizations should integrate trust, psychological safety, and

authenticity as core values to ensure that unhappiness is not punishable. A key step relates to signaling the acceptance for bad days and explicitly communicating that one does not always have to be happy to be perceived a good employee. It can also be an option to have “*champions of authenticity*” (Harry, 24, consulting, NL), who share their experiences about authenticity through the company’s internal communication channels. Managers could be trained on providing room to voice negative emotions while learning to detect the true emotional states of their reports. Moreover, it is recommended that companies create awareness that emotional displays can vary by person. Just because some employees are “*rather quiet and reserved, does not mean that they are not happy*” (Carlos, 36, marketing, NL). This awareness can decrease pressure to display happiness in an extroverted manner and help to create an understanding of various personalities and work styles, which can make it easier for employees to be themselves. Finally, the responsibility also lies with each individual in a company to reflect on this phenomenon, to which extent it is present, and whether it provides challenges that need to be overcome.

A certain support on positive thinking can be beneficial, but organizations need to watch that they avoid pushing happiness too much, since the consequences can be negative if they do. Instead of emphasizing the demand to be happy at work, it might be better to acknowledge that people are more likely to do well when both negative and positive feelings are in a healthy balance (Oishi, Diener & Lucas, 2009), and when they can be their authentic selves.

### **Further Details on the Data Collection**

This chapter was based on two qualitative studies conducted among young professionals in the UK (Suojanen, 2017) and in the Netherlands (Linzbach, 2019).

The study in the UK was a longitudinal study combining visual and narrative methods. 24 young professionals (12 men and 12 women) took part in the study. The age group was young adults, born between 1979 and 1994. They had a university degree and worked in different fields such as education, finance, legal services, and healthcare, for both private and public sectors. One half of the participants were British, the other half consisted of a variety of nationalities, from Europe, Latin America, North America, Asia, and Oceania. They were requested to take photos when experiencing work-related happiness during a two-week period. Afterwards they were asked to talk through their photos. The narratives were supported by semi-structured interviews.

The study in the Netherlands focused on why young professionals feel inclined to act happier than they feel, building on Suojanen’s findings of the happiness mask. The study was based on a constructivist grounded theory approach relying on in-depth interviews with 20 young professionals between 24 and 36 years of age (11 women and 9 men) and five experts from the fields of coaching, psychology, and HR to provide an external perspective. Participants worked in industries or companies known to place a high emphasis on happiness initiatives at work, for example the tech industry. The participants came from all over the world, mainly Europe.

### **Acknowledgments**

We are grateful for Tatiana Rodionova, Alp Arslan and Katrin Linzbach for their feedback on this chapter, and to Kate Horton for bringing the call for chapters to our knowledge.

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