

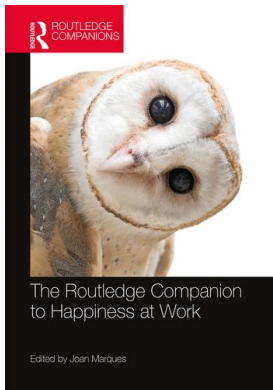
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TIME MANAGEMENT AND WORKPLACE HAPPINESS

Robert S. Fleming

Introduction

Workplace happiness is increasingly being recognized by contemporary organizations as a critical factor in determining an organization's present and future success. This is understandable given the role of workplace happiness in job satisfaction, job performance, and the retention of an organization's most important resource—its employees. Unfortunately, while its employees may aspire to experience genuine happiness at work, oftentimes the leaders of organizations are so focused on achieving their organization's business goals in a challenging, dynamic business environment, that they fail to recognize the role that a “happy” workforce could play in attaining those same goals and fulfilling the mission of the organization.

This is particularly interesting in the United States, where the Declaration of Independence delineates “the pursuit of happiness” as a fundamental human right. Similarly, pursuit of the American Dream involves engaging in work throughout one's life. Given the role that work plays in this life-long pursuit of the American Dream and the number of years that an individual commits to working for one or more organizations, the importance of workplace happiness should be obvious. While workplace happiness is an important determinant of an individual's general or overall happiness, this in and of itself will usually not lead to genuine happiness. Workplace happiness also contributes to the physical and psychological well-being of members of a society.

This chapter will advocate that workplace happiness can be achieved through a conscious commitment to its value by understanding its role in contributing to the present and future success of an organization. Such an enlightened approach represents a significant change in mindset from the traditional view that workplace happiness was merely a possible by-product of an organization's desired business outcomes, rather than a purposeful strategy intended to contribute to achieving these outcomes.

We will consider why workplace happiness matters and discuss ways in which an organization's leaders can manage and lead with the support of a culture that views workplace happiness as a mission-critical responsibility of an organization. While numerous other chapters in this work will consider other aspects of creating and sustaining a happy workplace, in this chapter we will focus on the role of time management in the effective and efficient accomplishment of the work of an organization in a manner that also fulfills an organization's commitment to offering a good place to work where all employees are given the opportunity to experience happiness as they lend their talents and work hard on behalf of the organization. We trust that you will agree that in today's

world, it is a refreshing thought that, despite the many frustrations that they may face in their lives outside the workplace, employees could find happiness at work.

Workplace Happiness in Contemporary Society

The fact that work has been described as a “necessary evil” of life is a sad commentary on the work climate that all too many individuals face in their workplaces. This is an unfortunate reality given the number of hours that most workers have traditionally spent at work and the fact that a growing number of workers are now expected to devote more hours to work than in the past. Some employees are also finding that through technological advances they can now and are sometimes expected to always be remotely available to perform their designated roles and responsibilities on behalf of their organization.

As the time that employees are expected to devote to work increases, unfortunately their leisure time correspondingly decreases. This affirms what we all know in terms of time being a finite or limited resource. While the challenge of discerning and achieving a proper balance between these two essential components in one’s life will be considered later, it is important at this point to recognize that the constant competition between these conflicting time demands can result in significant frustration and stress throughout an individual’s life. On the one hand we work to meet our needs to live, but all work is not good and leisure time is significantly important to our health, happiness, and, interestingly, to the essential contribution that we make when at work.

The fact that so many members of society desire but fail to experience workplace happiness is an unfortunate reality that should and can be addressed if enlightened organizational leaders embrace the importance of workplace happiness and purpose to make it a reality within their organizations. An organization’s success in recruiting, motivating, empowering, and retaining the necessary cadre of employees committed to contributing to its achievement of goals and organizational mission can be realized only through satisfied and productive employees. Ensuring workplace happiness should thus be a goal of each and every leader within a contemporary organization.

A growing number of employees consider their jobs to be stressful. While workplace stress has many origins and manifestations, it usually takes a toll on both an organization and its employees. In some instances, employees experience acute stress as the result of a major stressor event, such as a workplace violence incident, while more frequently the stress is chronic in that it accumulates and takes its toll over a prolonged period of time. A relevant example of chronic stress which could be addressed through effective time management would be unrealistic and overwhelming work demands, with accompanying impossible completion deadlines. Workers who find themselves in such unfortunate work situations will often experience burnout accompanied by a decrease in job satisfaction and productivity. In addition to resulting in undesirable personnel turnover wherein talented members leave the organization, this can also result in individuals that do not leave, but retain themselves and perform their jobs in a minimal manner given their decreased motivation and commitment to the organization. Both of these unfortunate realities occur more frequently than organizational leaders realize or may want to admit. They further demonstrate the importance of ensuring that employees are afforded a happy workplace in which to fully commit and utilize their unique talents.

As you will learn later in this chapter, workplace unhappiness has numerous origins. Being undervalued or underappreciated are two common reasons for employee unhappiness. Employees that affiliate with an organization do so with a set of expectations that they anticipate the organization will meet, if not exceed. These include designing jobs that, while contributing to the accomplishment of the organization’s work and attainment of its goals and mission, will enable qualified, motivated employees to meet their expectations and consequently realize genuine happiness at work. In addition to ensuring that the various jobs and their corresponding roles and responsibilities are meaningful, fully achieving workplace happiness requires a supportive organizational culture.

Why Workplace Happiness Matters

Although we trust that what you have read thus far has convinced you of the value of a happy workforce, the compelling reasons for drawing that conclusion bear repeating and elaboration. The resulting success and survival of any contemporary organization is based on the effective and efficient work of employees, often working in groups or teams, on behalf of that organization. The work and activities of an organization, and thus that of its employees, should be purposeful and directed towards accomplishing the organization's goals, and ultimately its mission. This requires that an organization recruit and retain highly qualified employees that are both motivated and empowered to commit themselves and their talents to the work of their organization. The key to recruiting, motivating, empowering, and consequently retaining employees is meeting and ideally exceeding their expectations. This is similar to the efforts that a successful organization must engage in to meet and ideally exceed the expectations of its two other most important stakeholder groups—customers and owners.

While it might seem that the only important outcomes of a happy workplace are measured with financial metrics such as revenues and profit, they should also include labor and capital productivity, and organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Just as it is a pleasure to work in a happy work environment, so too should be the customer experience of interacting with happy workers. Workforce happiness also results in reductions in absenteeism and lateness, which further contribute to an organization's success. All of these organizational outcomes benefit an organization's owners through enhanced financial performance. Achieving workplace happiness is thus a win-win situation for an organization's various stakeholders, including its employees, customers, and owners.

Is Workplace Happiness Achievable?

Although workplace happiness is a simple concept to comprehend, unfortunately many people often conclude that it is not possible in today's world in which we live and work. They may have developed this mindset that work and happiness are incompatible and became willing to accept this fallacy and allow it to influence their behavior. The result is that they are allowing an uninformed opinion to influence their perception of workplace satisfaction and happiness, and sometimes their general happiness outside of their world of work. The presence of such an attitude towards work begs the question of its origin. In some cases, individuals, based on their own work experiences, develop a mindset wherein they anticipate workplace unhappiness and are thus not open to ways in which they themselves or others in their organization could make their work experience more pleasurable. Others develop such an unhealthy mindset based on the influences and opinions of others who have pre-conditioned their perceptions so that they cannot envision a workplace where employees were genuinely happy.

As unfortunate as it is for any individual to adopt such a negative view of work and organizational life, it is tragic if that individual happens to be a manager within an organization. Rather than engaging in the proactive, inclusive leadership that can move the dial in the direction of workplace happiness, such an individual enacts their roles and responsibilities in a manner that denies their organization an opportunity to evolve and become a place where workers desire to work and experience great satisfaction and happiness. While workplace happiness should certainly be attainable in any organization, it can only be realized fully when transformational leaders commit to make this happen and are supported by an inclusive organizational culture and committed senior management.

Creating the mindset and the supporting organizational culture to make their organization a great place for current employees to work, as well as a highly desirable place in the minds of job applicants, should be a high priority for all members of an organization's management team. By motivating and empowering employees, its leaders can pave the way for workplace happiness. Some

of the attributes of a productive workplace obviously correspond with those of a happy workplace. This makes sense in that happy workers usually prove also to be productive workers who are committed and loyal to their organization and do all they can to help it succeed in the present and the future.

The building blocks of a happy workplace, staffed by happy, satisfied organizational members, should not be surprising in that they are basic management/leadership practices that have proven their value in both theory and practice. They include providing both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, as well as using appropriate hygiene and motivating factors. A starting point is to acknowledge that workers will never feel truly satisfied and happy if they are not properly compensated for their work. It is important that an organization's reward system incorporate both internal and external equity. If an organization fails to address this important factor, it should not be a surprise to find that employees are not satisfied and are often disgruntled.

In addition to these extrinsic factors, organizational leaders must turn their attention to the equally important intrinsic factors that influence how employees feel about their organization and how it treats them. It is important to ensure that employees are valued and that their contributions to an organization are recognized, appreciated, and, when appropriate, celebrated. They should be treated with dignity and respect, and their talents and contributions to the organization should always be valued. The roles and responsibilities of each employee should be clearly defined and supported through the provision of required resources and encouragement from their supervisor.

The working relationships that exist within their work unit and overall organization also play a significant role in making a workplace desirable and attractive to work in. Transparent communication must be a hallmark of employee satisfaction and thus of workplace happiness. Workplace happiness is also enhanced when an organization provides meaningful opportunities for its employees to utilize their talents in their present jobs as they prepare for and assume greater roles in the future should they desire to do so. We trust that the reader will agree that all of the things we have suggested thus far are definitely important in creating and sustaining a productive organization staffed by happy employees. There is, however, another consideration as an organization and its leadership team embark on their pilgrimage towards creating a happy workplace.

As important as all of the previous guidance is, we would be remiss if we did not more fully discuss the dynamics involved in serving as a job incumbent in a particular position within an organization. It is imperative that an organization's job design activities ensure that each and every position has clearly defined roles and responsibilities that its incumbent is expected to enact successfully. A consideration in properly designing each position should be the realistic amount of time that will be required to enact the delineated tasks, duties, and responsibilities properly. Only qualified individuals should be assigned to each position.

While employees should, through a realistic job preview, know what they are getting into before accepting initial or subsequent employment opportunities with an organization, there will be times that they may be called upon to engage in "any and all other duties assigned by their supervisor". This language should be familiar to most individuals who have perused—much less functioned—under a job description. The point we need to make here is that, while there will be times that employees are called to perform other than their normal duties, sometimes out of organizational necessity and at times to afford them professional development opportunities, having a "manageable" workload is an essential component to ensuring that workers perceive that they are being treated fairly and not being taken advantage of and thus are comfortable, satisfied, and happy.

Dedicated employees will always recognize that there will be times that the pressure may be on in filling a rush order or meeting a tight deadline. They also value having some control over their ability to inherit and complete such assignments. When employees become overworked and overwhelmed it can take a marked toll on both employees and the organization. Overworked

employees can experience both physical and psychological consequences often emanating from the enhanced work stress. Similarly, an organization can suffer related consequences as a result of diminished job satisfaction, loyalty, commitment, and job performance.

Responsibility for Workplace Happiness

It might seem that only organizational managers have a role in the creation of a work environment that exemplifies workplace happiness; that is not at all true. While their involvement is essential in changing the organization's mindset, and, as appropriate, its culture, they represent only half of the equation in the successful development of a happy workplace. Success in this noble venture actually requires the involvement of an organization's employees, thus making the responsibility for workplace happiness a shared or collaborative responsibility.

Employees contribute to workplace happiness in several ways. First and foremost, each employee plays a role in whether or not they find happiness in their workplace. Their individual expectations regarding their job and organization, in large part, determine if they are satisfied and thus happy, or unsatisfied and unhappy. Employees also play a role in influencing their organizational coworkers. Those that are happy may influence others to see things in a positive light, in contrast to those who are unhappy often spreading their discontent and animosity to others.

Ideally, an organization will have a number of employees who are committed to and promote happiness within their workplace. As important as an organization's management team as formal leaders of their organization can be, the power of informal leaders to influence others should never be underestimated. When an organization's employees, regardless of the formal position they hold in an organization, internalize happiness and become committed to enhancing the happiness of their workplace, it is a beautiful thing!

While a shared responsibility, an organization's managers will need to do much of the "heavy lifting" required to contribute to workplace happiness. While it might be desirable to assign this responsibility to a single leader and charge him or her to make it happen, the idea of saddling one person to serve as an organization's "chief happiness officer" lacks practicality. Through the collaborative leadership of an organization's management team, an organization can succeed in its quest to become a happy and productive workplace.

The importance of creating and sustaining the necessary organizational culture to make workplace happiness a possibility, much less a reality, has been emphasized throughout the preceding sections of this chapter. Fostering any required cultural change is clearly the responsibility of an organization's senior management and other leaders. It must, however, be remembered that an organization's culture was neither developed nor can it be changed overnight. Changing an organization's culture requires an "all hands" effort, particularly if the intended change is substantial. Patience may thus be required to give organizational members time to adjust and commit to the new organizational culture. Once organizational members begin to recognize and experience the positive benefits of the new culture, they will usually be ready, willing, and able to buy into and support the organization's commitment to enhancing workplace happiness.

Employee engagement and inclusive leadership will prove instrumental as an organization seeks to enhance the job satisfaction and happiness of its employees. Providing all organizational members with opportunities for involvement and participation is also extremely important. When the members of an organization know that their talents, ideas, and opinions are valued by their organization, progress has been made in the pilgrimage to workplace happiness. A determinant of both individual and collective workplace happiness is knowing that their organization is proactive in seeking, listening, and responding to their "voices" and is always prepared to recognize and utilize good ideas and give credit where it is due. In summary, while in traveling the road to workplace happiness an organization and its leaders may at times encounter a few potholes or other travel

challenges, this is a destination worth traveling to and one that can be most successfully reached through the collective commitment and action of an organization's members.

Balancing Life and Work Demands

One of the greatest challenges that individuals face is the big picture issue of allocating and balancing our limited time between two major demands—those of our workplace and those that relate to the activities that we engage in during our scarce and valued non-working hours. This balancing act can at times be relatively difficult given the magnitude of the workplace time demands of most individuals. As we engage in this important process of balancing our lives inside and outside of work, we would ideally find no opposition or conflicts between these two macro time demands in one's life; sometimes that is not the case.

As individuals and as leaders of organizations, we should never lose sight of the fact that work is not the only source of fulfillment in life. Just as an individual will not experience genuine happiness if he or she is not happy at work, so too if an individual has limited time to have a personal life because of work obligations and time demands, he or she will often lack happiness in both arenas. If you doubt this reality, just think about the workaholics you know.

As we consider the time demands of a particular job, it is important that we recognize the difference that may exist between "working time" versus time at work. This is particularly relevant with the advent of communication technologies and products that enable employees to complete organizational work from remote locations. While there are certainly advantages to organizational members being able to avoid the regular pilgrimage to their particular worksite, if not properly managed these current technologies, along with those that will follow, may serve an organization well, while disrupting a desirable work-life balance of its employees. The blurring of boundaries in work-life interaction serves to complicate the work-life balance and the process of making appropriate time allocations between these two important areas that each demand and deserve the allocation of appropriate, dedicated time.

The proper allocation of time between one's work responsibilities and personal life is a major decision that can potentially impact both workplace and general happiness. Similarly, failing to implement the planned allocation successfully can also prove problematic. In either case, there can be serious consequences in terms of job satisfaction, workplace happiness, and job performance. Once an appropriate balancing of time between work and personal life has been achieved, the next logical step is to utilize appropriate time management techniques in prioritizing, allocating, and utilizing time in completing one's work roles and responsibilities.

Time Management

A natural starting point in any consideration of time management must be to recognize that there are only 24 hours in the day, and that there are many competing demands on how people allocate their time both on and off the job. Since life is short and time is limited, it is imperative that we allocate and utilize our time in the best possible ways. Time management is a process wherein individuals can exercise conscious control over how they prioritize and utilize their time. Effective time management thus enables us to manage our time, rather than have our time manage us. While certainly essential in ensuring workplace productivity, its skillful use also enables us to make the most out of our leisure time.

Time management is both an art and a science. While there are proven time management techniques, the successful practice of time management is unquestionably an art. Developing the necessary skills and mastery of time management will serve one well and contribute to personal and professional success and a meaningful and happy life. The importance of effective time management is perhaps best summarized in the statement "we plan and then life happens".

The effective use of time management can have a positive impact on a person's work and life. Visionary organizational leaders recognize this and commit the necessary training and other resources to enable their employees to become skilled practitioners of time management. The tangible returns to an organization from so doing include enhanced employee productivity, while the equally important intangible outcomes are usually reduced employee stress and anxiety, increased job satisfaction, and enhanced workplace happiness. Effective time management equips employees to work smarter, not harder, and thus not to adopt the mindset that being overwhelmed and overworked should be a foregone conclusion of work life. Inherent in the effective practice of time management is discerning and prioritizing tasks based on their importance and urgency. So doing allows us to properly prioritize the various tasks and activities that bombard us in a contemporary organization.

While effective time management yields many positive outcomes for employees and their organizations, ineffective time management can negatively impact an organization and its employees. Employees who feel overwhelmed with their workload routinely experience stress and become physically and/or emotionally exhausted. They further may be anxious and come to resent the organization for "dumping" so much work on them. Their job satisfaction, performance, and productivity suffer, as does their work-life balance. Their frustration and dissatisfaction with their work situation often has a corresponding impact on their overall quality of life. They are clearly not "happy campers".

An organization likewise suffers as its frustrated workers engage in procrastination and increasingly miss important deadlines. As their work suffers and productivity decreases, so too may the effectiveness, efficiency, and success of their organization. As time passes, the situation often further deteriorates as workplace unhappiness tends to spread throughout an organization's workforce. The importance of effective time management can thus correlate with an organization's ability to motivate, empower, and retain qualified, committed employees.

While a comprehensive discussion of time management techniques is beyond the scope of this chapter, we will consider a number of salient aspects of effective time management that relate to enhancing personal productivity and workplace happiness through the effective allocation and utilization of time. The first is the importance of prioritizing work tasks. Prioritizing tasks may seem like a simple undertaking but in practice can represent a major stumbling block in the successful practice of time management. Many people have a tendency to want to make everything happen at once and thus have to resist this urge and learn how to effectively prioritize work tasks, activities, and projects. Seasoned practitioners of time management acknowledge that effective prioritization requires knowledge, skills, and confidence. Prioritization must be based on real, rather than perceived, task importance and urgency. The value of prioritization in breaking down seemingly overwhelming tasks and planning for their sequential completion should be recognized.

A proper prioritization of tasks serves as a basis for planning and scheduling the completion of these tasks. Effective time management involves setting goals for the completion of the various prioritized tasks and developing a realistic schedule for their completion. The importance of determining and assigning realistic time allocations to the completion of each task should be obvious, as should be the importance of striving to stay on the established schedule in task completion. Through effective scheduling, it is possible to make the most productive use of one's work time, thus reducing workplace stress and contributing to workplace happiness. Most people derive a sense of accomplishment as they are able to check off completed tasks on their "to do" lists.

Deadlines imposed by others often serve to frustrate workers as they seek to enact their roles and responsibilities successfully. Established deadlines should be appropriate and reasonable and should be provided when a work assignment is received. Paying attention and responding to deadlines is an important aspect of effective time management and of a committed organizational member. While at times unreasonable deadlines may be imposed, or workers may fall behind in meeting deadlines,

the potential resulting stress can be avoided by discussing the situation with one's supervisor as soon as possible. When feasible, a secret of successful time management is to set your own deadlines for task or project completion in advance of when something is actually due.

The effectiveness of time management practice can sometimes be enhanced by factoring in an understanding of one's natural work rhythms when planning and scheduling work activities. While some individuals tend to be more productive in the morning, others reach their pace later in the day. Taking this into consideration can prove valuable in the successful completion of work-related tasks. Procrastination is a related issue that can impact both the planning and completion of work tasks, activities, and projects. In addition to the toll it can take on individual and organizational productivity, its most devastating outcome is often unnecessary employee anxiety, frustration, and stress, which all undermine the happy workplace that an employer intends to offer its employees.

Before turning our attention to the role of time management in workplace happiness, it is important to acknowledge several factors that have been known to derail the successful practice of time management. The first relates to the challenges of avoiding distractions and minimizing interruptions. While some distractions should be anticipated in a fast-paced contemporary workplace, excessive distractions must be avoided. Minimizing interruptions is likewise important and can be a challenge when one is surrounded by others who are inclined to want to socialize. A last and certainly no less important skill in practicing effective time management is knowing when to say "no"! Each request to add more work to one's existing pile of pending work should be carefully scrutinized in terms of not only its importance and urgency, but also whether or not it falls within one's area of responsibility. By skillfully referring things to their appropriate "owner" and, when appropriate, delegating to others, seasoned practitioners of time management can keep the trains running on schedule, while maintaining their sanity.

Achieving Workplace Happiness Through Time Management

While the various other chapters in this collection speak to the challenge of realizing happiness in one's life and work, this chapter has been delimited to fostering a working environment where, through its organizational culture and leadership practice, employees are motivated and empowered, and thus desire to remain with their present organization. The integral role of happy employees working in a happy work environment was advanced as an important aspiration of visionary leaders who recognize the role that employees who are qualified, committed, and happy in their work situation play in the present and future success of their organizations.

Time management was introduced as an important tool that organizational members can use as they seek to enact their integral roles and responsibilities within an organization effectively and efficiently. Similar to successfully assembling of a jigsaw puzzle, enlightened organizational leaders recognize the need for each and every organizational member to assume and enact their part of their organization's "success puzzle". Their success in this respect will require that they complete each task, activity, or project in a manner that measures up to the organization's expectations in terms of quality and timeliness. Given the interdependencies that often exist between the work of the various organization members and groups, failure to meet a deadline may impede others in completing their work and consequently negatively impact the reputation of their organization and its present and future success.

We live and work in a world where there can be many demands on our time both from within and outside our workplace. Through effective time management, we can allocate and manage our work and personal time in a manner that contributes to our work and overall satisfaction and happiness in life. Time management is thus a key to unlocking both work happiness and our corresponding overall quality of life.

Making Workplace Happiness a Reality

We trust that as you approach the end of this chapter you agree that effective time management must play a foundational role in creating and sustaining a work environment that provides for and instills job satisfaction and happiness in its workers. While there are certainly a number of management and leadership practices that determine an organization's success in its quest to realize the utopia of workplace happiness, the antecedents of job satisfaction and thus workplace happiness track back to an organization's expectations regarding the quantity, quality, and timelines of the work of its employees. Effective time management therefore must underpin the success of organizational members and groups in performing the work of an organization.

Just as the work of an organization is usually performed by employees, often working in groups or teams, on behalf of their organization, so too the responsibility for creating and ensuring the continuation of a happy work environment is shared within an organization. Both an organization's supervisors and the employees whom they oversee have an interest in ensuring that they work in a pleasant, happy work environment. They both must be parties to successful time management. While employees can obviously practice time management to their advantage as well as that of their organization, their supervisors also have a role in this process as they assign work, establish deadlines, and hold their employees accountable for the completion of assigned tasks, activities, and projects.

In summary, we are all in this together. Our pilgrimage to workplace happiness is one of the most important travels that an organization and its members can take, given the critical competitive advantage that a contemporary organization, in a highly competitive business environment, can realize through motivating and empowering a happy workforce. In closing, we remind the reader of the importance of taking time for both work and play. Organizational members who are engaged in meaningful and fulfilling personal and work lives are the best asset an organization can have.