

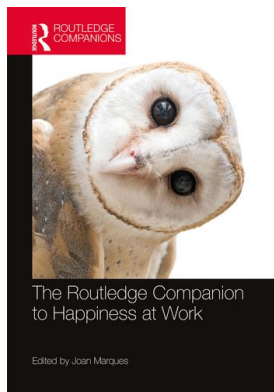
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8

IS THERE A PLACE FOR HAPPINESS AT WORK?

Dorota Jasielska

Work in the Context of Social Changes and Psychological Demands

Work is a place where the majority of people spend one third of their adult life from Monday to Friday, until retirement (or even longer). Getting a good job is the paramount goal of education. People graduate from schools, obtaining their degrees in order to start working for the next tens of years. When choosing paths of future education, one of the crucial criteria is whether it can guarantee a good job (Montmarquette, Cannings, & Mahseredjian, 2002). But what is a good job? Is it one with an attractive salary, stability of employment, prestige, or of great value for the society? And where in the definition of a good job is the place for happiness?

From the economic perspective, work activity has traditionally been perceived as producing negative utility (Juster, 1990), because it is time that people need to devote to obtain the resources that are essential for living. The necessity of work is unquestionable, and, throughout the years, it has been socially accepted to perceive work as an essential part of life without expecting from it much more than a salary (Spencer, 2008). For Baby Boomers—the generation born after World War II (approximately 1945–1964)—the essential goal of working was to provide for the family (Niemiec, 2000). In the work ethic of this generation, a person who works hard, performs well, and is loyal to the company gains promotion and recognition. Baby Boomers are committed, accepting power distance, hierarchy, and corporate paternalism (Yu & Miller, 2005). In contrast, people born in the late 1960s and 1970s, called Generation X, are motivated not by a stable environment and predictable career path but by perspectives of promotion and new challenges (Yu & Miller, 2005). Yet the biggest changes in the attitude toward work came when the new Generations, Y and Z, entered the market. In the twenty-first century, it is not enough for a job to provide a salary, development, and decent treatment. In order to sustain engaged, motivated, and effective workers, organizations need to go one step further and take care of their employees' wellbeing (Fisher, 2010; Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009). Several societal and historical processes account for this change in the perception of the workplace.

According to social scientists, the second half of the twentieth century for the majority of countries in a Western civilization was the best time in history (Pinker, 2018; Seligman, 2000). There were no devastating wars or dangerous epidemics. On the contrary, healthcare and education became common and accessible, and the majority of households had access to running water and electricity. Fewer and fewer people were living in extreme poverty, and charity grew worldwide, with more people ready to donate to various actions (The Ultimate List of Charitable Giving, 2019).

Yet, at the same time, rates of depression grew worldwide, leaving thousands of people feeling profoundly sad, worthless, and passive. A large study of 30 European countries indicated that about 38.2 percent of the adult European population aged 18–65 had been affected by a mental disorder in the previous 12 months (Wittchen et al., 2011). Depression is ranked by the World Health Organization (2017) as the single largest contributor to global disability. How can this paradox be explained? Why is this wonderful world making so many people miserable and psychologically unadjusted?

The problem is complex, and many factors contribute to the current situation, three of which will be discussed, as they have received considerable empirical support. Among the reasons for growing unhappiness are stress and information pollution (Hammen, 2005; Himma, 2007). With the constantly increasing number of stimuli, the number of choices that need to be made every day has become overwhelming. According to biologists (Wróbel, 2001), in one second, human senses receive about 100 billion bits of information, but they are able to perceive consciously only about a hundred. With brains overloaded with data, little space is left for reflection on what is important, or for mindful experience of present moments. This constant strain on the brain may lead to cognitive overload. As a result, when mental resources are limited, people are more susceptible to experience negative emotional states (Himma, 2007; Reinecke et al., 2017).

Another burden of contemporary life is related to the pressure of making the right impression. As an increasing amount of research shows, an obligation to look immaculate and lead a perfect life, fueled by social media, can be damaging for self-esteem. One study showed that frequent use of social media is related to poorer self-esteem, mediated by greater exposure to upward social comparisons (Vogel, Rose, Roberts, & Eckles, 2014). In another study, greater involvement in self-promotion online was related to higher levels of narcissism and lower levels of self-esteem (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Excessive use of social media has been also found to be linked to lower satisfaction with life, due to the decrease in self-esteem (Hawi & Samaha, 2017). Finally, among Facebook users, self-esteem is related to the number of “likes” received for posts, but this relationship is weakened by having a greater purpose in life (Burrow & Rainone, 2017).

Yet it seems that most devastating for subjective wellbeing is declining social capital (Bartolini & Sarracino, 2015; Putnam, 2001). According to Putnam (2001), social capital is a term describing the networks of people that have great value both privately and socially. With societies getting more individualistic (Santos, Varnum, & Grossmann, 2017), interpersonal bonds no longer play a central role in people’s everyday lives. One can easily imagine that many of the functions of friends or neighbors (providing help or support) can be easily outsourced now by hiring a qualified specialist (e.g., therapist, cleaner, babysitter). People are less dependent on others, but at the same time their sense of belonging is not fulfilled (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), which may lead to intense feelings of loneliness and even increased risk for suicidal behavior (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001; Van Orden et al., 2008). It is important to note that erosion of social capital has been observed worldwide, from the United States (Putnam, 2001), through Europe (declining participation in groups and associations—Sarracino & Mikucka, 2017), and Asia (Bartolini & Sarracino, 2015).

The changes have also affected the complexity of many jobs and professions, which has greatly increased compared to 30–40 years ago. With the development of modern means of communication, many businesses compete in both local and global markets. New, specialist positions have been created, which makes the company structures and lines of reporting more complex. What is more, innovative technologies enforce continuous modifications, which makes change management a constant element of everyday reality in many companies (Todnem By, 2005), requiring employees to adapt. An important issue is also economic uncertainty, which has been present since the global crisis of 2008 (Baker, Bloom, & Davis, 2016). Finally, executives face the challenge of managing four different generations of employees that are present on the global market: Baby Boomers, and Generations X, Y, and Z. Each of them has different needs and a diverse approach to work.

Of the four generations present on the job market, the two youngest—Generation Y (so-called millennials, born in the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s) and Generation Z (born after 1996)—enforce a change in thinking about what work is. For millennials, having meaningful and joyful work is more important than a high salary. According to analysis by iOpener Institute (2012) conducted on a sample of 18,000 employees born in the 1980s, loving one's job is related to doing something worthwhile. The same research revealed that loving one's job is negatively correlated with intention to quit, and that offering more money does not keep Generation Y in the company. On the other hand, Generation Z, the most digitalized and technologically fluent cohort, highly values flexibility, a casual atmosphere, and independence (Bencsik, Horváth-Csikós, & Juhász, 2016). Their behavior is driven by intrinsic motivation, and hence they seek a genuine inspiration in the workplace. These characteristics clearly show that having a positive attitude toward one's job is essential for Generations Y and Z to become involved with the company.

According to analyses conducted by S&P in the top 500 organizations, intangible assets such as knowledge, knowhow, relations with clients, and patents contribute to 75 percent of the market value of organizations (Baker, Greenberg, & Hemingway, 2006). These data indicate that effective organizations need employees that are intelligent, qualified, engaged, and ready to learn. Once such people are recruited, it is important to know how to make them stay with the company longer than one or two years and invest their resources in this particular place.

Taking into consideration all the above-mentioned changes, it is not surprising that the role of work has been transforming. It is no longer solely a means of survival, because getting resources for living is not a challenge in developed countries. On the contrary, due to the low unemployment rates in the EU, US, or Canada (respectively, 6.4%, 3.6%, and 5.4%; Trading Economics, 2019), finding a job in Western societies is relatively easy. Hence, in order to attract and retain the best employees, companies need to offer much more than just financial gratification. Yet it is not only about satisfying the youngest or most demanding workforce. Creating a happy workplace is much more than adjusting to employees' needs. This is a whole new approach toward the job and employees which leads to changes that have a direct effect on the prosperity of the company and the wellbeing of its workers. As Fisher (2010, p. 404) notes:

There is widespread consensus that employment relationships are changing. Employers and employees are generally more loosely connected (...) In this environment, happiness at work is likely to be the glue that retains and motivates the high-quality employees of the future.

This is why it is important for every company to find a space for activities oriented toward building a happy workplace. In the second part of the article, the evidence-based benefits of investing in employees' happiness will be discussed; then effective ways of implementing solutions will be described.

Why is it Worth Investing in Employees' Happiness? Empirical Evidence

Happiness is often conceptualized as an indicator of subjective wellbeing with reference to its two, interrelated dimensions, emotional and cognitive (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). The first is expressed in a dominance of positive over negative affect (Diener, Sandvik, & Pavot, 1991), or emotional wellbeing (Keyes & Lopez, 2002), while the latter is described as a quality of life judged by an individual as good (Veenhoven, 1999). These definitions can easily be applied to work settings. A cognitive dimension of happiness at work is sometimes described as job satisfaction (Fisher, 2010). Emotional wellbeing can be labeled as frequency of pleasant experiences (positive feelings, moods, emotions, flow states) at work. An important concept in this field is work engagement, defined as a

state of work-related wellbeing that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, and is associated with such significant factors as job performance and identification with work (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008).

Within the development of positive psychology in the last 20 years, happiness at work has become an important and extensively studied topic. Evidence from research clearly shows that employees' subjective wellbeing is beneficial both for workers and employers. Therefore, it is worthwhile to analyze and identify the cognitive, motivational, and interpersonal outcomes of being happy at work.

The first set of evidences comes from correlational studies, comparing in which areas the happiest employees differ from their less happy companions. Data from research indicate that the happiest workers are also more effective, more creative in problem-solving and finding new solutions, more involved in their work, more loyal to their employers, more proactive, more helpful, and have a better relationship with coworkers (Carr, 2013; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011; Fisher, 2010; Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005). Positive mood reduces interpersonal conflicts and facilitates constructive negotiations (Baron, Fortin, Frei, Hauver, & Shack, 1990). It also increases motivation and task performance (Erez & Isen, 2002). As Fisher (2010) reports, job satisfaction is negatively related to intention to quit, counterproductive work behavior, depression, anxiety, and burnout, and positively related to organizational citizenship and physical health. Emotional wellbeing has been documented to predict career success in terms of high performance and earnings (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008). In sum, all these data indicate that happy employees are more likely to be productive employees (Fisher, 2010). Therefore, firms benefit from having happy workers, because they will contribute to the company's success.

However, it is important to note that people differ in terms of their happiness level, and these differences are at least 50 percent genetically determined (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). For some individuals, being happy at work will be a natural state of mind, whereas others may require extra effort to achieve this state and all the benefits stemming from it. There are some promising concepts suggesting how individuals may volitionally contribute to their own happiness at work, and these will be discussed below.

According to the concept developed by Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, and Schwartz (1997), there are three substantial approaches to work. For those who treat it as a job, working is a source of salary and they do not perceive it in terms of fulfillment. It is merely a source of money that is important for living. In a group which is career-oriented, a job provides opportunities for development, success, and achieving high status, and so provides a much broader gratification than the financial. Yet there is also the third group that treats their job as a calling. For these workers, the main satisfaction from work stems from doing something significant, something that goes beyond making money or achieving success. Once they believe their work is meaningful, they no longer count the hours of working or aim for the highest salary or the greatest power. They focus on doing their job the best they can, because they believe it is worthy and others may greatly benefit from it. This group also reports the highest level of job satisfaction and wellbeing (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Researchers have found these three orientations in various groups studied, irrespective of the type of profession (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). For example, an accountant can treat his profession as a source of material benefits, not seeking any other reward from it; as a path for career advancement (planning to be promoted to the position of team leader and head of accounting in a longer perspective); or as his passion, an important part of his identity that is responsible for doing something meaningful (in this case, helping to keep the company's finances in order).

Callings can develop over the course of one's working life, or in a particular job setting (Wrzesniewski, 2012). For example, they can be developed by social learning, thorough observation of work values of significant models (Bandura, 1977). They can also be the result of a strong identification with a group or organization, when the employee internalizes the goals of his in-group

and they therefore become meaningful for him (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Finally, callings can be developed by intentional activity. According to job-crafting theory (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), an employee can shape their job by implementing changes in several dimensions—modifying tasks that need to be done, transforming relationships into more satisfying ones, and altering their cognitive perception of work. The examples and concepts described above indicate that the approach to one's job is something that can be developed throughout the career, and that such elements of work as company culture, organizational values, leadership style, or personal, intentional activity may have a great impact on perceiving a job as meaningful.

Another well documented approach to enhance employees' wellbeing at work focuses on personal strengths. Employees are more encouraged to work and be engaged in it when they have a chance to use their best talents (Harzer & Ruch, 2013). A character strength, according to Peterson & Seligman (2004), is a quality of character (such as creativity, curiosity, or open mindedness) which, when put into action, results in feeling effective, motivated, and excited about the current task. Strengths manifest in different situations and in different tasks, and they contribute to achieving valuable goals, and people appreciate them as important qualities of their personalities, not because they lead to particular gains. There are several interesting reasons why people benefit from knowing and consciously using their strengths. As Hodges & Clifton (2004, pp. 257–258) note,

Talent is defined as naturally recurring. (...) Roughly, between the ages of 3 and 15, the human brain organizes itself by strengthening the synaptic connections used often, while infrequently used connections weaken over time (...) While this doesn't imply that people cannot change, it does provide scientific backup for the notion that their talents, or re-occurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior don't significantly change over time.

This indicates that the greatest return on investment in development can be achieved when focusing on these strong synaptic connections. Therefore, conscious use of strength is not only a way of enhancing emotional wellbeing, but also an effective strategy to become a better worker. Indeed, studies show that companies greatly benefit from employees who have identified their strengths and use them at work. Use of strengths is associated with greater engagement and productivity at work (Hodges & Clifton, 2004), higher ability to achieve goals (Linley, Nielson, Wood, Gillett, & Biswas-Diener, 2010), greater self-efficacy (Govindji & Linley, 2007), lower perceived stress, greater self-esteem, and higher positive affect (Wood, Linley, Maltby, Kashdan, & Hurling, 2011). These data show the importance of exploring personal strengths and actively implementing them at work. Every manager should be aware of the best qualities of each of his team members. Only by that can leaders plan the work of their teams by consciously using their best assets.

There are other managerial behaviors that have the potential to increase workers' wellbeing, such as providing them with control and a sense of agency, diversification of given tasks, ongoing support from the management (adjusted to the employee's needs), decent wages, and clear requirements communicated with information about how to accomplish them (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011). An important factor for job satisfaction is to adjust the work environment to the employee's needs. Job characteristics should correspond with the skills and competences of the employees, as incongruence in this field can badly affect job satisfaction (Allen & Van der Velden, 2001). Aside from this demand-ability fit, it is vital that the employee matches the company in terms of values. People are happier if their workplace fits their values and goals, and when the organizational culture matches their needs and preferences (Fisher, 2010). Another important issue is maintaining positive affective balance at work (Fredrickson, 2013). Positive affective balance means the dominance of positive over negative emotions. It can be achieved by allowing and facilitating experiencing positive emotions on one side, and regulating expression and excessive, destructive negative emotions on the other.

Finally, an important contributor to happiness at work is pleasant relationships. Strong interpersonal bonds play a substantial role in fulfilling the need for intimacy, security, and affiliation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). They are also associated with higher positive affect and greater social activity (Christopher, Kuo, Abraham, Noel, & Linz, 2004; Diener & Seligman, 2002). Therefore, it is not surprising that high quality relationships at work are an important source of happiness for employees (Fisher, 2010).

Researchers conducting studies in the field of positive psychology at work have gathered compelling arguments that it is worth investing in employees' happiness. Yet several important issues need to be considered. How to find time and space for all these activities? Who should be responsible for them? How to ensure long-term effects? There are several ways of building a happy workplace, and they will be discussed in the next chapter.

How to Find a Place for Happiness at Work?

In order to take care of employees' happiness, a profession has been created called the Chief Happiness Officer (CHO). This relatively new position is gaining enthusiasts all around the world: in July 2019, at the time of writing this chapter, there are 2,370 people on LinkedIn (a professional job-related social network) who describe their current job as CHO. CHOs are hired by, for example, Google and the government of the United Arab Emirates. There are many interpretations and concepts of what a designated CHO will do (Omar, 2018). The term is used by consultants who offer advisory services aimed at implementing new solutions (for example, Denmark-based WooHoo). In close collaboration with the management board, they work out solutions that will enhance the happiness of workers. They can, for example, propose a cycle of trainings on positive leadership for all managers in the company, or serve as facilitators in working groups that prepare the implementation of changes, or they can offer ready-to-implement solutions based on their best business practices and analysis of the situation in the organization. This solution, though it certainly has a lot of benefits, bears the risk that the changes proposed will not be permanent and they may not grow roots in the organizational culture, especially when attrition in the company is high. Therefore, when hiring external consultants, it is important to establish long-term cooperation.

According to another understanding, the CHO is a high-ranking person in the enterprise, an experienced manager who permanently cooperates with the management board when developing policies aimed at enhancing happiness at work. Here, there is an opportunity to implement long-term-oriented system solutions, such as successive changes in organizational culture and new strategies of management, that promote the idea of positive leadership, and large-scale development programs for leaders, which provide tools to all managers for fostering their employees' subjective wellbeing. Direct cooperation with the management board is essential, because it gives the CHO a mandate for implementing all the solutions, irrespective of resistance, skepticism, and reluctance from employees. Such reactions, often resulting from fears and misgivings, are typical responses to change (Piderit, 2000).

However, it is important to note that the CHO's activities are not restricted to strategy. A lot can be done on an operational level, organizing social campaigns or events which offer opportunities for positive interactions among employees, building a friendly atmosphere in the workplace, and enhancing the social identity of coworkers. Therefore, an operational manager who takes care of organizing and monitoring such activities can be very helpful. Obviously, such activities should not be the core of CHO activity, but should support system solutions. It is important to remember, though, that these regular stimuli contribute to the daily affective balance and can determine whether the person is in a positive or negative mood (Fredrickson, 2013). Under the influence of positive emotions, people are more creative, kinder, more willing to help others; they notice more chances and opportunities (Fredrickson, 1998). These are assets that will be valuable for every

company, irrespective of the profile of activity. Therefore, in a third understanding, the CHO represents a manager or experienced expert who takes care of the emotional wellbeing of employees on a day-to-day basis and ensures that workers have opportunities for positive interactions and can capitalize on their positive feelings. The question arises as to what actions will serve that function and whether or not they will destabilize the employees by taking them away from their work and devouring a lot of their attention?

Business practitioners generally agree that the activities of the CHO should be well-integrated with the daily routine of workers, and they should mainly use the HR tools and events that already take place in the company (Kjerulf, 2015). Therefore, we describe below several ways of taking care of employees' happiness based on regular organizational activities, culture, and resources.

Building a happy workplace should start during recruitment: this is the first opportunity to meet a person who could become part of the social fabric of the organization. Traditionally, recruitment has been founded on competence-based selection—the better the fulfillment of given criteria, the better the candidate (Piotrowski & Armstrong, 2006). In a happy-oriented workplace, this approach is complemented by hiring for culture fit (Hsieh, 2010). Given the results of studies showing that organizational culture affects both job satisfaction and intention to leave (Fisher, 2010; Lund, 2003; MacIntosh & Doherty, 2010), this focus on cultural adjustment seems to be an effective strategy. A lot of skills can be learned on the job, contrary to the value system that remains relatively stable across the years (Bardi, Lee, Hofmann-Towfigh, & Soutar, 2009).

The idea of a positive workplace and best practices implemented by the organization should be promoted and reminded of in every stage of communication with employees, starting from induction training. Any training or employee gathering can serve as an opportunity for a short exercise about sharing positive emotions, expressing gratitude, giving positive feedback, etc. That can increase employees' awareness of how such practices can be applied in their daily routine.

Building positive workplaces should also happen during career planning, cyclic evaluations, and creating motivational systems. Employees responsible for these activities should have solid knowledge of the benefits of activating intrinsic motivation such as higher work involvement and better psychological adjustment on the job (self-determination theory offers a well-grounded concept that can be implemented in relation to practical solutions at work: see Deci et al., 2001). They should also be familiar with factors affecting work engagement and job satisfaction. This knowledge needs to be actively used in practice in order to help employees plan their career in a way that will be motivating and engaging for them, and at the same time provide a sense of fulfillment. The previously mentioned concepts of job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) and strengths-based development (Hodges & Clifton, 2004) can be applied as other valuable evidence-based tools for enhancing happiness at work.

Irrespective of the implemented practices, employee engagement should be assessed regularly, with the results of the surveys analyzed and conclusions drawn (Markos & Sridevi, 2010). Otherwise, employees might become skeptical about whether their answers can have a real impact on the situation at work. One of the CHO's tasks is to ensure that the surveys will allow a reliable analysis of the situation in the company and, if necessary, implement changes. When planning any improvements, it is worth establishing working groups consisting of employees from various departments. This provides a great opportunity to listen to the real needs of various groups and work on solutions that are the most appropriate.

The activities that contribute to employees' wellbeing are various positive interventions (such as expressing gratitude, practicing optimistic thinking, committing good deeds, or sharing positive events), the effectiveness of which has been extensively documented (Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2014). They can be easily transformed into social actions oriented toward helping specific groups, or into thematic days at work, such as a week of kindness, a week of smiling, a week of gratitude, etc. It is good when actions are varied and not too frequent. Otherwise, people can become accustomed to them and grow bored easily, and so no longer benefit from the activities (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005).

The natural carriers of the idea of happiness at work are various developmental activities such as coaching, mentoring, workshops, and developmental trainings. Through these activities, it is possible to offer regular support to employees in building positive leadership, or implementing job crafting by providing them with knowledge and appropriate developmental tools, or by answering their questions.

Conclusion

More and more scientific data indicate that enhancing employees' happiness at work is a strategy that is beneficial for everybody (Fisher, 2010). Companies gain engaged and loyal workers, ready to devote their best resources to the organization's success. Employees feel important and appreciated; they like their job and are motivated to do their best. Since passion and engagement transfer directly to the quality of service (Bakker et al., 2008), customers also profit.

At the same time, the road to achieve this state can be long and demanding, because it requires a systematic approach and a proper strategy. Building a happy organization is a process wherein the key elements are building such an organizational culture, leadership, and management strategies that allow the implementation of initiatives oriented toward building happiness in the everyday work of employees. In order for changes to be stable, they need to be implemented gradually and they should include all staff. Only under these conditions can the company be described as a happy workplace.

In every organization, there is space to build employees' happiness, as long as a few critical points are fulfilled. First of all, the concept should be endorsed by the management board (Kjerulf, 2015). Only such active support can enhance system solutions and access to the persons who are most skeptical about the idea. What is more, a long-term and complex plan should be prepared. It is essential to provide proper training for managers and equip them with tools that will allow implementation of the idea of positive leadership in their everyday practice. Another key factor is to provide proper training for the HR department to ensure that, when preparing developmental strategies, employees' wellbeing is taken into consideration. It is highly beneficial when a company has a CHO, a person who will monitor the effectiveness of the implemented strategies and manage all the processes related to employees' wellbeing. Finally, all the activities should be performed in a way that will not destabilize everyday work of staff. It should be an added value to their everyday work—some small changes that will not be time-consuming and, at the same time, will allow employees to flourish. Trivial as it sounds, building happiness should not be treated as a burden, an additional duty that workers are charged with. This is something that happens during the actual work and brings quantitative benefits.

Once these criteria are fulfilled, an organization has a chance to offer workers much more than salaries and stability. By encouraging people to use their best qualities and assets at work, not only do we build happy companies, full of people who are willing to work with passion and engagement, but we also create happy societies with resilient individuals. And this is a great advantage for everyone.

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