

Factors affecting Happiness in a Workplace

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The Asian Conference on the Social Sciences 2014
Official Conference Proceedings
0496

Abstract

This study had its two main objectives of exploring factors affecting happiness in a workplace and factors affecting unhappiness in a workplace in the Thai context. Survey questionnaire was used to collect data from numbers of employees from various corporations in Thailand who participated in Happy Workplace Forum 2012. List of factors affecting happiness and unhappiness in a workplace was revealed. In addition, a model of happiness in a workplace was presented.

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Introduction

Thai Health Promotion Foundation (ThaiHealth) with its slogan “The sustainability of well-being for Thai people,” has long involved in researching and funding numbers of research projects on the topic of “Happy Workplace.” ThaiHealth realizes the importance of happiness in a workplace as it can bring about benefits to both workplace and its employees, and eventually to the Thai society as a whole.

Dr. Charnwit Wasantanarat, Director of Healthy Workplace Office, said that “Happy Workplace” has been created to fill the gap between employers and employees, with the aim to make people in the workplace happy. It is believed that “people” are the most important assets of organizations. If people are happy working, they work effectively and their organizations will grow sustainably (ThaiHealth's Support for “Happy Workplace” Prototype, 2011).

The “Happy 8” conceptual framework has been created from ThaiHealth’s research project to promote work life balance for employees, consisting of 8 pillars. Through the holistic approach consisting of 3 areas (people, family and society) and these 8 pillars, happy workplace program aims to improve mental and physical health of employees (Happy 8, 2014).

People: 1) Happy Body-Enjoy good health in one’s body and in one’s mind; 2) Happy Relax-Able to relieve stress from work and in daily life; 3) Happy Heart (Relationship)-Show kindness and sympathy for oneself and for others, and be generous, 4) Happy Soul (Spirituality)-Possess a good sense of moral, 5) Happy Brain-Improve one’s knowledge through learning, 6) Happy Money-Manage personal finances well.

Family: 7) Happy Family: Create understanding and a stable environment in one’s family.

Society: 8) Happy Society: Support one’s community at work and at home. Promote social harmony.

The above statements go together with the happiness trend at the international level where money is not the pathway to happiness. Ed Diener, also known as “Dr. Happiness”, a leading researcher in positive psychology argued for a strong genetic component to happiness, and has amassed some compelling data showing that external conditions do little to change one’s happiness. His recent research has focused on the relationship between income and happiness, about which he writes: “...over the past 50 years, income has climbed steadily in the United States, with the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita tripling, and yet life satisfaction has been virtually flat...While happiness isn’t highly correlated with income, it *is* highly correlated with social relationships.” Indeed, in a recent cross-national study on teenagers, Diener found that “the most salient characteristics shared by the 10% of students with the highest levels of happiness and the fewest signs of depression were their strong ties to friends and family and commitment to spending time with them.” (Diener, 2014)

Moreover in his latest book, *Happiness: Unlocking the Mysteries of Psychological Wealth*, Diener sums up the results from his twenty-five years of research on happiness. He underlines four central ingredients for a happy life:

1. Psychological wealth is more than money. It is also your attitudes, goals and engaging activities at work.
2. Happiness not only feels good, but is beneficial to relationships, work and health.
3. It is helpful to set realistic expectations about happiness. No one is intensely happy all of the time.
4. Thinking is an important aspect to happiness. His theory of Attention, Interpretation, and Memory (AIM) helps people to increase their psychological wealth.

This research is yet another attempt to explore factors affecting happiness in a workplace of Thai employees and funded by ThaiHealth.

Happy Workplace Model

Over the past 7 years, the concept of Happy Workplace has been widely discussed on Thai and international academic arena. A team of researchers navigated the matter and attempted to create a model by carrying on a study of 103 happy workplaces in Thailand. The results are presented as a Happy HOME Model, consisting of 3 sub models-HO (Happy Organization), HM (Happy Management) and HE (Happy Employee) (Kaewpijit, Utsahajit and Kusumavalee, 2011).

The first model is developed by Sombat Kusumavalee (Kaewpijit, Utsahajit and Kusumavalee, 2011). It is called Happy Organization Model where he found 3 types of organizational structures suitable for 3 types of organizational characteristics, namely simplified organization, creative organization and sustainable organization.

The second model, Happy Management Model, is developed by Juthamas Kaewpijit (Kaewpijit, Utsahajit and Kusumavalee, 2011). It formulates the model of '3 ToBes', a concept that analyzes happiness through the eyes of human resources experts who are in charge of happiness management. The model revolves around three aspects (1) the nature of happy workers, how to live and work in order to 'Be' happy workers (2) the creation of 'Being' good things for work by focusing on giving respect, opportunity, communication, continuous development and learning, and (3) the result of 'Being' good workplaces which promotes the happiness of workers. This leads to beloved and respected boss, organization's performances that can mirror happiness and the families of staffs are valued.

Formulated by Wichai Utsahajit (Kaewpijit, Utsahajit and Kusumavalee, 2011), the third model is called Happy Employee Model and discusses the 7 factors to happiness at individual level.

First factor: Thought, belief, attitude, wisdom and practice

A basic factor of perception of employees' happiness involves personal mindset. Some people perceive happiness from their way of thinking. Some can feel it regardless of bad situation. On the contrary, some cannot do so as they fail to be upbeat in spite of a position situation. Moreover, intelligence, which can be developed through learning, thinking and self-practice to become someone who has an insight into happiness in life, is an important factor in establishing an individual ability to perceive happiness if they understand life. One would go through different situations that cause desirable and undesirable circumstances, affecting perception of happiness. Therefore, if one understands the rule of nature, one can perceive happiness upon reality while, in any situation, seeing and understanding the nature of life.

Second factor: Job characteristics

This factor can be divided into 2 components. The first element deals with job characteristics itself. They can motivate employees, especially when staff members have an opportunity to choose their favorite job, or when they and others consider that the job is worthy and significant, or when they can progress in their career and witness their skill development. Ultimately, it can lead to job satisfaction which affects the employee's perception of happiness.

The next part is working process and other supportive factors. It can be described that an interesting, challenging job procedure, which entails a proper difficulty level, a clear goal and achievement, can motivate employees. Workers can be motivated when receiving useful opinion or advice, proposing creative ideas in order to improve work process. Alternatively, motivation can emanate either from remuneration that matches their performance and has a reasonable rate, or from workplace with suitable supportive factors. All of these are crucial for employees' perception of happiness.

Third factor: Supervisor, colleagues, customers and other related parties

A person-related factor is another significant issue affecting perception of happiness. A supervisor is a factor which considerably influences employees' perception of happiness at an organization. This is because a supervisor is a person with whom every subordinate must regularly interact and has power to advantage and disadvantage his/her staffs. Meanwhile, colleagues coordinate and work together to complete a job by due date and customers are a group of people who are necessary for success and existence of the organization. Other related parties are also involved in order to achieve the assigned job. Therefore, fundamental of individual and work behavior controls employees' perception of happiness.

Fourth factor: Organizational culture and work atmosphere

An organizational culture can be referred to as a frame of behaviors displayed at the workplace. It serves as a mutual standard which the majority of people follow, helping everyone to perform their roles in line with the organization's expectation. When an organizational culture is positive and promotes achievement-oriented work behaviors, while developing creativity, knowledge and skill, and fostering teamwork, helpfulness and family-liked warmth at work, it can be said that most of employees

can enjoy work happiness. Moreover, work environment is a necessary happiness factor for a worker as a good work condition should provide convenience and safety at work.

Fifth factor: Life style

This factor relates to the activities of one's life style such as consumption behavior and health care, both mentally and physically. As staff's lives do not cope only with work, a personal life is important as well. Thus, a life style does involve in employees' perception of happiness.

If laborers' life style is plagued with stress-prone activities such as excessive expenditure for consumption, gambling, lottery or drinking---behaviors that mentally and physically spoil one's health, workers will suffer, inevitably affecting work behavior and perception of happiness. On the contrary, with proper way of life such as spending on consumption as necessary, being economical and wisely taking care of his mental and physical health, one will feel relaxed and have no stress from debt or depending on others, and can live freely. Misbehavior, therefore, affects perception of happiness in individual's life, concentration and commitment to job success which eventually bring about happiness at work.

Although this factor has no heart in the picture due to variation of individual's behavior and life style, the organization can promote correct understanding of good life style to support mental and physical health so that workforce can be able to complete the assigned job successfully which would enhance perception of happiness from work.

Sixth factor: Family

Family is a key fundamental factor related directly to everyone's life. After work hours, all employees return to their home. If the family is full of love, warmth and care, it will encourage the employee at work. On the opposite, if his family has no good and intimate relationship, he would not be supported for a success.

Seventh factor: Society and situations/surrounding factors

As staffs are members of the society, any change, including situations and other surrounding factors such as economic and political factors, technology and nature, in the society undeniably affects staffs' lives. Happiness perception at work is dependent of feelings in everyday life. Daily experiences or situations with which an employee deals affect happiness. This last factor is the least controllable issue.

Research Objectives

This study had its two main objectives of exploring factors affecting happiness in a workplace and factors affecting unhappiness in a workplace in the Thai context.

Research Methodology

Survey questionnaire was used to collect data from numbers of employees from various corporations in Thailand who participated in Happy Workplace Forum 2012. (Happy Workplace Forum is an annual event where organizations, be private, governmental, or state enterprises, gather together to share knowledge and information on how to create a happy workplace.) The forum attendees were asked to identify 3 factors affecting their happiness at work and 3 factors affecting their unhappiness at work. 535 sets of response were received for happiness factors and 416 sets of response were received for unhappiness factors

Research Findings

Results from a survey of opinions of 535 participants in the Happy Workplace Forum can be shown as follows:

Factors Affecting Happiness in a Workplace		
1. Task Itself	37.94%	203
2. Work Team	12.71%	68
3. Co-workers	11.02%	59
4. Supervisors	9.15%	49
5. Work Atmosphere	6.72%	36
6. Compensation and Benefits	5.42%	29
7. Recognition	5.23%	28
8. Subordinates	2.99%	16
9. Organization	2.80%	15
10. Work-Life Balance	1.68%	9
11. Health	1.31%	7
12. Career Path	1.12%	6
13. Training and Development	1.00%	5
14. Activities	1.00%	5
	100%	535

From the figure, the top five factors affecting happiness in a workplace include task itself, work team, co-workers, supervisors and work atmosphere.

Details of Each Happiness Factor

1. Task Itself		
a. Being assigned interesting, preferred or fun tasks	39%	80
b. Being able to accomplish the task as targeted	38%	78
c. Being assigned important and valuable tasks	20%	40
d. Having reasonable workload	3%	5
2. Work Team		
a. Working with achievement oriented team	47%	32
b. Having close and supportive relationships	44%	30

c. Working with open-minded people	9%	6
3. Co-Workers		
a. Having helpful and supportive co-workers	42%	25
b. Having understanding and caring co-workers	34%	20
c. Being accepted and respected by co-workers	24%	14
4. Supervisors		
a. Having understanding and caring supervisors	41%	20
b. Being accepted and respected by supervisors	33%	16
c. Having unbiased and fair supervisors	26%	13
5. Work Atmosphere		
a. Having nice, quiet, clean and green environment	56%	20
b. Having sincere and caring atmosphere	44%	16
6. Compensation and Benefits		
a. Receiving fair, acceptable and on-time remuneration	100%	29
7. Recognition		
a. Being recognized by the organization	100%	28
8. Subordinates		
a. Having achievement-oriented subordinates	56%	9
b. Having helpful and supportive subordinates	44%	7
9. Organization		
a. Working in a growing and stable organization	100%	15
10. Work-Life Balance		
a. Having work-life balance	100%	9
11. Health		
a. Having good health	100%	7
12. Career Path		
a. Being promoted on a clear career ladder	100%	6
13. Training and Development		
a. Being trained and developed continuously	100%	5
14. Activities		
a. Participating regularly in recreational activities	100%	5

The next part displays factors affecting unhappiness in a workplace

Factors affecting unhappiness in a workplace

1. Supervisors	21.69%	90
2. Task Itself	16.10%	67
3. Work Atmosphere	15.38%	64
4. Co-workers	13.22%	55
5. Work Team	11.05%	46
6. Organization	4.80%	20
7. Health	4.32%	18
8. Compensation and Benefits	4.08%	17
9. Subordinates	3.60%	15
10. Recognition	2.88%	12
11. Career Path	1.20%	5

12. Activities	0.96%	4
13. Work-Life Balance	0.72%	3
	100.00%	416

From the figure, the top five factors affecting unhappiness in a workplace include supervisors, task itself, work atmosphere, co-workers and work team.

Details of Each Unhappiness Factor

1. Supervisors		
a. Having biased and unfair supervisors	44%	40
b. Working with supervisors who are not visionary and do not communicate well	16%	14
c. Working with supervisors who are incapable and blame everything on subordinates	14%	13
d. Working with egoistic and authoritative supervisors	9%	8
e. Having inexperience and unintelligent supervisors	9%	8
f. Having unhelpful and unsupportive supervisors	8%	7
2. Task Itself		
a. Having unrealistic timeline and deadline	33%	22
b. Having unreasonable workload	29%	19
c. Being assigned unwanted and inexperience tasks	13%	9
d. Being assigned too complicated tasks or tasks that require intensive cooperation	13%	9
e. Being assigned unpleasant or unethical tasks	6%	4
f. Being assigned unimportant and invaluable tasks	3%	2
g. Being demanded to do the tasks without any sayings	3%	2
3. Work Atmosphere		
a. Having unpleasant, unclean and unsafe environment	36%	23
b. Having too much competitive and political atmosphere	28%	18
c. Having untruthful and insincere atmosphere	23%	15
d. Having too many sub groups with their own sub culture	13%	8
4. Co-Workers		
a. Having uncooperative and unsupportive co-workers	44%	24
b. Having untrustworthy co-workers	29%	16
c. Having egoistic and close-minded co-workers	27%	15
5. Work Team		
a. Having too much destructive conflicts working in teams	61%	28
b. Having weak and benefit-oriented relationships	24%	11
c. Having too many trouble makers and envied team members	15%	7
6. Organization		
a. Working in a low performance organization	35%	7
b. Working in a non-visionary and aimless organization	30%	6
c. Working in a stagnant and irresponsive organization	25%	5
d. Working in a highly regulated and too formal organization	10%	2
7. Health		
a. Having bad health or not enough rest	78%	14
b. Being depressed and sad	17%	3
c. Having an accident at work	5%	1
8. Compensation and Benefits		

a.	Receiving unfair and unreasonable remuneration	70%	12
b.	Being in debts	18%	3
c.	Receiving a salary cut or demotion	12%	2
9.	Subordinates		
a.	Having unproductive and close-minded subordinates	54%	8
b.	Having unsupportive and uncooperative subordinates	33%	5
c.	Not being accepted and respected by subordinates	13%	2
10.	Recognition		
a.	Not being recognized by the organization	100%	12
11.	Career Path		
a.	Having no advancement nor job security	100%	5
12.	Activities		
a.	Having no chance to participate in any recreational activities	100%	4
13.	Work-Life Balance		
a.	Having no work-life balance	100%	3

Comparing between happiness and unhappiness factors, it can be said that the top five factors are similar factors affecting both ways, excepting a bit difference in sequence. Task itself was rated as the number one factor affecting happiness at work, while supervisor was rated as the number one factor affecting happiness at work. Finally, all factors can be grouped in to 4 groups as follows: Work-related Factors-Task Itself, Compensation and Benefits, Recognition and Career Path; Other People-related Factors-Work Team, Supervisors, Subordinates and Co-workers; Self-related Factors-Health and Work-Life Balance; and Organization-related factors-Work Atmosphere, Organization, Training and Development and Activities.

The following model represents the conceptualization of the research findings:



Conclusions

These research findings have confirmed that factors affecting happiness in a workplace involve not only work-related factors, but also other factors including people-related, self-related and organization-related factors. All these factors are crucial and any organization who put its priority on being a happy workplace must pay closest attention to.

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