

# An Evaluation on the Factors Influencing Happiness at Working Environment in UAE Government Entities: A Literature Review

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**How to cite this paper:** Al Suwaidi, E.Y. (2019) An Evaluation on the Factors Influencing Happiness at Working Environment in UAE Government Entities: A Literature Review. *Open Journal of Business and Management*, 7, 1460-1470.  
<https://doi.org/10.4236/ojbm.2019.73100>

**Received:** June 20, 2019

**Accepted:** July 23, 2019

**Published:** July 26, 2019

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## Abstract

Work environment plays a very vital role in the employee performance in any organization around the world. Conducive work environment motivates employees to work hard to achieve their stated goals and objectives. Providing enabling working environment by UAE government to its employees tremendously affects their performance, it helps in managing employees' work-life balance. Therefore, this paper reviews the related literature based on the factors that influence the happiness at working environment in UAE government entities. This review figures out those factors and explained them in detail on how they influence happiness at working environment in UAE government entities.

## Keywords

Happiness, Working Environment, Employee, Government Entities, UAE

## 1. Introduction

Happier work environment helps the workers to do their job diligently and boost the performance of the organization [1]. It is found that workplace happiness can help employees to achieve career success, improve their job satisfaction, and encourage them to work harder; at the same time, the turnover rate of happy employees can be lower. Companies achieve higher profitability and decrease the healthcare costs. Workplace happiness can even positively affect other aspects of company operations, not only its productivity. [2] revealed that the US's 100 best employee-satisfied companies generate a 2.3% to 3.8% higher stock return compared with the market average level.

However, what we saw from the current performance of large amount, of em-

employees was that they experienced high feelings during the weekends, while their happiness turned down during the weekdays [2]. [3] described these phenomena as “a Monday-to-Friday sort of dying”. Both academicians and industry leaders were seeking for better statistical practices to explore the workplace happiness and the driving factors behind it. [3] built up a model and designed a questionnaire to explain the functioning relationships of the four critical constructs of happiness, which were personal resources, organizational system, functioning at work, and experience of work [3].

Based on this questionnaire, a survey was conducted in Project Management Institute (PMI) Silver Spring Chapter, Montgomery County, Maryland and Nelson Hart collected raw data. With this data source, they conducted the exploratory statistical analysis to explore key factors affecting workplace happiness. The first research was to evaluate the validity and reliability of workplace happiness.

However, work is one of important aspects of people’s lives. People perform their work in exchange for either monetary (e.g. salary and benefits) or non-monetary rewards (e.g. psychological fulfilment from work). In today’s changing world, the world of work has been changing rapidly [4]. The changing work environments (e.g. the increasing internationalization of business, new technology, and new organizational practices) lead to the changing nature of work. Nature of work is defined as “the actual content of the job or work characteristics”. From human resource management (HRM) perspective, HRM practices (e.g. downsizing, outsourcing, and temporary employment) influence the nature and scope of work. Corporate restructuring and downsizing which aim to reduce the workforce for improving organizational performance probably can make employees feel unsatisfied with their jobs. Employees who perceive job insecurity have lower commitment to their organizations and they intend to leave their jobs. Employees’ job satisfaction has an impact on organizational performance. If they were satisfied with work, their productivity would be increased [5].

Generally, employers expect a high level of performance and productivity from their employees. Most companies need productive workers to work for them so as they could attain organizational goals. Many companies used managerial tools for the purpose of increasing productivity. The studies by [6] considered HRM practices (e.g. compensation system, face-to-face communication) as the means to increase productivity. Moreover, maintaining happiness at the workplace can increase employees’ productivity. The previous studies [7] state that happy employees are productive employees. Conversely, unhappiness at the workplace reduces productivity. The happiness issues have been widely studied in various fields such as philosophy, religion, psychology, sociology, and economics. Many scholars have discussed the term “happiness”. “Happiness” is universal to all people in every culture because everybody searches for happiness [8]. It is related to an individual’s subjective well-being or life satisfaction. There is a close relationship between job and life satisfaction. Job satisfaction affects life satisfaction while life satisfaction also affects job satisfaction. Thus, happi-

ness at the workplace refers to an individual's work and life satisfaction, or subjective well-being at the workplace. In this paper, the two terms "happiness" and "subjective well-being" are used interchangeably.

Whereas happiness at the workplace is important to both individuals and organizations, the research on employee happiness in organizations is limited. It should be investigated further in order to provide sufficient knowledge to academics, practitioners, and those who are interested in the notion of happiness at the workplace. This paper therefore develops a conceptual framework of happiness at the workplace that could be used for conducting the research on this area. It begins with conceptual framework. It is then followed by discussion, and conclusion respectively [9].

In 2012, a company in South Africa introduced the "Workplace of Choice" survey in order to attempt to improve the situation. In the context of this research, it is seen as a cornerstone to gain insight into how UAE public government office employees felt about working for the organization and its leadership, regarding their happiness and job satisfaction. The intention was to discover recommendations for improvement. The poor results realized from the survey reflected the negativity of employees caused by the poor position that the company found itself in and the measures taken to react to these unstable conditions. Management then introduced a number of significant cultural and structural changes such as improved communication (e.g. about the company's position and its future strategies for business), fairness, trust, teamwork, recognition, etc. Another "Workplace of Choice" survey followed in 2014 and the results proved to be a substantial improvement from the first time. It showed an increase in the levels of happiness and job satisfaction of employees in the organization as a result of the change in organizational culture as the result of a mere investment in its human resources [10]. The survey was, however, only performed with staff employees though, and not hourly employees. Although UAE government staffs has shown an increase in employee happiness and job satisfaction, there is still significant room for continuous improvement, especially by including the hourly employees. Hence, the importance and need for conducting research into employee happiness research in UAE public government offices.

## **2. Definition of Happiness**

Happiness is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "a state of mind or feeling comprising contentment, satisfaction, pleasure or joy". Within the literature the term happiness is frequently used interchangeably with other terms such as subjective wellbeing, psychological wellbeing and satisfaction. In order to develop an understanding of the concept of happiness and its defining attributes it was important to clarify these terms.

Satisfaction is one term which is frequently used interchangeably with happiness. The Oxford dictionary defines satisfaction as "the feeling of pleasure that arises when you have the things you want or need or when the things you want

to happen happen” [11]. There is an affective component to satisfaction and there is also a cognitive evaluative component involving making a judgement regarding wants and needs and whether these have been achieved. Subjective wellbeing is a term which recently is being used increasingly to indicate happiness.

Wellbeing is defined as “the state of being comfortable, healthy or happy” and the adjective subjective is defined as “based on or influenced by personal opinions”. Subjective wellbeing is therefore also a state which involves both cognitive and affective processes. It involves a personal appraisal of one’s own quality of life.

Dictionary definitions of the term psychological wellbeing indicate similarity with those phenomena noted above. Psychological refers to “of pertaining to, dealing with or affecting the mind especially as a function of awareness, feeling or motivation”. It is unclear in this dictionary definition whether psychological wellbeing is determined subjectively, objectively or both. Again, the definition of the word psychological infers both an emotion and a cognitive component. A less commonly used term within happiness discourse is that of emotional wellbeing. Emotions are defined as “An affective state of consciousness in which joy, sorrow, fear, hate or the like is experienced as distinguished from cognitive or volitional states of consciousness”. Emotional wellbeing therefore is distinguished from other terms denoting happiness as an affective state rather than one which involves cognition [12].

Dictionary definitions, aside from indicating both an affective component and generally a cognitive component to happiness, fail to discriminate between the term happiness and some of the other terms used. A review of philosophical perspectives and psychological perspectives was also conducted in order to provide more clarity on the concept.

### 3. Philosophical Perspectives on Happiness

Happiness is a concept that has interested philosophers through the centuries both in traditional western philosophy and also in eastern philosophy. In the 4th century BC the Greek Philosopher Aristipus is noted to have proposed that the goal of life is to maximise one’s pleasures. The philosophy of happiness has been dominated by two main perspectives: that of hedonism and that of eudaimonia or the good or moral life.

Hedonism essentially is the pursuit of pleasurable experiences and feelings and the avoidance of pain or negative experiences. Bentham (citation) extended the hedonistic perspective to a societal level and argued that an action is right if it promotes the happiness of the greatest number of people. “Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; and by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure” [13].

Central to happiness from a hedonic perspective and also from a utilitarian perspective is pleasure. The experience of pleasure is a subjective experience and much of the research on happiness in the form of subjective wellbeing and satisfaction is conducted from a hedonic perspective.

The other predominant philosophical position on happiness is eudaimonia. This perspective is generally attributed to Aristotelian philosophy although Socrates and Plato both had a position on this prior to Aristotle. Within this perspective the good or moral life is the happy life rather than a life of pleasure. While pleasure is not unimportant, meaning in life, achieving one's potential and virtue in life are essential components of the good life [14].

Pleasure, it is argued, usually accompanies the engagement in and completion of activities which constitute happiness. The eudaimonic life is one which contains acts of altruism and virtue which, at the time may not be pleasurable, but overall which contribute to a person's wellbeing. As such the eudaimonic perspective on happiness contains an objective perspective which can be measured. While the term happiness is derived from the Greek word eudaimonia it is not an exact translation and it is suggested that a better translation of the word is that of human flourishing. [15] described the happy man as "One who lives objectively, who has free affections and wide interests, who secures his happiness through these interests and through the fact that they, in turn, make him an object of interest and affection to many others".

While hedonic utility has been the main driver of modern economies eudaimonic perspectives have been gaining increasing interest as a basis for societal happiness.

#### **4. Psychological Perspectives on Happiness**

The increasing interest in positive psychology has refocused the study of psychology and science from that of distress and mental illness to that of positive emotions and psychological health and happiness. A number of positive psychologists have explored the concept of happiness and offer differing perspectives on it. Daniel Kahneman sees happiness in hedonistic terms and has led the development of hedonistic psychology which focuses primarily on happiness as utility. Some researchers propose the concept of subjective well-being as happiness. It is frequently termed more colloquially as happiness. Subjective wellbeing is multifaceted and comprises high levels of positive effect, low levels of negative effect and satisfaction with one's life as a whole and with specific domains of it such as work, relationships. In essence subjective well-being is hedonic wellbeing. Subjective well-being is defined as a cognitive and affective evaluation of one's life [16]. Conversely [16] rejects the notion of happiness as pleasure and positive affect alone and he argues that much more is required in order to be authentically happy. He proposes that pleasure and frequent positive emotions, engagement with others and with activity such as work and meaning in life, are required for a full life. This engagement should involve the use of an individual's

signature strength. While recognizing the importance of pleasure he sees it as least important and argues for a refocusing on both engagement and meaning in life. Seligman's view on happiness is more consistent with the Aristotelian philosophy of the good life.

Researchers identified engagement as central to happiness. He describes the type of engagement when involved in an activity such as playing music, an athlete training, or someone working on a project, where they become immersed in the experience to the extent that they lose awareness of everything else as an optimal experience. He likened this optimal experience or Flow to that of an autotelic experience. The activity is challenging and requires concentration and skill and also learning and mastery. People who experience Flow describe it as an enjoyable, pleasurable and exhilarating state and all absorbing.

Similarly, psychological well-being is a more complex psychological phenomenon more consistent with eudaimonic explanations for happiness. [17] suggests that psychological wellbeing comprises six components: self-acceptance; personal growth, relatedness, autonomy, environmental mastery and purpose in life. While undoubtedly pleasure, positive emotions and satisfaction are intrinsic components of happiness more is required for a more lasting state of happiness. [18] argues that when people talk about happiness they are generally referring "to a relatively lasting, justified good feeling about their lives".

## 5. Happiness at Working Environment

One of the concepts related to happiness studied most extensively in the workplace is that of job satisfaction. These studies primarily focus on satisfaction globally with the job or with specific aspects or conditions of the job. These conditions frequently include items such as the nature of the work, remuneration, promotional opportunities, supervision control, and levels of support and level of autonomy. It could be argued that the focus of these studies is on antecedents to satisfaction rather than the nature of job satisfaction itself.

Despite the plethora of studies exploring job satisfaction and effects of job satisfaction there appears to be a lack of agreement within the field of psychology as to what exactly job satisfaction is. [19] cites Locke's 1969 definition of job satisfaction as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job". This definition focuses on emotion as the primary factor in job satisfaction. Despite the large amount of agreement on job satisfaction as an emotional or affective response to one's job there is also an alternative position proposing that job satisfaction is primarily a cognitive evaluative process which [20] argues is consistent with job satisfaction being an attitude. Evaluation, as an essential component of an attitude, has broad agreement. In this context he describes job satisfaction as "a positive (or negative) evaluative judgement one makes about one's job or job situation".

Additionally, [21] argues that Job Satisfaction, like other attitudes, comprises three separate concepts which are evaluative judgements about one's job, affec-

tive experiences at work and beliefs about one's job. Being clear about these distinct but related concepts, as components of job satisfaction, is necessary for more accurate study of the components of job satisfaction and subsequent theory development. Much of the research conducted on job satisfaction has involved cognitive evaluative judgements about the object of one's attitude *i.e.* the job or aspects, characteristics or facets of the job. [21] regards evaluation and affect as conceptually different and argues that job satisfaction is essentially an evaluative process either positive or negative. Within the study of job satisfaction, a paradox exists where job satisfaction has been viewed essentially as an affective evaluation where upon many of the scales used to measure job satisfaction are in fact evaluative in nature [21]. Affective states, moods or emotions are transient states and undoubtedly have an impact on the evaluation of one's job but confusing this has done little to advance the study of job satisfaction itself or the study of affective states at work [22]. It would seem that such clarity and agreement on this is required in order to ensure that happiness studies which involve the study of satisfaction have greater validity and are of more use in terms of understanding happiness. None the less job satisfaction is central to happiness in the workplace and as such is one of the defining attributes of happiness in the workplace.

## **6. Factors Influencing Happiness at Working Environment**

Antecedents to happiness at work include both organisational and job characteristics. Following the recent scandals in the banking and corporate world organisational virtuousness has recently gained attention and characteristics such as integrity, trust and compassion have been identified as important contributors to employee happiness in the workplace. Aspects of perceived organisational climate *i.e.* affective; interpersonal and social relationships including participation, co-operation, warmth, and social rewards, cognitive growth, innovation, autonomy and intrinsic rewards and instrumental: achievement, hierarchy, structure and extrinsic rewards have been shown to result in employee happiness in the form of job satisfaction and organisational commitment [23]. Additionally, organisational climate in relation to cooperation and innovation was also shown to be related to employee commitment [23].

Perceived organisational justice and equity have also been identified as important for job satisfaction and employee commitment. Further, the employee commitment and satisfaction would be a predictor to organizational citizenship behaviours and employee retention [24]. Perceived organisational support including fairness, both procedural and interactional, supervisor support and rewards/job related positively with affective commitment, positive mood at work, job satisfaction, and desire to remain in the organisation and turnover intentions and adaptability to change. Healthy workplace practices, including work life balance, employee growth and development, health and safety and employee involvement have been noted as a cause of organisational commitment

and well-being at work.

Research on leadership behaviours has shown a direct relationship with employee happiness in the workplace. Ethical leadership behaviours were noted to be positively related to job satisfaction, affective organisational commitment and work engagement. Supportive leadership behaviours specifically Consideration as defined by [25], has been shown to impact positively on job satisfaction as has initiating structure. Furthermore, transformational leadership behaviours have been shown to have a positive impact on employee moods including optimism, happiness and enthusiasm. Positive leadership behaviours have also been shown to positively relate to employee momentary emotions, subjective wellbeing, organisational performance and organisational citizenship behaviours.

Researchers identified that job satisfaction was increased when three critical psychological states were present for the employee. These are experienced meaningfulness of the work, experienced responsibility for the outcomes of the work and knowledge of the results of the work activities. These are created by the presence of five core job dimensions. Three relate to meaningfulness of the work: skill variety, task identity and task significance. Experienced responsibility for job outcomes is achieved when a job is high in autonomy and knowledge of the results of work activities is achieved and when the job is high on feedback [26].

[26] proposed a number of antecedents to happiness at work: opportunity for personal control, opportunity for skill use, variety, contact with others, and availability of money, physical security and valued social position. Additionally, [23] notes supervision, remuneration and career issues as further predictors of happiness in the workplace. He notes, however, that some job characteristics only have limited benefits to the point where deficiencies are overcome, and he likens this to the intake of daily vitamins in what he terms the “vitamin analogy”. A Swedish study conducted into happiness of self-employed workers and those in employment of others similar to Warr also found that personal control, autonomy and independence were important factors identified by the happier self-employed workers [4].

A large research study into happiness in the workplace in the UK found that most staff were happy at work *i.e.* over one quarter were very happy and over one half were fairly happy. The following were identified as being important factors which contributed to this happiness: friendly supportive colleagues; a good line manager; enjoyable work; good work/life balance; varied work; belief that you are doing something worthwhile; feeling that what you do makes a difference; being part of a successful team; recognition of achievements and competitive salary. Social support has also been noted by [15] as important to employee happiness.

Environmental factors such as routine work, money and leisure activities have been demonstrated to have a strong effect on happiness. But some researchers have claimed that personality is the main factor determinant of happiness rather



than social class, money, relationships, works, recreation religion or other external factor. Numerous researchers have found consistent results between the relationship of personality traits and happiness. One of these studies is the sustainable happiness model sustains that SWB (subjective well-being) is determined by three factors: genetics, individual circumstances, and activities [18]. “Why are some people at work happier or unhappier than others?” A comprehensive answer is that individuals at work are happier if their jobs contain desirable features and if their own characteristics and mental processes encourage the presence of happiness.

Genetics represents the set point as physiological characteristics determined by birth, which influences is about 50% in SWB, this percentage cannot be changed, is fixed. Individual circumstances represent only 10% in the model of happiness and it refers to a demographic profile, personal experiences and social status [19]. Finally, happiness depends in 40% of intentional activities, and refers what people do in their daily live. These activities are the focus of the happiness model because is the way to increase one SWB in life and at work [21].

[24] argued that to achieve the “happy life” people must work in good organizations. A very numerous researchers of literature have demonstrated that aspects of organizations and job are the most predictive of job satisfaction, organizational commitment and other types of happiness at work. Researchers have studied the environmental contributors to the happiness, at the organizational, job and event level. Environmental contributors of happiness at the organizational level claim that it is necessary to consider characteristics of culture and HR practices as determinants of employee happiness [22].

According to [23] claims that happiness at work depends on 5 “Cs” factors: Contribution (the effort you make), conviction (the motivation you have), culture (how well you fit in work), commitment (how engaged you are) and confidence (believe in yourself and your work). However, [21] have found other the six main factors determinants of happiness at work: employee performance, organizational culture, organizational trust, job satisfaction, leadership behavior and individual characteristics.

## **7. Conclusion**

Work environment plays a very vital role in the employee performance in any organization around the world. Conducive work environment motivates employees to work hard to achieve their stated goals and objectives. Providing enabling working environment by UAE government to its employees tremendously affects their performance, it helps in managing employees’ work-life balance. Therefore, this paper reviews the related literature based on the factors that influence the happiness at working environment in UAE government entities. This review figures out those factors and explained them in details on how they influence happiness at working environment in UAE government entities.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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