

## Engaged Workforce: A Key Ingredient for Happiness at Work

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### Abstract

*Positive Psychology has brought into light the importance of positive emotions and mental well being with an aim to enable individuals and communities to thrive, wherein happiness is a state of pleasant moods and emotions, well-being and the experience of frequent positive affect and an overall sense of contentment with life in general. The interest in happiness has also extended to workplace experiences as it forms a major part of an individual's adult life. Workplace Happiness plays a significant role in defining employee- work relationship. Engagement level of employees is an aspect which measures their emotional attachment to their jobs, colleagues and organization as a whole. Employee Engagement as an organizational construct influences happiness level as well as happiness as an experience enhances engagement level of employees at work and in general. This study is an attempt to explore this mutual impact and review the definitions, causes and influence of happiness at work and its relation with Employee Engagement. The paper traces the journey of Happiness as well as Employee Engagement as a concept in psychology literature since its inception to the present day research findings. The aim is to make a contributory effort towards the ongoing research on enhancement of happiness and engagement levels by bringing into light the past efforts in hope of working on improving and enhancing the current levels and forming a happy and engaged workforce.*

**Keywords:** Positive Psychology, Happiness, Employee Engagement.

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### **Introduction**

Employee Engagement as a concept has generated a great deal of interest in recent years in both management and academic literature. The first mention of the term employee engagement appeared in an *Academy of Management Journal* article, "Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work" (Kahn, 1990) wherein, Kahn suggested that "people act out momentary attachments and detachments in role performances". Kahn's development of first grounded theory of personal engagement and personal disengagement was influenced by Goffman's (1961) interactionist theory where he defined personal engagement as "the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's 'preferred self' in task behaviors that

promote connections to work and to others, personal presence, and active full role performances". Later, Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles, in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances". Kahn's conceptualization of personal engagement and personal disengagement was the only piece of empirical research on employee engagement until early 2001, when Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined engagement "as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption." They further stated that engagement is not a momentary and specific state, but rather, it is "a more persistent and pervasive affective-

cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual or behavior". Harter et al. (2002) were the first to look at employee engagement at the business unit level. In their conceptualization, employee engagement was defined as an "individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work". Saks (2005) conducted the first academic research to specifically conceptualize and test antecedents and consequences of employee engagement and defined employee engagement as "a distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components associated with individual role performance".

Kahn (1990) further explained that cognitive aspect is comprised of the employees' beliefs about the organization, its leaders and working conditions. The emotional aspect deals with how employees feel about each of these three factors and whether they have positive or negative attitudes toward the organization and its leaders. Leaders and managers who inspire confidence in individuals, giving them autonomy to make decisions with clear goals and accountability are perceived as engaging. The physical aspect of employee engagement concerns the physical energies exerted by individuals to accomplish their organizational roles.

Contemporary organizations today need employees, who are psychologically connected to their work, who are willing and able to invest themselves fully in their work, who are proactive and committed to high quality performance standards. They need employees who are engaged with their work (Bakker & Leiter, 2010) and are engrained with a feeling of joy and contentment when occupying and performing an organizational role so as to ensure overall happiness at work.

The rise of *positive psychology* (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) has

legitimized attention to happiness and other positive state which has spread its wings to the organizational context to a large extent as individuals today spend most of their time working. Pleasant moods and emotions, well-being and the experience of frequent positive affect forms a major part of overall sense of contentment of an individual's life in general and an engaged workforce experience it every day at work thus resulting in positive outcomes.

### **Happiness Defined**

According to Martin Seligman "Happiness is made up of three factors: positive emotions; being completely engaged; and feeling you are part of something meaningful. There are plenty of terms ranging from joy, pleasure, fulfillment to being satisfied and content which explains the feeling of "being happy". However , happiness is a much deeper term whose roots can be traced to the work of great Greek philosopher Aristotle who introduced the idea of Eudaimonia (i.e., happiness) which comes from the Greek *eu* (good) and *daimon* (God, spirit, demon) identifying one's virtues, cultivating them, and living life in accord. Several other explanation of happiness as a concept can be found in literature. Freud (1929) linked happiness with primitive urges, as an orgasmic experience. Frey et al (2002) defined happiness "as a natural byproduct, a gift in itself". Diener (1997) defined happiness "as being satisfied with life while feeling good", whereas Sumner (1996) sees it as a positive attitude towards life. According to Veenhoven (2010) happiness can also be seen as a synonym for the quality of life or well-being and is a mixture of hedonic level of affect and contentment, hedonic level

referring to various affects reflecting on one's mood and contentment referring to the level we meet the aspirations for life. He also calls it the "overall enjoyment of one's life as-a whole".

### **Happiness at Work**

Happiness is a feeling resulting from positive deeds and in organizational context it relates to the positive outcomes at the workplace which are a result of many interlinked factors ranging from employee- work relation within the organization to the end result of efficient production and customer satisfaction. Manka's (2011) recipe for happiness at work includes five ingredients: organization, leadership, community, work and the most important of all is the individual i.e. the employee. In today's competitive scenario where companies are fighting a survival battle to outperform one another; better products, technology and services assist them as a tool in enhancing their performance. But the master key to win the battle is the workforce of an organization which distinct one company from another and creates a sustainable competitive advantage and enhances company's value. Employees are the back bone of an organization and keeping them engaged is the key route to happiness at work. Stephen Covey (2004), the great management guru in a philosophical way highlighted the state of human resource in the organization as the fact that what happens in that Human (employees) are treated as expense in the profit and loss account and machines as investments. It should be the other way round. The need of the hour is to value "HUMAN" resources and treat them as a capital. This research paper evaluates the importance of an engaged workforce in creating a happy workplace as Henry Ford once said that "There is joy in work. All that money can do is, help us in buying someone else's work in exchange for our own. There is no happiness except in the realization that we have accomplished something". These lines highlight

the importance of being attached to the work and the fact that employees who have a sense of accomplishment for their work prove to be an asset to the organization by not only delivering the desired result but also contributing to the overall positive outcome of the organization. Happiness at work falls within the employee engagement spectrum while correlating engagement with positive outcomes such as growth, lower costs, and lower absenteeism along with decreased turnover intention. Several studies have highlighted the importance of engagement levels of employees in creating a balanced organization with fruitful results. Rohbard (2012) found that Engagement is an important concept in positive organizational context as its positive outcomes extend even to In role and extra role performance, client satisfaction and creativity. Brummelhuis, Bakker & Euwema (2010) in their research concluded that engagement was negatively associated with turnover intentions and engaged employees would never think about leaving the organization instead they perceive their workplace as a happy and positive place where they can strive and enhance their performance Bakker and Demerouti (2008) examined a literature review on work engagement, where qualitative and quantitative studies on work engagement and revealed the antecedents and consequences of work engagement. Engaged workers are more creative, more productive and more willing to go the extra mile.

Happiness at work is also associated with the concept of flow given by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi(1990) and it means an experience of virtuosity. Martin Seligman(2004) specifies it as a "positive emotion about the present with no conscious thought or feeling attached". It is a momentary experience often associated with work and it increases the engagement to work thus becoming a important contributor to the phenomena of happiness at work.

**Conclusion:**

It is clear from the above discussed literature and findings that an individual's state of emotions and feelings govern their behavior and its of at most importance that these feelings are directed in the right direction so as to reap the maximum benefit and live a happy and content life. Organizations globally are focusing on their employee well being and constantly enhancing ways to establish a better employee – work relationship and create a happy and healthy overall work environment .Engaged workforce is very organization's dream and it can be very well achieved by making an attempt to understand employees perception of their performance and create a thriving work environment for them. An atmosphere of trust, empowerment, and encouragement harnesses an engaged workforce which renders a positive and happy workplace.

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