

HAPPINESS AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: THE MODERATING ROLE OF
EMPLOYEE SPIRITUALITY AND EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

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ABSTRACT

While happiness is a primary goal in life, few studies have examined its effect on employee performance (EP). This study looks at the effect of employee happiness (EH) on the EP of public sector employees in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), while examining the moderating role of their spiritual and emotional wellness (ESEW). Theory Y, Two-Factor Theory, and Job Characteristic Model were reviewed, as well as frameworks related to EP. Based on these theories and current literature, the study proposed that happiness positively affects the ESEW, impacting their performance. EH was operationalized to include seven sub-constructs: performance appraisal, promotion, rewards and recognition, income, workload, flexible working hours, workplace environment, and peer and supervisor support. Each was presumed to affect EP. In addition, ESEW is expected to moderate the effect of EH on EP. The population of this study was public servants in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, for which a random sampling technique was deployed. The instrument of data collection was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was validated, and a pilot study conducted, prior to data collection. Data was collected from 334 respondents and examined using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 22.0. Hypotheses were tested using Smart Partial Least Square (Smart PLS). Findings confirmed that EH has a significant effect on EP, as well as ESEW. ESEW did not have a significant effect on EP, but it moderated the effect of EH on EP. The study recommends that decision makers increase EH by appraising performance fairly and providing a competitive salary. It concludes with a discussion of the findings, limitations and directions for future work.

ABSTRAK

Kebahagiaan adalah matlamat utama dalam kehidupan, dan beberapa kajian telah pernah dijalankan bagi mengkaji kesannya terhadap prestasi pekerja. Oleh yang demikian, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji kesan kebahagiaan terhadap prestasi pekerja sektor awam di Emiriah Arab Bersatu (UAE), di samping turut mengkaji kesan moderator dalam kesejahteraan rohani dan emosi mereka. Teori Y, Teori Dua Faktor, dan Model Ciri Pekerjaan telah dikaji, ditambah dengan rangka kerja yang berkaitan dengan prestasi pekerja. Berdasarkan teori-teori masa lalu dan kajian literatur terkini, kajian ini mencadangkan bahawa kebahagiaan positif boleh mempengaruhi kesejahteraan rohani dan emosi pekerja, di samping turut mempengaruhi prestasi mereka. Konteks kebahagiaan yang diuji mempunyai sub-konstruk: penilaian prestasi, promosi, ganjaran dan pengiktirafan, pendapatan, beban kerja, jam kerja yang fleksibel, persekitaran tempat kerja, serta sokongan rakan dan penyelia. Setiap elemen tersebut didapati mempengaruhi prestasi pekerja. Populasi kajian ini dalam kakitangan awam di Abu Dhabi dan Dubai, dan teknik pensampelan rawak digunakan dalam memilih sampel kajian. Instrumen pengumpulan data adalah melalui soal selidik. Soal selidik telah disahkan, dan mempunyai kebolehpercayaan dan keesahan setelah kajian perintis dijalankan sebelum pengumpulan data. Data dikumpul dari seramai 334 orang responden dan data dianalisis menggunakan Pakej Statistik untuk Sains Sosial (SPSS) versi 22.0. Hipotesis diuji menggunakan Smart Partial Least Square (Smart PLS). Penemuan terpenting mengesahkan bahawa kebahagiaan pekerja mempunyai kesan yang signifikan terhadap prestasi tempat kerja, serta kesejahteraan rohani dan emosi. Kesihatan pula menyederhanakan kesan kebahagiaan terhadap prestasi. Kajian ini mencadangkan agar pembuat keputusan dapat meningkatkan kebahagiaan pekerja dengan menilai prestasi pekerja secara adil dan dapat memberikan gaji yang kompetitif. Kajian ini disimpulkan dengan perbincangan hasil kajian, batasan kajian dan panduan untuk kajian di masa hadapan.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CA	Cronbach's Alpha
CR	Composite Reliability
df	Degree of Freedom
DV	Dependent Variable
EP	Employee Performance
ESEW	Employee Spiritual and Emotional Wellness
FWH	Flexible Working Hour
INC	Income
IV	Independent Variable
P	P-value
PE	Performance Appraisal
PLS	Partial Least Square
PRR	Promotion, reward, and recognition
PSS	Peer and Supervisor Support
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
WE	Workplace environment
WL	Workload

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction to the study. It describes the background to the work and identifies issues related to performance and happiness among employees in the public sector of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The chapter is divided into ten sections. The first section presents an outline of the chapter followed by a discussion of the study's background. Study problems are discussed in the third section, followed by the research questions and objectives in the fourth and fifth sections respectively. The significance of the study is elaborated in the sixth section, while the scope is discussed in section seven. The eighth section presents conceptual and operational definitions of the terms used in this study. A layout of the study is provided in the ninth section, with a summary of the chapter presented in section ten.

1.2 Background of the study

Employee performance is critical for organizations and individuals. The importance of this performance comes from the role that these employees play in increasing the productivity of an organization. For this reason, employees are the most important assets

of any organization and the performance of organizations is highly dependent on the productivity of their employees. Employee performance is referred to as “*the quantity of output, quality of outputs, timeliness of output, presence or attendance on the job, efficiency of work completed, and effectiveness of work completed*” (Mathis & Jackson, 2009).

The importance of employee performance increases when it comes to public sector as these employees provide the public with essential services such as the educational services in public educational institutions, healthcare services in public hospital, and other transactions in public organizations. Therefore, performance of employees in public sector carries significant contribution not only for the sector itself but to the public services that are of importance for citizens and all other stakeholders in the society (Nasi, 2011). Public sector is an important sector of the country and it contributes significantly to the employment of citizens as well as to provide high quality public services (Duran, Bason, Simpson, & Whittaker, 2017; Niankara & Ismail, 2018; Ogunbayo, Alagbe, Ajao, & Ogundipe, 2016)

However, majority of previous studies looked into the performance of employees in private sector while few examined this performance in public sector (e.g. Tran & Pham, 2018; Otoo *et al.*, 2019; Ndungu, 2017). In an economy focused on production, most organizations urge their employees to improve their performance. Consequently, employees are working longer hours but increasingly feeling more stressed and less fulfilled in their work, which eventually decreases their performance and productivity, increase the rate of absenteeism as well as the desire to leave the job (Ravina-Ripoll *et al.*, 2019; Zhao & Pan, 2019).

While focusing solely on increasing the performance of employees, organizations are neglecting what many perceive to be the ultimate goal of a good life: happiness (Gavin & Mason, 2004). Employees are the most important asset of an organization (Compton & Hoffman, 2019). Helping them feel happy about their workplace and the work itself benefits not only the employees, but the organizations as well (Achor, 2011; Ravina-Ripoll *et al.*, 2019). In this context, employee happiness is defined as “*a holistic*

state of wellbeing, of doing well and being well, and of taking authentic pride and self-esteem from one's accomplishments” (Gavin & Mason, 2004).

Researchers have agreed that happiness is a multidimensional, subjective, and cultural-based construct. Scholars have agreed that happiness includes life satisfaction, the presence of positive emotional experiences and an absence of negative emotional experiences (Caunt *et al.*, 2013; Hill, Delpriore, & Major, 2012; Valenzuela & College, 2008; Wesarat, Sharif, & Majid, 2015). A sense of fairness and satisfaction with performance appraisal (Aggabao, Shareif, & Awadhi, 2013; Otoo *et al.*, 2019), income (Bakan & Buyukbese, 2013; Wesarat *et al.*, 2015), compensation, promotion, rewards and recognition (Alfagira *et al.*, 2017; Ndungu, 2017; Saks, 2006), the workplace environment (Martin, 2010; Samson, Waiganjo, & Koima, 2015), factors such as flexible hours and workload (Abid & Khan Barech, 2017; Riyanto *et al.*, 2017), and support from supervisors and peers (Hua, 2013; Martin, 2010; Saks, 2006; Tamer & Dereli, 2014) are other important components of employee happiness. Nevertheless, previous studies did not holistically focus on the potential effect of these variables. Since happiness varies across cultures, spirituality and emotional wellness plays a critical role in a conservative community such as the UAE. High spiritual and emotional wellness can contribute to a happier working environment and this ultimately affects the attitude and productivity of employees (Zou & Dahling, 2017). Adopting spiritual values in the workplace can also have a positive impact on the attitude and productivity of employees (Sultana & Taj, 2018). Nevertheless, few of previous studies have examined the potential role of employee spirituality and emotional wellness (Kumar & Kumar, 2014).

Therefore, this study examines the level of employee happiness, performance, and spirituality and emotional wellness in the UAE public sector. In addition, it explores the effect of happiness on employee performance at work. Lastly, it looks at the moderating effect of spirituality and emotional wellness between happiness and performance.

1.3 Problem statement

Employees in private sector are more productive and satisfied compared with public sector in UAE (Askary, Kukunuru, & Pech, 2014). The productivity of employees is associated with the happiness of the work and the workplace environment as well as the duties and overload. Employee performance in the country could be affected by several factors such as the balance between work and life and the flexibility of the working hours. Gallup report (2018) showed that 85% of employees in UAE are less engaged with their work and this could be the reason behind weak performance. Nationally, the UAE's Federal Authority of Government Human Resources (FAHR) has reported a high turnover of public servants in the country – at 5% in 2014 (FAHR, 2014). Researchers describe this figure i.e. 5% as alarming due to the high cost of turnover in UAE (AlHashmi, Jabeen, & Papastathopoulos, 2019)

In UAE, the ruler of the country has proposed that happiness can be a tool to increase positivity and productivity (Al Maktoum, 2017). An emphasis on happiness at work boosts morale in organizations and earns loyalty from employees, enhancing relationships among and between employees and their employers (Alnuaimi, 2018; Suwaidi, 2019). The country's rulers have emphasized the importance of creating a happy nation. To this end, the Ministry of Happiness was established in 2016, aiming to place UAE among the five happiest countries in the world by 2021 (E-government in UAE, 2020). Nevertheless, the World Happiness Report in 2019 listed the UAE at the 21st rank (Walker *et al.*, 2019).

This lack of work engagement and happiness may stem from job-related factors such as income (Bakan & Buyukbese, 2013; Wesarat *et al.*, 2015), flexibility of working hours and workload. In addition, other contributing factors may include workplace environment (Martin, 2010; Samson *et al.*, 2015), relationships and interactions with peers, supervisors and management, including performance assessment (Aggabao *et al.*, 2013; Otoo *et al.*, 2019), perceived support or lack thereof from peers and supervisors (Hua, 2013; Martin, 2010; Saks, 2006; Tamer & Dereli, 2014), and the fairness of promotion, rewards, and recognition (Alfagira *et al.*, 2017; Ndungu, 2017; Saks, 2006).

In a study conducted on public sector in UAE, the findings indicate that employees are less satisfied, and this was mainly due to lack of recognition for good work, lack of engagement in discussion about progress of the organisation, weak support for the performance evaluation process, and fairness process of performance appraisal (Askary *et al.*, 2014).

As moderating factors, spirituality and emotional wellness could have a significant impact on employee attitudes toward work, as well as their productivity. Despite increased attention to the matter, empirical studies on spiritual and emotional happiness at work are still lacking (Ali, 2017; Almazroei, 2014). UAE is a Muslim country and the majority of employees in the public sector are of this faith. Spirituality and emotional wellness in the workplace could impact their feelings towards themselves and their work. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of spirituality and emotional wellness in altering the attitudes of employees (Sultana & Taj, 2018; Zou & Dahling, 2017). However, the role of spirituality has not been empirically tested in the context of UAE's workforce.

Against this background, the previous studies focused on this variable among non-working population such as students, or patients at hospitals, and adolescents (Ali, 2017). This has made a gap in the literature regarding the happiness of employees working for organizations (Yaghi & Al-Jenaibi, 2017, 2018). As the literature surrounding happiness has ignored the work domain, so too has management literature largely ignored the concept of employee's spirituality and well-being. Only recently has employee happiness as a factor in work and life outcomes become an area of research in the field of human resources (HR) and organization behaviour (OB) (Tenney, Poole, & Diener, 2016).

Organizations that makes their employees happier, achieve 37% more productivity than other organizations (Beheshti, 2019). This is because happy employees are more likely to be 50% successful and 88% more loyal to their organizations compared with other unhappy employees (Sharifzadeh & Almaraz, 2014). For this reason, organizations started to think about the happiness of their employees aiming to achieve better organizational performance and develop more loyal and committed employees.

Happy employees are more productive, showing more commitment and satisfaction with their work (Marescaux, De Winne, & Forrier, 2019; Tanwar, 2019). Despite this increased focus on happiness, however, there is a lack of academic studies examining the effect of happiness on employee performance (Ravina-Ripoll *et al.*, 2019; Zhao & Pan, 2019). The lack of study is greatest when it comes to public organizations, as a majority of existing studies focus on business and for-profit organizations (Oswald, Proto, & SgROI, 2015a; Sharifzadeh & Almaraz, 2013; Zhao & Pan, 2019).

Previous studies have tended to focus on happiness in highly developed countries, as these societies enjoy strong economies and a high standard of living (Neve *et al.*, 2019; Ravina-Ripoll *et al.*, 2019; Rego & Cunha, 2008). A more limited number of studies have focused on still developing countries such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Alnuaimi, 2018; Suwaidi, 2019). In UAE, public sector occupies high importance of the government as it employs most of the citizens and contributes by more than 30% to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and 57.2% to the investment in the country (Ministry of Economy, 2019). The sector includes all employees working for the federal government, government departments, municipality employees, public bodies, and federal and public institutions.

To support the effort of transforming the public sector and competing with the private sector and based on the fact that most of citizens are working for public sector, the UAE government establish a Ministry of Happiness in 2016, which aims to spread happiness among UAE citizens. In addition, UAE Vision 2021 aims to make the country one of the five happiest in the world by 2021 (E-government in UAE, 2020). The country's rulers are paying special attention to the happiness of public sector employees, establishing Chief Executive Officers (CEO's) and a "council of happiness" in all governmental entities (E-government in UAE, 2020).

Despite these efforts, the World Happiness Report of 2019 ranked UAE at 21st in the world (Walker *et al.*, 2019). Previous studies in the UAE have examined factors affecting employee happiness and found that they include leadership style, organizational culture and structure, as well as human resource management (HRM) practices (Alnuaimi, 2018). Other studies in the country were more conceptual. A review of the

literature found that organizational, job-related and individual factors also affect employee happiness (Suwaidi, 2019). However, all these previous studies had significant methodological, theoretical and analytical limitations.

The methodological limitation of previous studies relates to an overuse of correlational and descriptive studies to identify level of happiness while ignoring its impact on work attitude and performance (Oswald *et al.*, 2015; Sharifzadeh & Almaraz, 2013). The theoretical limitation is a lack of theory to explain the happiness and its consequences on employee's work and productivity. The fact that happiness as a construct is still emerging and subjective, and its operationalization not well established, could explain this deficiency (Wright, Cropanzano, & Bonett, 2007). In addition, few previous studies have included mediating or moderating variables between happiness and performance (Kumar & Kumar, 2014; Van De Voorde & Beijer, 2015). This leads to the analytical limitation – descriptive and correlational studies that did not include mediator or moderator, and used the first generation of statistical analysis, such as Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) (Ndungu, 2017; Riyanto, Sutrisno, & Ali, 2017; Sherman, 2018). Advanced techniques able to test complex models, such as Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), were also not widely used in previous studies (Bangwal & Tiwari, 2019; Van De Voorde & Beijer, 2015).

To overcome these limitations, studies need to look into the causal relationship between employee happiness and job performance in developing countries in general and the UAE in particular. Theories such as the Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1959) and Job Characteristic Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) can help explain these relationships, but few studies have examined these theories in the context of happiness-performance (Ndungu, 2017; Saks, 2006). In addition, the Theory of Y, developed by McGregor (1960), has not been used to explain the effect of happiness on employee performance. Spirituality and emotional wellness are important in the workplace and few studies have examined their moderating effect on the relationship between happiness and employee performance (Wright *et al.*, 2007; Zou & Dahling, 2017). Moreover, few studies have used the Role-Based Performance Scale (RBPS) to measure the performance of

employees (Pahos & Galanaki, 2018). This study uses this measurement to measure the performance of employees.

This justifies the need for a study to examine the happiness in the context of public sector in UAE. Accordingly, this study aims to deploy theories and moderating variable, as well as SEM, to construct a framework that may be used by decision makers in the UAE to increase employee happiness and performance in the public sector.

1.4 Research questions

Based on the issues identified in the previous section, this research aims to answer the following questions:

- i) What is the level of employee happiness, employee performance, and spiritual and emotional wellness among employees in UAE?
 - a. What is the level of employee happiness among employees in UAE?
 - b. What is the level of employee performance among employees in UAE?
 - c. What is the level of employee spiritual and emotional wellness among employees in UAE?
- ii) How is the effect of happiness on employee performance in the UAE?
 - a. How is the effect of performance appraisal on employee performance in the UAE?
 - b. How is the effect of flexible working hour on employee performance in the UAE?
 - c. How is the effect of promotion, rewards, and recognition on employee performance in the UAE?
 - d. How is the effect of income on employee performance in the UAE?
 - e. How is the effect of peer and supervisor support on employee performance in the UAE?
 - f. How is the effect of workload on employee performance in the UAE?
 - g. How is the effect of workplace environment on employee performance in the UAE?

- iii) Does spiritual and emotional wellness moderate the effect of happiness on employee performance?
 - a. Does spiritual and emotional wellness moderate the effect of performance appraisal on employee performance in the UAE?
 - b. Does spiritual and emotional wellness moderate the effect of flexible working hour on employee performance in the UAE?
 - c. Does spiritual and emotional wellness moderate the effect of promotion, rewards, and recognition on employee performance in the UAE?
 - d. Does spiritual and emotional wellness moderate the effect of income on employee performance in the UAE?
 - e. Does spiritual and emotional wellness moderate the effect of peer and supervisor support on employee performance in the UAE?
 - f. Does spiritual and emotional wellness moderate the effect of workload on employee performance in the UAE?
 - g. Does spiritual and emotional wellness moderate the effect of workplace environment on employee performance in the UAE?

1.5 Research objectives

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the effect of employee happiness on employee performance. The study also aims to identify the moderating role of spiritual and emotional wellness among employee happiness and employee performance. Accordingly, this study aims to fulfil the following objectives:

- i) To identify the level of employee happiness, employee performance, and spiritual and emotional wellness among employees in UAE.
- ii) To examine the effect of employee happiness and its dimensions on employee performance in UAE.
- iii) To evaluate the moderating effect of spiritual and emotional wellness on the relationship between employee happiness and employee performance.

1.6 Significance of the study

This study is significant because it contributes to the body of knowledge surrounding employee happiness, performance and spiritual and emotional wellness, particularly among public sector employees in developing countries. It contributes to the literature of employee happiness by operationalizing the construct and examining its effect on the performance of public sector employee. Previous studies are lacking in this regard, focusing mainly on for-profit organizations in highly developed countries.

This study is also important because it examines the moderating effect of between employee happiness and spiritual and emotional wellness, while also exploring the latter's moderating role. Previous studies, to a large extent, did not include this variable. Furthermore, it is important for the way it deploys established theory to formulate a conceptual framework of study, where few previous studies used theories to explain variation in employee performance. The study is also important because it uses structural equation modelling, while previous studies mainly deployed SPSS.

From a practical perspective, the study is important for the UAE's government, citizens, employees and organizations. It helps to reveal the factors that lead to happy employees in the workplace, supporting the government agenda of establishing a happy nation and fulfilling part of Vision 2021. It will help improve the reputation and performance of governmental institutions, as happy employees provide better service to the country's citizens. Lastly, the study will benefit employees, by drawing attention to importance of their workplace happiness, positively affecting their daily quality of life.

1.7 Scope of the study

Research was conducted in the UAE on employees working for the government of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. UAE is a federal country consisting of seven states. Abu Dhabi is the capital of the UAE while Dubai is the commercial city of the country. In Dubai and Abu Dhabi, there are 18 ministries and 17 federal entities with 53,961 national employees working in these organization (FAHR, 2014). For this reason, the study focused on these

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