Research Article

The Concept of Happiness in India

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ABSTRACT

Happiness does not exist in any external object, but only in us, who are the consciousness that experiences happiness. Though we seem to derive happiness from external objects or experiences, the happiness that we thus enjoy in fact arises from within us. The philosophical and theoretical literature on happiness is abundant in India. Ancient texts and scriptures like the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagwad Gita have explored the nature of happiness, and the insights gained from these writings are still relevant to Indian people, influencing their conceptions of happiness and guiding them on how to lead a happy life (e.g., Bhawuk, 2011). The collectivist perspective takes into account that while some people are purely hedonistic in their approach and a few are spiritual in nature, a vast majority falls in between, and that there are enormous individual differences in the needs and aspirations of people. Keeping this in sight, the Indian seer and sage established a social framework and ground rules for good life, which ensures the wellbeing of all (Kiran Kumar, 2004). Many other ancient texts of India elaborate on the nature and sources of happiness. Indian treatise on medicine, the Ayurveda describes the concepts of sukhswarup (happy life), dukhswarup (unhappy life) and health (or swastha).

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CONCEPT OF HAPPINESS:

The term "Happiness" is not commonly understood among people across different societies and cultures, although several research studies reveal that it has a universal appeal across the world. Almost everywhere and everyone wants to be happy. People who are already happy search for more happiness in life, while those who are unhappy wonder how others can enjoy their lives despite so much hardship and problems all around. There would still be others who have already achieved the heights of their career and worldly possessions as they dreamt of, but still feel hollowness and incomplete or not in control. Even in high-income group families, or in case of successful businessmen, or any society that is "very developed materially", the proportion of unhappy people is still higher than others. Under the façade of external affluence, many such people tend to undergo mental strife within, which contributes to their frustration, pointless quarrels, addiction to drugs, alcoholism, that sometimes even leads to suicide**.** The recent suicide of a promising Indian Bollywood actor, who had so many successful films to his credit and was considered a very fine actor, is a case in point.

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Happiness is much deeper than either getting or achieving everything one has ever dreamt of, or enjoying materialistic pleasures in life. Globally, several research studies have shown that when asked to rank in order of priority their life desires, people rank their "quest for happiness" among the top of the list, well above the materialistic worldly possessions like wealth, fame, status, a good job, big house, etc. This holds true for individuals across ages, regions, religions, cultures, races, and lifestyles (World Happiness Report, 2012).

Different people carry different impressions and interpretations on "what does happiness mean to them" (Uchida & Ogihara, 2012). The variety of responses, generally received against this question, could range from, "having cherished materialistic possessions", to "something which comes when one achieves success", or "when one enjoys life pleasure", or "it's just a temporary mood", or "being always positive in life", or "it's about lowering your expectations to enjoy life better", etc.

LITERATURE OF REVIEW

Tatarkiewicz, 1977 Later, Socrates, and his student Plato, tried to view happiness from an objective and absolute standpoint, by suggesting that happiness as the "secure enjoyment of what is good and beautiful" **(Plato, 1999, p. 80).** However, Aristotle, another great philosopher, in his significant work **"Nicomachean Ethics" (1947),** while stating that the "highest of all goods achievable by human action was happiness", focused more on the eudaemonia aspect to recommend that individual's happiness was in their own hands, which could be realized by any person who led their life in harmony with their "most valued virtues" **(Aristotle,1992).** Some philosophers also propounded only hedonic view, or pursuit of pleasure as the singular route to happiness, but this did not find much acceptance even in ancient times, as there was broader agreement among multi-cultural philosophers that a "good life" bereft of "reason", "virtues" and "morality", was clearly not realizable. Certain studies on happiness treated it "more as feeling good than being good" **(McMohan, 2006, p. 65).** This view was countered later.

Systematic studies on happiness and satisfaction with life, which psychologists understood as *"psychological well-being"*, started from mid-1990s **(Myers & Diener, 1996)**. This field of psychological well-being started generating interest, since initially psychology studies were primarily focused on human misery and sorrow than to the antecedents and outcomes of positive operationalisation of the concept **(Diener, 1984).**

Ryff (1989) reviewed the then existing constructs of psychological well-being due to excessive focus of past studies on human unhappiness and suffering, operationalized the positive aspects of psychological well-being that had been ignored earlier, and compared them with the previous evaluation indexes.

Ryff and Singer's (1996) concept of "psychological well-being" and **Ryan and Deci's (2000)** "self-determination theory", were two other important perspectives propounded on "happiness" and "well-being". Ed Diener, also called *"Dr. Happiness",* a leading American psychologist, professor, author, and researcher, in 1984, coined the expression "subjective well-being" (SWB), as a "scientific term for happiness and life satisfaction"—"thinking and feeling that your life is going well, not badly". He recommended that "SWB" includes both "affective evaluations of one's life" (like "pleasant feelings", "enjoyment", etc.), and "cognitive evaluation" (like "satisfaction", "meaning", etc.) **(Kesebir & Diener, 2009)**. However, it was clear that high "subjective well-being" and "eudemonic happiness" concepts

are not necessarily replaceable, since it was possible for an individual to feel subjectively happy, without living a righteous life.

Wesarat, Shari, Majid, & Halim (2014) observed that "Happiness is universal", since people in all cultures search for happiness (**Aydin, 2012; Fisher. 2010),** and the same holds true for the organizations as well. The authors created a conceptual framework to propose that 36 Workplace Happiness was impacted by diverse independent factors such as "employment status", "income", "friendship", and "work activities", which when moderated by "cultural values", influences the dependent variable, viz. the happiness at the workplace. The study reinforced the point that sustaining "employee happiness" was essential to safeguard availability of workforce (**Asiyabi & Mirabi, 2012; Lindorff, 2010**), since in the times (Clarke, 2007), especially in the knowledge intensive contexts, in search of happiness at work. As such, improving happiness at the workplace in order to optimize organizational productivity, was one of the biggest organizational challenges (**Chaudhry & Shah, 2011).**

Studies have found that job satisfaction and life satisfaction were linked, and that both job satisfaction and life satisfaction affect each other at the workplace (**Saari & Judge, 2004).** So, the "workplace happiness" refers both to an "individual's work satisfaction" and "life satisfaction", or "subjective well-being" at the workplace (**Bhattacharjee & Bhattacharjee, 2010; Carleton, 2009**). The authors investigated that while workplace happiness was fundamental to people and the companies (Fisher, 2010; Simmons, 2014), however, the research on "employee happiness" in organizations was very inadequate (**Fisher, 2010; Hosie, Willemyns, & Sevastos, 2012)**

Abdullah & Ling (2016) in their study of workplace happiness in the context of school teachers, described workplace happiness as "spirit at work" to explain the concept as an "experience" of those employees who are "driven" and "energised" by their work, derive "meaning and purpose" in their work, feel "encouraged to express themselves freely", and have "productive sense of connection" with other employees at work. Their work supported findings of Ryff and Keyes (1995) who had described workplace happiness as one's belief about their work being purposeful and meaningful, where they nurture a sense of autonomy, acknowledge work-related and individual feedback positively, develop productive relationships with organizational members, and keep developing self and others.

All the above research findings helped to clarify numerous misconceptions and understand the the "workplace happiness" in the most appropriate perspective.

SIMPLE WAYS TO BOOST HAPPINESS AT WORK

Happiness is not a topic that comes up enough at work. Many companies and leaders have the sense that it's not professional to talk about "happiness". We need to change that! Multiple studies have proved that our well-being and positive emotions have a huge impact on us at work. We are more creative, engaged, productive, motivated, open to new things as well as more likely to stay with our companies longer- the list goes on! If we practice enough, we can train our brains to see the positives before the negatives. By becoming more mindful of our own happiness, we can take action to increase those feelings of positivity.

1. Reflect on what you need to be "just" a little bit happier

Your happiness is your own responsibility. You need to know your own drivers of happiness at work. Take the time to ask yourself some introspective questions:

- What motivates me at work?

- What really makes me happy in my job?
- What was I doing the last time I was truly happy at work?

2. Show more gratitude at work

Expressing gratitude at work improves your happiness, relationships and boosts self-esteem. It's important to spend some time thinking about what you have and what you're grateful for – especially the small things you normally take for granted. Make a list of all the things you are grateful for at work, start a gratitude journal and share what you are grateful for with your colleagues.

3. Spread happiness – emotions are contagious

Surround yourself with positive people and inspire others to be happier. Maybe that means smiling more at your colleagues, spending your coffee break with your favorite team mate, organizing a surprise get-together for your team or giving more positive feedback. We've all experienced a positive energizer around us: these people that walk into a room and make it glow. Everyone becomes energized, enthused, inspired, and connected.

4. Start a meeting with positivity

Did you know that starting a meeting with positivity will make your meeting more productive? Participants will feel positive emotions and will be more creative, motivated and engaged. Here's a few ideas to kick start your weekly meeting: organize an ice breaker, start with a recognition round, celebrate small wins or play a quick game.

5. Show your appreciation and send your encouragement to someone who needs it

Simple words can make a huge difference. Let your colleagues know you appreciate them by thanking them and recognizing their contributions. You could say:
- "Thank you for your hard work."
- "I really value your contribution."
- "You did great today."
- "I appreciated your help during the meeting."

6. Celebrate your regular wins

Ask your colleagues to share their recent wins and create a 'success wall' to post them on. These successes can be big or small, but encourage them to keep it simple. This is a great way of getting your team to realize how many amazing things you've actually achieved, even if you haven't really thought about it lately.

7. Ask yourself: What's the one thing I am looking forward to at work right now?

It's a powerful question to kick start your day or your week with positivity. It could be that you are looking forward to:
- a get together with your team
- a specific meeting
- a coffee chat with your favorite colleague
- the end of a project

8. Ask your colleagues to share their highlight of the week

Try this with your colleagues in meetings and do it by yourself at the end of the day. It can help you to reduce your negativity bias and remember all the small things that have made you feel good today or this week. We have a tendency to remember more negative experiences

than the positive ones, that's why we need to hack our brain to remember the positive things that happen.

9. Take care of your happiness at work

Happiness is a skill we can all learn and there is always potential to work on it. We can all do something to improve our happiness and make our workplace better. Like any other skill, you need to practice it to maintain it.

10. Spread awareness about Happiness at Work within your team

Companies need to create a safe environment where the employees happiness is part of the company's culture and not just an exception. Luckily, there are many ways to implement strategies to maximize happiness at work. Start by sharing this article or organizing a webinar, workshop, or a complete program on this topic.

MYTHS AROUND HAPPINESS

There are several myths that have surrounded the term "Happiness", which are essential to analyse and clarify, to get to the true essence of individual happiness:

1. **Treating happiness, the same as pleasure:** When most people pursue happiness, they are seeking pleasure, viz. exciting holidays, watching entertainment programs, enjoying good food, new car, sea-facing house, parties with friends and family members, etc

2. **Positivity is taken as happiness:** We often come across people who appear to be strangely happy and smiling all the time, even in extremely distressing circumstances or situation. By repudiating negative emotions, such people experience much more acute and deeper negative emotions and trauma within themselves, which they are not able to handle over time that leads to their skewed personality, besides disillusionment and dissatisfaction with life. So, it's not just about smiling all the time. *"Happiness is not the belief that we don't need to change; it is the realization that we can"*.

3. **Happiness is just a fleeting mood**- Generally people try to define happiness in terms of sensory pleasures, which obviously passes away, once the event is over. More than a **"temporary mood",** happiness is essentially **"work ethic",** which can be consciously and systematically developed within self that endures for a long time.

4. **Happiness makes one more lazy, selfish, and less productive**- This myth assumes that since happiness is very desirable and people want to be in that state for as long as possible, therefore, they are slow to change and are more concerned about their happiness and comfort, rather than proactively supporting change and helping others. This again is far from truth. Research has shown that we are more creative, productive, and altruistic, when happy. Happy people contribute better in so many ways.

5. **Happiness follows favourable external circumstances**- Many people believe that their happiness is a by-product of their external circumstances and that happy people have things going for them one way or the other. The fact, however, is that "Happiness isn't something that just happens", rather it is "what we make out of our lives".

6. **Happiness is primarily driven by one's genetics**- It is believed that happiness comes only to the privileged lot, or those enjoying plenty of good luck, or those who were born with a silver spoon. However, research shows that people are biologically wired for success but

not necessarily for happiness. Each person has a different level of baseline happiness and about 50% of our baseline happiness is genetically inherited (Bouchard & Loehlin, 2001). determined by our "habitual thoughts", "feelings", "words", and "actions". It explains how people can increase their baseline of happiness, just like they set the temperature of their air conditioner on a hot day, and reprogram it to a higher level of peace and well-being. So, happiness can be ours, it can be controlled and cultivated, provided we take time to decipher what makes us happy (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schkade, 2005).

7. **Happiness requires lowering of one's expectations**- Some people feel that if we lower our expectations from life, i.e., desire less, then we face lesser disappointments and failures, leading to lowering of our happiness threshold and hence more happiness in our lives. However, such an argument is fallacious on at least 2 counts. First, it views happiness in terms of external validation, which we have already seen, is not correct. Secondly, a lot depends on how we define our expectations and standards.

8. **Rich people are generally happy**- Past research studies have indicated that although penury and low remuneration might cause unhappiness among many people, however, once certain threshold is attained, thereon there is "no significant relationship between amount of money earned and feeling good about life" (Easterbrook, 2005). So, although an adequate number of financial resources is necessary for happiness, however, it is not a sufficient condition.

9. **People value happiness in their daily lives**- It is popularly felt that people give lot of importance to happiness over other priorities, and happiness often decides what they do or behave or choose. Infact people devalue happiness in their daily lives (Schiffer & Roberts, 2018). It might be due to several reasons. One of the main reasons is that people generally fail to define happiness in concrete terms. They give weightage to things that are clearer and concrete. Since, they don't understand happiness well, they also don't value it much.

EVOLUTION OF HAPPINESS

Despite the myths that surround it, the term "happiness" has continued to remain very fascinating, attractive, and desirable for majority of people. Infact, even during the time these myths on happiness remain a myth, everything that such people do or aim to do is ultimately aimed to make them happy, whether consciously or unconsciously. Happiness has been termed the *"holy grail of human existence, the be-all and end-all of life"*. Aristotle called it the *"goal of all goals"*. As per Aristotle- *"Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence"*.

There has been no single meaning of happiness for a long time which could generate a common understanding among masses, primarily because everyone determines their own levels of happiness based on how they feel and think about themselves, their own work and life, which is the reason researchers also referred it as "Subjective well-being".

Despite so much research available on happiness, still many people find it difficult to define happiness for themselves. Several renowned authors and researchers have shared a few pertinent guidelines for anyone to discover their happiness:

(a) **"Keeping it real, meaningful, and about yourself"-** We need to stop comparing ourselves with others or try to derive happiness through material things or external validation.

Whatever we feel is meaningful in terms of our purpose of life, feel the target is realistic yet challenging, and derive joy and "flow" while doing it, contributes to our happiness;

(b) **"Own your attitude"-** Ultimately our actions, behaviour and results are an outcome of our attitude only. Happiness is determined more by "one's state of mind than by external events". Author John Milton wrote in his book "Paradise Lost" that *"The Mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."* Life can be beautiful and you can enjoy only if you think so and your mind permits so. On the other hand, you might achieve all the success, wealth and fame, yet you might feel lonely, disconnected and hollow from within. *"Happiness, like other emotions, is not something you obtain, but rather something you inhabit".* If we feel excited and blessed to enjoy our work, look forward to live another day with our family and friends, appreciate life and are grateful for whatever we have got, then happiness can't be far behind. Again, a person's happiness can't be defined by happiness of someone else, like a "demanding boss", "quarrelling neighbour", "politicking co-worker", or a "temperamental client. One must take "response-ability" of their happiness, i.e., "trying to respond to events in their life in a way that supports their happiness";

(c) **"Not including material things or those things that offer only short-term happiness"-** Material things or prized possessions don't define our happiness. It is about understanding self in all dimensions, cultivating the right mind-set and attitude, and focusing on the larger, meaningful purpose of our life through our actions and behaviour in that direction, which gets us on the path of happiness.

(d) **"Consider what is sustainable over the course of your entire life".** Happiness gives us joy, with preponderance of positive emotions within us over a longer period, that drives us towards our mission.

(e) **"Happiness is not achieved in itself, but rather it is the side effect of a particular set of ongoing life experiences"**. "You can't buy happiness and you can't achieve happiness... it just is". *"Happiness is the process of becoming your ideal self".* Human beings are "psychological", "emotional", "social", and "spiritual" beings.

(f) **Minimize reliance on "external validation".** While "Internal validation" is an "infinite resource", something that one has control over, that enhances our "self-esteem" and "baseline happiness," however, "external validation" is a "temporary ego boost", which depends on rare occasions of someone praising or recognizing us.

(g) **"Develop a perspective beyond oneself"-** It involves deeper-level of thinking and introspecting to get answers from within on why and how a mindless pursuit of success and material possessions will help him lead a good life in future, and what as per him is the real definition of a "Good life". Developing a selfless, caring and an "attitude for gratitude", goes a long way in promoting one's long-term happiness. One Harvard Business School study found that "giving to charity made people happier, regardless of their country, how much money they gave, or even why they gave it" (Aknin, Dunn & Norton, 2012).

(h) **Building social connect and strong relationship** with family, friends, and others. Spending quality time regularly with those we care and being kind and compassionate in our relations with others, enhances our happiness. An inner belief that we exist to make a difference in the lives of others and give back to the society, provides us enduring source of happiness.

(i) **Balance is the key.** One should embrace oneself completely with all their strengths and shortcomings. A brave, bold, and spontaneous exterior persona should get complemented with inner peace, patience, and silence. One should make their own rules to self-actualization and follow that path diligently, without letting any other person tell you how to live according to their life, or an external entity or event deterring us from the chosen path.

HAPPINESS AT WORK

Work is an important and integral part of an individual's lives (Dulk, Groeneveld, Ollier-Malaterre, & Valcour, 2013). People work either for financial rewards, like salary and benefits, etc, or non-financial rewards, like, "psychological fulfilment from work" (Stiglbauer & Batinic, 2012).

Just like the perceived ambiguity on happiness in our day to day-life, "Happiness at work" is a relatively new concept. At the workplace, it can mean different things to different people. For some, it could emerge from being treated fairly, or being valued or trusted, while for others, it could be a result of being in a rewarding relationship, being engaged at work, doing challenging and/or meaningful work, leading a purposeful life, or an overall sense of well-being. One point on which there is consensus is that happiness is an individual-driven feeling of well-being, characterized primarily by the overall perception of satisfaction and positivity. Bhattacharjee & Bhattacharjee (2010) referred to "Happiness at the workplace" as "an individual's work and life satisfaction", or "subjective well-being" at the workplace.

Workplace Happiness was also very lucidly explained by Salas-Vallina, Alegre, & Guerrero (2018), as an umbrella concept and is a wider construct than just *"engagement" (*"psychological bonding and alignment of purpose"), or *"job satisfaction" (*"evaluation of job characteristics"), or *"Affective organizational commitment" (*"sense of belongingness to the organization").

At the workplace, an employee's work becomes an integral part of a person's identity, with the professional role allowing the person to express himself/herself, derive pleasure, feel valued, experience growth, gain appreciation, enhance pride and self-esteem through accomplishments. It has to be understood that doing a simple, easy and routine job doesn't necessarily make one happy. However, a meaningful yet slightly difficult work to accomplish, which stretches our skills, makes us learn more, develops our competencies and brings us closer to our cherished dreams, gets us in the "happiness mode". Workplace happiness is associated with "pleasure that one gets while being engaged in work that is perceived as meaningful and purposeful", and is essentially about "how people satisfy their plethora of deepest emotional and psychological needs through their work". As such, it is easy to appreciate that, "happiness goes beyond mere satisfaction on the job or just engagement of employees at work". One may not have best of the resources or the environment, like routine work, inappropriate company policies, rude boss, inadequate infrastructure, poor incentives, etc., however, that does not necessarily prevent a person to be happy at work. "Happiness at work is about mindfully making the best use of the resources you have, to overcome the challenges you performance and achieve your potential. And this not only builds your happiness but also that of others – who will be affected and energized by what you do." (Dr Laurel Edmunds and Jessica Pryce-jones,2011,p.1)

In the workplace, happiness is influenced by both "short-lived events" and "chronic conditions in the task, job and organization". Employer–employee relationships are primarily

regulated by mutual satisfaction of each other actions and behaviour, which continues to meet their expectations. In such an environment, "happiness acts as a glue" that retains and motivates the key talent in the organization (Fisher, 2009).

RELEVANCE OF WORK PLACE HAPPINESS

Happiness is not just a resultant coming out the positive developments and outcomes in our life. They are infact a precursor and the cause of diverse positive outcomes in an individual's life. Past research studies have shown that happiness results in better health, better performance and achievement, more prosocial behaviour, better social relationships and more ethical behaviour, among others. At present, we are also witnessing the 4th Industrial Revolution, which is the new age of automation characterized by unprecedented level of technological evolution happening at exponential pace, be it predictive analytics, Internet of Things, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, augmented reality, robotics, autonomous vehicles, 3-D printing, etc. All these developments are redefining how we live and work. For e.g., Ordering groceries, booking a hotel, selling a car, finding a property, making payments, watching a film, etc can all be done online, remotely in the comforts of our home, with use of technology. Due to aforesaid macro-level economic, technological, demographic and social trends, and consequent changing shareholder, customer, consumer and employee expectations, leading companies have started to rapidly adopt new technologies, new business models, drive innovation, eliminate redundancies, undertake mergers and acquisitions, to stay competitive and relevant. It is not just a question of continuously learning, innovating and demonstrating agility to pursue new business directions, but most importantly doing it faster and more seamlessly than the competitors.

The changing business environment, as explained above, has contributed to continuous disruption, cut-throat competition, dynamic nature of work, wider obsolescence, job roles being relooked, a certain section of job roles witnessing redundancy, leading to growth in new professions and brand-new roles (Srivastava et al., 2014). It is also creating an inequality of sorts and huge divide in the job market, since the low skills and routine jobs are getting automated and replaced by machines, algorithms and apps, while there seems to be high demand for niche, high-end skills which are possessed by only a few people, leading to heightened unrest, anxiety and simmering social tensions.

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