

Caught in the Code: Enduring Happiness of Midcareer IT Professionals

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ABSTRACT

The mid-career phase in the information technology (IT) sector is marked by heightened professional responsibilities, evolving job roles, and increasing psychosocial stressors. This study explores the relationship between perceived stress, happiness, and meaning in life among mid-career IT professionals in Bangalore, India. It further investigates the influence of job role, job function, and gender on well-being outcomes. A descriptive, cross-sectional research design was employed, utilizing online survey data from 151 IT professionals (58.3% male, 41.7% female; mean age = 43.3 years). Standardized instruments—Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS), Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ), and Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)—were used to assess psychological well-being. Chi-square and Mann-Whitney U tests were applied to analyze associations and group differences using SPSS software. Results indicated significant associations between perceived stress and both happiness and meaning in life ($p < .01$). Job role and function were also significantly related to well-being indicators ($p < .001$). Notably, gender differences emerged: female participants reported higher happiness, while male participants reported higher meaning in life and burnout. These findings reflect the complex emotional and existential experiences of mid-career IT professionals, influenced by role expectations, organizational demands, and gendered experiences. The study highlights the need for tailored mental health interventions, resilience-building strategies, and supportive workplace cultures that address both emotional and existential aspects of employee well-being. Future research should adopt longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to deepen understanding of mid-career psychological dynamics in the digital work era.

Keywords: *Perceived Stress, Happiness, Meaning in Life, Mid-Career, IT Professionals, Burnout, Gender Difference*

India has an ever-increasing working population in the IT industry. These professionals have not completed one cycle, and many are still in their mid-ages. While they get increasing worried about health and aging, it is essential to understand where they are happy, whether they achieve their purpose in life and whether they are already drained out due to the very nature of this competitive industry. Engaged employees are those who are highly energetic, resilient in performing their tasks, disciplined, and put their heart and soul into the job (Romita Khurana, 2016). The mid adulthood have more accountability and

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responsibility in career planning, research have indicated that professionals grow dissatisfied in their jobs in their mid-40s. (Setiya, K. 2019).

'Happiness' can be defined in many ways and from multiple perspectives. In psychology, happiness is mostly referred as positive psychology and subjective well-being. According to Chu Kim-Prieto, Ed Diener, and their colleagues (2005), in positive psychology, happiness can be approached mainly in three ways; namely, a) global assessment of life and its facets b) recollection of past emotional experiences c) aggregation of multiple emotional reactions across time. The happiness factors can broadly be classified into four; the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual levels. For a happy and complete human, the holistic growth and repair of these are important. The key levels of happiness could be different for different people as it is influenced by several factors including his or her personality, age, social status, economic stability, surroundings, and other social, economic, cultural dynamics. While it is extremely difficult to study and analyse all the factors, it would be good to focus on a set of people who are in the same profession and the same age group. The population in focus are the Indians who have joined the IT industry during the 1980's and early 90's. This set of talented Indians fall into a special category that is squeezed between the conservative parents and the new-gen children.

In ancient literatures too definitions of happiness can be found. Bhagavat Gita elaborates at length on how an individual can attain happiness based on his maturity level. Indians also experience happiness that is constructed from within and defined by local standards for emotions and individual perceptions in the world. India presents an interesting case of people with a fate negotiation perspective that may help buffer them from the dire effects of poverty by helping accept their circumstances even as it propels them to affect change by giving them hope that change-within limits-is possible. (Biswas-Diener, R., Tay, L., & Diener, E. 2012).

According to report by Gallup (2018), the main causes of employee burnout (a) 70% employees face burnout due to Unreasonable time pressure (b) 70% of employees face burnout out due to Poor of communication and support from a manager (c) only 60% of employees have clarity on the job role and rest are simply exhausted by simply trying to figure out. It was further found that unmanageable workload and unfair treatment such as favouritism, unfair compensation and mistreatment are more likely face burnout 2-3 times more (Gallup, 2018).

Theoretical frameworks on Happiness.

A. Nagraj (1999) model for happiness addresses the four dimensions of human living as an integrated form of the material, behavioural, intellectual & experiential aspects, which is collectively referred as "*happiness triad*". The Triad for Happiness (as shown in figure 1 below) has three components, (a) Happiness through our senses, which is classified as momentary happiness (b) Feelings in relationships, which is the feelings establish the value of a relationship and thus they are referred as deeper happiness and (c) Learning and awareness – It is based on what we experience when we solve a problem, learn something new, understand a concept or some meaning. This is referred as sustainable happiness (Happiness Curriculum (2019)).

The research on happiness falls in the tradition of well-being (see figure 1). There are two traditions, one Hedonic tradition, here the primary focus is on happiness, what are the factors that lead to happiness, which includes person factors, social-environmental factors,

and cultural factors. The second tradition is eudemonic tradition, here the focus is on living life, fully functioning, and deeply satisfying way. It is more than just happiness. In the literature the under Hedonic traditions the concept of Subject wellbeing (SWB) has frequently been used interchangeably with the term ‘happiness’ here maximizing one’s well-being has been viewed as maximizing one’s feelings of happiness. With respect to eudemonic tradition well-being is not so much an outcome or end state as it is a process of fulfilling or realizing one’s own true nature (Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M., 2008).

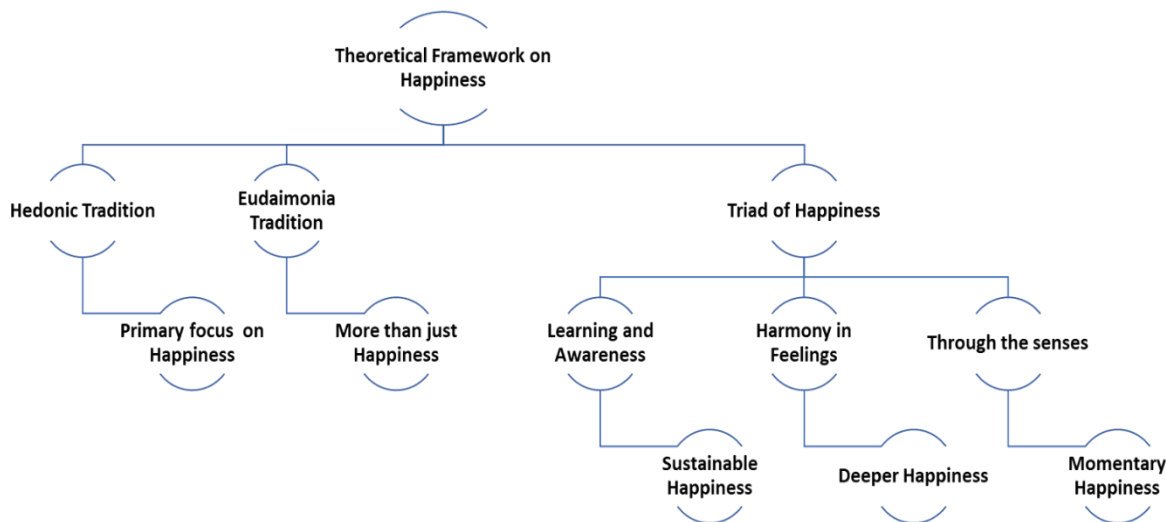


Figure 1: Showing the Theoretical Framework on Happiness

Happiness and Meaning of Life

The most popular theory of self-interest which identifies self-interest with happiness and happiness with pleasure and the absence of pain is a prime example of a hedonistic theory. A meaningful life is that has one seeks internally for an affirmative answer towards the need for longing that are characteristically described as inevitabilities for meaning. A meaningful life involved projects of worth that is not accidental and adds more value to their lives (Wolf, S., 1997). A study examined the relations of happiness and meaning in life with mental health among university college students (N=284) found that happiness and meaning in life were both uniquely negatively related to perceived stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. Further it was found that happiness was more strongly related to mental health outcomes, adding to this happiness, and meaning in life were indirectly related to positive Association towards self-satisfying and self-transcending outcomes (Li, P. J., Wong, Y. J., & Chao, R. C. L., 2019).

Stages of Career – IT organisation

In Information Technology (IT) based organisations, a new employee typically starts as a developer at junior level and then progresses to senior developer. By then he would have completed 6-8 years. Those aspiring to be managers, moves on to head a project. Alternately techies can opt for a technical role if he/she aspires to be an architect. He/she continues in this role at varying capacities for the next 5-6 years. Product/Delivery managers, Domain/Process consultants and Architects are the next role for the professional depending on his interest. Most of the mid-age professionals fall into these set of roles. After experiencing this role, he can then move to a senior leadership role. For ease of understanding this is depicted in the below diagram (see figure 2).

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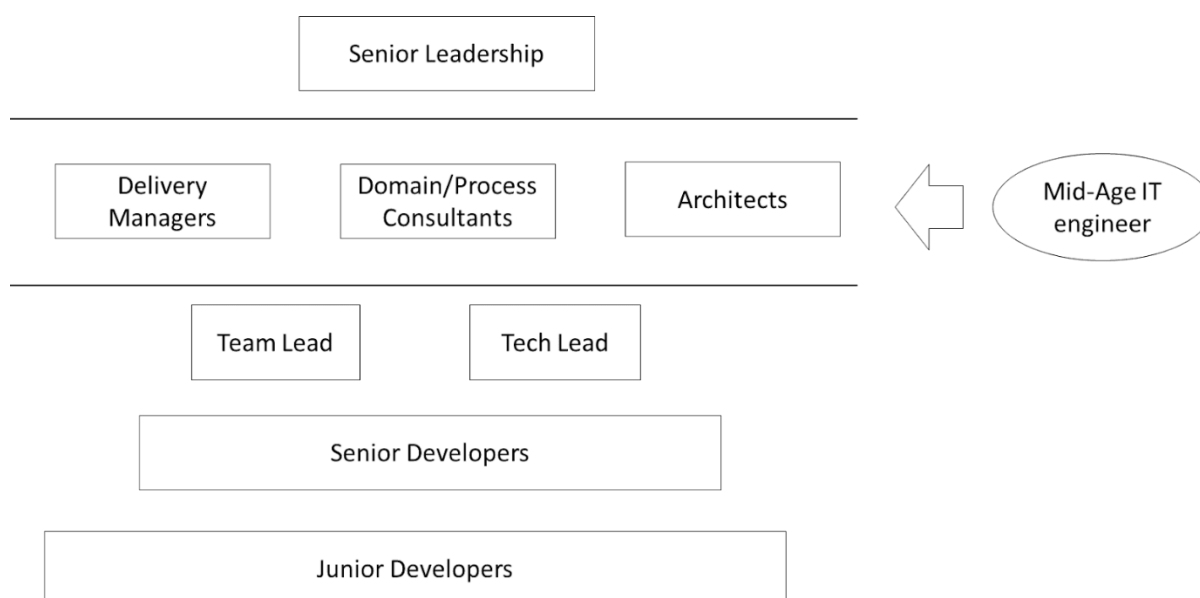


Figure 2: Typical Career Progression in IT profession

IT professionals in Indian context

Applying these worries to IT industry, professionals enjoy their initial years with the high salary and travel opportunities. They get to see many countries that they never ever thought about visiting. All these are considered as achievements. They save the money that they earn and own a house and vehicle of their choice at an early age itself. Their parents could think of building an own house only nearing 50 years of age. At work also they grow up the ladder amazingly fast and somewhere in the middle they forget to enjoy the happiness of the moment. They miss important family occasions. They miss their parents and extended family and even their 'native' place. To ensure the required 'quality of life' many leave their hometown and country and settle abroad. It is a known fact that lifestyle and quality of life does not define the happiness of a being. While all these happen on side, on the other side the health and happiness and the soft feelings like love, kindness and forgiveness, care and share etc are all diminishing due to the very nature of this highly competitive industry. Happiness, satisfaction, and life's meaning are all subjective and specific to each individual. While the initial set of IT professionals are going through their journey in life, it is extremely critical to take a stab on what is in store for this set of humans.

Mid-life Characteristics in IT professionals

Neugarten (1968) proposed, middle-aged adults perceive their future as being limited, they should also experience a motivational shift from an orientation towards achieving gains to one towards maintenance and the avoidance of loss. According to Brim (1976) 'the concept of *crisis*', in mid-life and at other times, implies a rapid or substantial change in personality..., which is dislocating with respect to one's sense of identity – his usual reference groups, his role models, his principles, his values, his dyadic relationships. So, the whole framework of one earlier life is under question.

Mid-life is usually considered as the age between 40 and 65 years. Psychologically it has several aspects that it is usually referred as the 'crisis' period. This is the time when most individuals are realizing that they are half done with their life. They find it difficult to accept the fact that they have only few years left in their life. Most would then tend to enjoy their life and have fun. This is that stage of the life when they look at what they achieved so far and whether that is their purpose of this life. For some, the feeling of aging causes anxiety

and depression. They try hard to stay youthful. After 40, most of them take a look at what life has brought them and where they stand.

We read about several IT engineers who have left their job after 40 and then start running own business, in most cases by bringing together like-minded people and start-ups to help the community by bringing in farmers together, planting saplings, teaching underprivileged, take up professionals that matches their interests and hobbies like acting, performing etc. Often it is said that they are trying to do 'what makes them happy' and 'trying to find meaning out of life' or 'fulfilling life's purpose'. As the number of such cases are increasing, hence exploring the factors associated to happiness, meaning of life and burnout is critical among middle aged IT professionals. This study focuses on a specific age group of mid-life, a 'generation' that has not seen the end-to-end cycle of professional life. Most of them have experienced what it means to 'live for needs' and 'live for wants. Anything in surplus has to move across to attain equilibrium. Under this context this study investigates the influence of stress levels, annual income, gender, job role and functions on the key dimensions of happiness, meaning in life and burnout.

Understanding Happiness in IT organisations

Based on five case-studies developed inside agile projects, in a company that valued innovation a study explored how (Un) Happiness impacts on software engineers who are working in Agile teams.). About from 67 participants responses were gathered through a survey and interviews. It was found that the factors influencing happiness were effective communication, motivated members, collaboration among members, proactive members, and present leaders (Amorim, L. F.,2020).

Graziotin, Daniel & Fagerholm, Fabian. (2019) studied Happiness and the productivity of software engineers. The objective of the study was to understand the relation between happiness and productivity, further explore how software companies are trying to make their employees happy to enable more productivity. The study revealed that the causes of unhappiness that are controllable by managers and team leaders. It was found that common reason arises from technical factors related to the artifact and its process. This highlights the importance of strategic architecture and workforce coordination. The experience of unhappy is felt when they are being stuck in problem-solving and time pressure (Graziotin, Daniel & Fagerholm, Fabian. 2019).

One important study on happiness from multiple dimensions is covered in the research on 'True Happiness: The Role of Morality in the Folk Concept of Happiness' carried out by Jonathan Phillips et al., (2015). The study constituted of five studies to evaluate how the moral value of a person also influences happiness in additional to the default norms based on high positive affect, low negative affect, and high life satisfaction. Certain portions of this research were presented at the 2015 Society for Personality and Social Psychology Conference. The ordinary concept of 'feeling' happy Vs 'being' happy which itself is referred by Aristotle (Jonathan Phillips et al., 2015).

A study by Abraham, S. (2015) explored Factors influencing workplace happiness among employees in software companies in Bangalore. The results showed that vitality, personal resilience, Personal happiness, professionally managed team, and a manager who trusted in their efforts were the factors that resulted in Workplace happiness. Further, it was found that workplace happiness had a moderate relationship with Job satisfaction (Abraham, S., 2015).

Graziotin D, Wang X, Abrahamsson P. (2014) highlighted that happy software developers solve problems better. This article echoes the call to employ psychological measurements in software engineering research and prove that happy souls perform better (Graziotin D, Wang X, Abrahamsson P. 2014).

Brockmann, Hilke. (2010) work provides a theoretical explanation on why age affects happiness. Also, the time variables of age, period and cohort effects are given consideration in their study. This research analysed the objective and subjective returns of professional and personal investments done by individuals at various stages of life. (Un)happiness in midlife is more strongly determined by gender-specific occasional influences and individual characteristics. It was found that during middle-age, people are believed to turn to '*frustrated achievers*' (Brockmann, Hilke., 2010).

Need for the study

The focus group of in the present study, is middle-aged IT professionals, they are the group who have witnessed significant changes when it comes to the priorities and perspectives that each generation considered as important. For example, the previous and older generation, a generation that worked to earn each penny it has received and the younger, newer generation that utilizes the money they earn for their entertainment and enjoyment. In Indian context, software engineers are considered as high achievers and successful. This is mostly to do with the money that they earn due to the high salaries package. While all that is true in the initial years of career, the set of people who joined this sector during the boom period of 90's is going through a middle-age transformation, taking a nab on what they achieved so far. Many of them are few times richer than their parents are but are they at a state of mind to enjoy it. Are they physically fit to enjoy what they achieved so far? With only minimal studies available on this so far, this study dissects the population with respect to Gender, Income bracket, Level of stress, Job role and Job function and investigates its impact on happiness, meaning-in-life, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment.

While there are several studies and empirical findings available for 'happiness' and its impact on 'productivity', 'motivation', 'workforce', 'workplace', but a focused study on the exploring the association of happiness and meaning in life have drawn our interest. Further how the burn out level among IT professionals impacts the level of happiness and meaning of life.

Objectives of the study

The present study aims to:

- Examine the association between perceived stress and subjective happiness and meaning in life among mid-career IT professionals.
- Investigate the influence of job role and job function on levels of happiness and meaning in life among mid-career IT professionals.
- Analyze gender differences in the perception of happiness and meaning in life among mid-career IT professionals.

Hypothesis

- **H1:** There is no statistically significant association between perceived stress and levels of happiness and meaning in life among mid-career IT professionals.

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- **H2:** There is no statistically significant relationship between job role and levels of happiness and meaning in life among mid-career IT professionals.
- **H3:** There is no statistically significant relationship between job function and levels of happiness and meaning in life among mid-career IT professionals.
- **H4:** There is no statistically significant difference based on gender in the perception of happiness and meaning in life among mid-career IT professionals.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study is descriptive in nature as it explores the nature of association Happiness and meaning of life with respect of Job role and function among software employees in Bangalore. For the study, we use online google survey. The data was collected during the November (2020) to March (2021). The companies in Bangalore were selected using purposive sampling technique. A sample of 151 employees was selected who have completely participated online survey. Male respondents were 58.3% and female respondents were 41.7%. Average age of the group is 43.3. The data collected from the sample was analysed using appropriate statistical method with the help of SPSS software.

Measures

- The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) is a 4-item self-report measure developed to assess an individual's overall happiness as measured through self-evaluation (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999).
- The-Meaning-In-Life-Questionnaire (MLQ) is a 10-item measure and 7-point Likert-type scale of the (1) Presence of Meaning - how much respondents feel their lives have meaning), and (2) Search for Meaning - how much respondents strive to find meaning and understanding in their lives (Steger, M. F., Frazier, P., Oishi, S., & Kaler, M.,2006).
- Maslach Burnout Scale (MBI), 22 item scale focusses on three core dimensions emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (Maslach, C., Jackson, S. E., & Leiter, M. P., 1996).

RESULTS

About 45 % participants of the study reported no stress, 30.5% reported acute stress and 24.5% reported chronic stress. among the job function 28% of the participants are from design and development 44% of participants are from architecture/ technology, 41 % of respondent were pair from management and delivery. 32% of the group were from sales support and operations. and 6% from top management. with respect to job role 21.2% were reported from process and support, 24.5% management, 31.8% architecture, 17.2% delivery and 5.3 COO (Chief operating officer). The bar graph below (figure 3) shows the percent of respondents with respect to job role and function. The observed Happiness of the group mean is 14.13 with a SD of 2.21, Meaning of Life group mean is 34.12 with an SD of 6.11 and for Burnout the group mean is 57.46 with a SD of 9.60.

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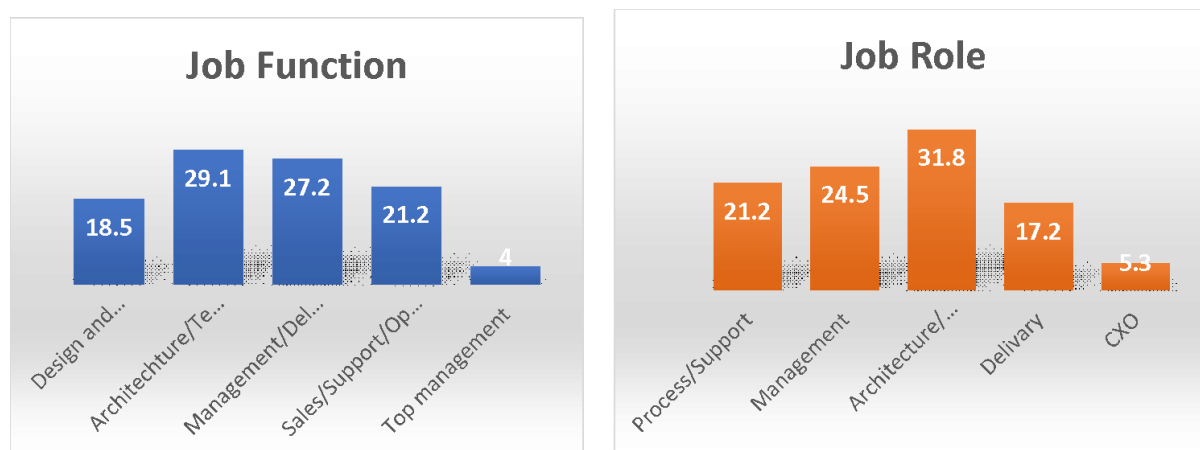


Figure 3: Showing % of respondents w.r.t job role and function (N=151).

H1: There is no statistically significant association between perceived stress and levels of happiness and meaning in life among mid-career IT professionals.

A chi-square test of independence was computed to examine the association between perceived stress, happiness and meaning of life among mid aged IT professionals (see table 1). The association between these variables was significant. For Perceived Stress we observed χ^2 . (2, N = 151) = 10.10, $p = .006$, for Happiness χ^2 . (10, N = 151) = 138.86, $p = .000$ and meaning of life is χ^2 . (23, N = 151) = 68.497, $p = .000$. Since the p value is less than the 0.05 the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is a significant relationship between typed of perceive stress (Acute & Chronic) with levels of happiness and meaning of life. It can be concluded that level of perceived stress of the respondents did play an important role in experiencing happiness and meaning of life the respondents.

Table 1: Showing the results of Chi-square test of Independence (N=151)

	Value	df	p value
Perceived Stress	10.106 ^a	2	.006
Happiness	138.861 ^b	10	.000
Meaning of Life	68.497 ^c	23	.000

H2: There is no statistically significant relationship between job role and levels of happiness and meaning in life among mid-career IT professionals.

Table 2: Showing the results of Chi-square test of Independence for Job role (N=151)

	Chi-Square	df	p value
Job Role	29.033 ^d	4	.000
Happiness	138.861 ^a	10	.000
Meaning of Life	68.497 ^b	23	.000

A chi-square test of independence was computed to examine the association between job role happiness and meaning of life among mid aged IT professionals (see table 2). The association between these variables was significant. For Job role we observed χ^2 . (4, N = 151) = 29.03, $p = .000$, for Happiness χ^2 . (10, N = 151) = 138.86, $p = .000$ and meaning of life is χ^2 . (23, N = 151) = 68.497, $p = .000$. Since the p value is less than the 0.05 the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is a significant relationship between type of Job

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role (*Process/Support, Management, Architecture/ Technology/ Consulting, Delivery and Chief operating officers*) and happiness, meaning of life and burnout level. It can be concluded that level of perceived stress of the respondents did play an important role in experiencing happiness and meaning of life by the respondents.

H3: There is no statistically significant relationship between job function and levels of happiness and meaning in life among mid-career IT professionals.

Table 3: Showing the results of Chi-square test of Independence for Job function (N=151)

	Chi-Square	df	p value
Job Functions	29.828 ^d	4	.000
Happiness	138.861 ^a	10	.000
Meaning of Life	68.497 ^b	23	.000

A chi-square test of independence was computed to examine the association between job function happiness and meaning of life among mid aged IT professionals (Table 3). The association between these variables was significant. For Job function we observed χ^2 . (4, N = 151) = 29.82, $p = .000$, for Happiness χ^2 . (10, N = 151) = 138.86, $p = .000$ and meaning of life is χ^2 . (23, N = 151) = 68.497, $p = .000$. Since the p value is less than the 0.05 the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is significant relationship between type of Job function (Design & Development, Consulting, Management, and Sales/Support/Operations) and happiness, meaning of life and burnout level. It can be concluded that level of perceived stress of the respondents did play an important role in experiencing happiness and meaning of life among the respondents.

H4: There is no statistically significant difference based on gender in the perception of happiness and meaning in life among mid-career IT professionals.

Table 4: Showing the results of Man Whitney test (N=151)

DV	Group	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	p value
Happiness	Male	68.32	6012.00	2096.000	.009
	Female	86.73	5464.00		
Meaning of Life	Male	88.31	7771.00	1689.000	.000
	Female	58.81	3705.00		
Burn out	Male	83.51	7349.00	1689.000	.013
	Female	65.51	4127.00		

To determine differences between two independent groups of male and female middle aged IT professionals, Mann Whitney test was used. A Mann-Whitney test indicated that the level of Female IT middle aged professionals (mean rank = 86.73) perceived more happiness compared male IT middle aged professionals (mean rank = 68.32). Male IT middle aged professionals (mean rank = 88.31) perceive more Meaningfulness of life compared to Female IT middle aged professionals (mean rank = 58.81). At the end Male IT middle aged professionals (mean rank = 83.51) perceive more Burnout of life compared to Female IT Professionals (mean rank = 65.51) Since the observed value is less than 0.05 level, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant difference between **gender** in perceiving the **happiness, meaning of life and burnout level**.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore the complex relationships between perceived stress, happiness, and meaning in life within the context of mid-career IT professionals. Our findings provide strong evidence against all four null hypotheses, suggesting significant associations between perceived stress and key indicators of well-being, as well as the moderating role of job role, function, and gender.

Perceived Stress and Well-being

The significant association between perceived stress and both happiness and meaning in life aligns with earlier findings that stress, especially in high-demand sectors such as IT, negatively impacts psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2018). This is particularly relevant for professionals in the mid-career phase, a period characterized by increased job demands, leadership responsibilities, and personal life transitions (Super, 1980). Prior research also corroborates that stress adversely affects work engagement and subjective well-being among IT professionals (Omar & Noordin, 2015). Moreover, literature suggests that chronic stress is a key contributor to burnout, which in turn is inversely related to perceived happiness (Maslach et al., 2001).

A 2024 global survey revealed that 82% of tech employees reported at least some degree of burnout, with women disproportionately affected (Gromyko, 2024). Similarly, Michels et al. (2024) found that psychological distress among software engineers significantly reduced their subjective well-being, especially under prolonged role ambiguity. Furthermore, perceived stress has been found to negatively influence self-evaluated happiness and purpose in life, echoing earlier theoretical frameworks and recent empirical evidence (Martinez Montes et al., 2025; Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2018). These results suggest the necessity for organizations to provide targeted resilience-building initiatives for professionals at this career stage.

Job Role and Function

Results indicate that job role and function significantly affect how IT professionals perceive their happiness and meaning in life. This aligns with studies showing that mid-career work responsibilities, especially those involving leadership, delivery, and architecture roles, can enhance or diminish one's sense of purpose depending on role clarity and resource availability (Wu & Tsay, 2018). Teachers, for example, reported job satisfaction but were vulnerable to emotional exhaustion due to increased responsibilities in mid-career (Shin et al., 2021). These findings underline the importance of aligning job responsibilities with individual coping resources to enhance well-being.

Results align with Hug (2025), who argues that many mid-career professionals face "expertise paralysis," where increasing technical demands are met with declining motivation and reward structures. In high-skill domains like IT, such role mismatches often contribute to lower engagement and purpose. According to Ruparel et al. (2025), employees equipped with stronger mental resilience and social support systems report lower levels of burnout and greater well-being. Therefore, it is crucial for organizations to match employees' job roles and functions with adequate autonomy, recognition, and coping resources (Maslach et al., 2001; Wu & Tsay, 2018).

Financial Stress and Midlife Challenges

Midlife is also a period of intense financial and familial responsibility, which may contribute to psychological stress. As proposed by Lachman (2004), this life stage is marked by

balancing multiple roles—parenting, elder care, career advancement, and financial planning. These multidimensional demands could partially explain the elevated stress levels and the need for interventions such as wellness coaching and mentoring programs tailored for this demographic.

The results indicate that there is potential stress from the job environment, the job role and function is perceived as presenting demand for the IT employees, the substantial difference in the rewards or resources to meet the job demands need to be further explored in future studies. The mid adulthood group must plan their finances to meet the requirements of both elder and younger generations as well as their needs. They must plan for their future expenses. Usually, people at this stage would be planning to have house or vehicle. They must plan for the active income as well as the passive income. They will be undergoing lots of financial stress and pressures as well. Approaching midlife can mean many things: Greater stability at home or upheaval from divorce; shifting careers or hitting peak earning years; preparing for retirement while still feeling far from ready to leave the workforce.

Interestingly, the 2025 World Happiness Report (Short, 2025) concluded that workplace factors such as empathy, fairness, and opportunities for connection predict employee well-being better than salary. This finding underscores the importance of moving beyond compensation as the sole driver of employee satisfaction, especially in knowledge-intensive industries like IT.

Gender Differences

Interestingly, the study reveals that female IT professionals reported higher levels of happiness but lower levels of meaning in life compared to their male counterparts. These results resonate with mixed findings in the literature. For instance, Inglehart (2002) found that younger women reported higher life satisfaction than men, whereas older women showed the opposite trend. This may suggest that female professionals face unique psychosocial stressors in midlife, potentially shaped by biological, social, and workplace factors (Allahverdipour et al., 2021). The lower perception of meaningfulness among mid-career women also mirrors earlier studies highlighting their increased vulnerability to reduced psychological well-being in middle age (Bhattacharya & Basu, 2007).

Data from the Wellbeing Research Centre at Oxford (2024) highlight that gender disparities in well-being have widened globally, with women more likely to face emotional exhaustion due to invisible labor and role overload (Haring et al., 1984; Allahverdipour et al., 2021). Female professionals, especially in tech, also report decreased meaning in life when role demands conflict with caregiving responsibilities or when facing workplace inequities (Bhattacharya & Basu, 2007; Le Monde, 2024).

It interesting to observe from the results that the Meaningfulness of life among Female IT middle aged professionals was less compared to male. This might be attributed the biological and psychosocial changes due to aging. In a cross-sectional study on psychological wellbeing and happiness among middle aged women from Tabriz found that 55.7% of women had low levels of psychological wellbeing with low level of happiness (Allahverdipour, H., et al., 2021). The lower levels of meaning of life among middle-aged female IT professionals draws attention for future research to explore role of work environmental, psychosocial factors and mental health factors influencing the meaningfulness of life.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the relationship between perceived stress, happiness, and meaning in life among mid-career IT professionals, along with the influence of job role, job function, and gender. The findings provide compelling evidence that perceived stress significantly impacts both subjective happiness and meaning in life. Furthermore, job-related characteristics—such as role and function—demonstrated strong associations with well-being outcomes, while gender differences revealed nuanced trends, particularly in the perception of life meaning and burnout.

The results highlights the psychological vulnerabilities of mid-career professionals in the IT sector, a group often facing complex job demands, professional stagnation, and financial and familial pressures. As the digital workplace evolves, midlife professionals navigate increasingly hybrid, performance-intensive roles that can challenge personal well-being. The observed gender differences, especially the lower levels of meaning in life among women despite higher happiness, call attention to the compounded effects of gendered expectations and workplace inequalities.

From a practical standpoint, the study highlights the urgent need for tailored mental health interventions, flexible role structuring, and resilience-building programs within IT organizations. Fostering supportive, empathetic, and gender-sensitive work environments may mitigate the psychological toll of mid-career stress. Organizational practices such as coaching, job redesign, and inclusive succession planning can play a pivotal role in enhancing employee meaning and satisfaction.

Future research should adopt longitudinal and cross-cultural methodologies to examine how stress, identity, and meaning evolve over the career lifecycle. Moreover, integrating qualitative insights could further contextualize how individual and organizational values shape well-being outcomes in knowledge-based industries.

In conclusion, understanding and supporting the emotional and existential needs of mid-career IT professionals is not just a matter of productivity—it is a commitment to sustainable, human-centered workplace practices.

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Conflict of Interest

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