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HAPPINESS: AN EVER DESIRED CONCEPT OF LIFE DESERVING RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Happiness is the mental state of wellbeing characterized by positive or pleasant emotions, ranging from contentment to intense joy (Wordnet3.0, 2012). It is defined in a variety of terms: psychological, religious, philosophical, biological, and economical terms. According to philosophers and religious thinkers, happiness is a good living rather than simply an emotion. Biologists define it as "biohappiness" in which biological methods such as germ line engineering or medicines are utilized to raise the baseline level of happiness in health and human achievement (Mark Alan Walker, 2006; Ronald Bailey, 2007). Psychologists relate the happiness to the positive energy attained. Economists assess the public happiness in terms of traditional economic measures such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP). In general, richer nations are happier than poorer nations, but this effect appears to diminish with wealth (Bruno and Stutzer, 2001). This is explained by the dependency between wealth and happiness and the relationship is not linear but logarithmic. In other words, the same per cent increase in the GNP produces the same increase in happiness for wealthy countries as for poor countries (Hagerty, 2003; Wilkinson, 2007; David, 2008; Stevenson, 2008).Thus happiness is an essential purpose of human life, a good predictor of human wellbeing and overall life satisfaction, wanting much more research for its improvement. This paper reviews the research status of happiness studies.

Research on happiness

Apart from our ancient religious and philosophical views of happiness, many research on happiness is of recent origin, as evident by the works of Veenhoven (1993), Joseph and Lewis (1998), Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), Easterlin (2001), Diener *et al.*(2002), Mahon *et al.* (2005), Kahneman and Riis (2005), Yu and

Weng, (2006), Layard (2006), Borghesi and Vercelli (2007), Graham (2008) and Selim (2008). In general, there is a strong statistical association between happiness and wellbeing of human being (Kahneman and Riis, 2005). Many attempts have been made to quantify the concept of happiness.

Andrews and Withey (1976) were the first to develop scales for measuring happiness of respondents to rate their impressions ranging from very negative to very positive. Further, several measures have been developed. One such method is the day reconstruction method, in which the memories of the previous working day are recollected by writing a short diary (Kahneman and Riis, 2005). Yet another method is using the Depression-Happiness Scale consisting of a 25-item statistically self-report scale designed to measure depression and happiness (Joseph and Lewis, 1998). In other method, happiness of individuals is measured based on his/her impressions in politics, economy, society, natural environment and spiritual life. In this method, there are 25 indicators, divided into five levels: (1) Sense of richness (2) Sense of stability (3) Sense of expectation (4) Sense of joy and (5) Endocentric sense. All the indicators are weighted to arrive at an indicator of overall happiness for a given population (Yu and Weng, 2006).

Happiness Index is used for measuring satisfaction of the citizens of a country and as a numerical measure of the Gross National Happiness (GNH). This term of Gross National Happiness (GNH) was coined by the former king of Bhutan King Jigme Singye Wangchuck in 1972. The first world map of happiness has been developed by Adrian White in 2006, after analyzing the data of UNESCO, the CIA, the New Economics Foundation, the WHO, the Veenhoven Database, the Latin barometer, the Afro barometer, and the UNHDR.

Components of happiness

The major components of GNH are the promotion of sustainable development, preservation and promotion of cultural values, conservation of the natural environment, and establishment of good governance. There are seven components of wellness that determine GNH: (1) economic, (2) environmental, (3) physical, (4) mental, (5) workplace, (6) social and (7) political wellnesses (Med Yones, 2006). These are measured through direct survey and statistical measurements. Economic wellness is measured by consumer debt, average income to consumer price index ratio

and income distribution. Environmental wellness is attributed to pollution, noise and traffic. Physical wellness is related to physical health metrics such as severe illnesses. Mental health is measured by mental health metrics such as usage of antidepressants and rise or decline of psychotherapy patients. Workplace wellness is measured by labour metrics such as jobless claims, job change, workplace complaints and lawsuits. Social wellness is determined by social metrics such as discrimination, safety, divorce rates, complaints of domestic conflicts and family lawsuits, public lawsuits, crime rates. Political wellness is measured by political metrics such as the quality of local democracy, individual freedom, and foreign conflicts.

Based on the components of GNH, Bhattacharjee and Bhattcharjee (2010) have used five indicators to measure happiness at work place in particular for college teachers. The measures used are (1) Economic wellness, (2) Environmental wellness, (3) Infrastructural wellness, (4) Social and academic wellness and (5) Democratic wellness. Economic wellness is related to salary, workload, perks, promotion, stability etc. Environmental wellness is pertaining to the working environment provided by the employer and relationship with colleagues at workplace. Infrastructural Wellness is related to physical facilities at work place, position of the institute etc. Social and academic wellness is the attitude of the society towards the profession, academic independence provided at work place. Democratic Wellness is the role in students or curriculum related administrative issues, approachability of the seniors, etc.

Problems and prospects in happiness research

Use of happiness index for measuring wellbeing of the citizens of a country is a well known technique. Such a technique with some changes is used for measuring the happiness of employees at their work place. This attempt is only scattered and not very frequent. The measurement varies with different professional sections of the people. Therefore, different indices and methods are available and there is no universal model is available. There is a scope to develop a common or universal model for considering various measures of different sections of employees in assessment of happiness which is a task deserves much more research.

According to British Broadcasting Corporation, the general public opinion is that the government should focus on making the people happier rather than wealthier. Wealth alone cannot and will not bestow total happiness. A combination of internal

and external factors of an individual will determine the happiness. The measurement of happiness should consider both the factors in a balanced manner.

While considering the components of happiness index, weighting should be provided differently according to the importance of the particular component. In the presently available methods, the drawback is that the simple average of weighting will give equal importance to all the different components of happiness and this may not be a very practical thing. There are different method of weighting available, such as consulting of experts, Iyengar and Sudarshan method (1982), Vidwans method (1983) but a new method of weighting using a constant sum scale is to be developed, similar to that is popular amongst market researchers (Malhotra and Dash, 2009).

Concluding remarks

Happiness is an essential requisite of human life, but largely ignored for research. Happiness index is used to measure the satisfaction of the citizens of a country and there is increasing political interest in using measures of happiness as a national indicator in supplementation with measures of wealth. Human development is much more important than economic development, but happiness index is much more essential than job satisfaction of employees. The happiness index is not very frequently attempted as a tool for measuring the happiness of employees in an organization. As the happiness measures vary with different groups of employees. Future research should try to develop methods for different professions, especially in fast exploding industries such as information technology, in consultation with stakeholders, experts and statistical methods. Such methods of measuring the happiness index should be simple, reliable and efficient for application. This would help in developing strategies for augmenting happiness and performance leading to excellence in human resource development.

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