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# Organizational Happiness Index (OHI): Conceptualization and Operationalization of Measurement among Employees in Services Industry

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## ABSTRACT

*The issue of happiness in organization has been debated among academicians, practitioners, and policy makers nowadays. This is because the concept of happiness is very likely to help guide progress towards sustainable development. Whereas sustainable development entails all parties especially public and private organizations to balance economic, social and environmental objectives in a holistic manner. When organizations pursue economic wealth in a lopsided manner, overriding social and environmental objectives, the results often negatively impact human well-being inside and outside organizations such as employees, customers and communities. Therefore, there is a strong need for organizations to ensure the sustainability of their development by understanding the level of happiness of their workers. However, evaluating happiness could be inconclusive since available measurements were one-dimensional and non-academically validated. Hence, the objective of this study is to propose a systematic measurement of organizational happiness index that is conceptualized using 3-dimensional Authentic Happiness theory which to be operationalized in service industries settings as these industries employ substantial number of human resources. This study also aims to quantitatively produce the index for each participating service organization besides analyzing the identified research framework using structural equation modeling, where studies emphasizing such an approach are relatively scarce.*

**Keywords:** *happiness, work-life balance, well-being, job satisfaction*

# INTRODUCTION

Happiness is increasingly considered a proper measure of social progress and a goal of public policy. Following the historic resolution by the United Nation Assembly initiated by the Prime Minister of Bhutan, the first ever World Happiness Report in 2012 was published and many countries began to realize the importance of measuring people's happiness using Gross National Happiness (GNH) index instead of just referring to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or Gross National Income (GNI) indices towards ascertaining a sustainable development. The GNH index is measured using 9-core domains i.e., psychological well-being, health, time use, education, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standard. As per the third World Happiness Report in 2015, Malaysia is currently ranked in 61st place with index of 5.770 out of 10, hence indicating that Malaysians are on average in the middle, between happy and not happy.

The knowledge of happiness is very important as to enable sustainable development of human capital. Nevertheless in organizational settings, there were no universal indices in measuring happiness especially among employees. At present, many organizations simply measure their employees happiness using unidimensional measurement e.g. Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1997) or by engaging non-theoretically driven scales by various consultants (Paco & Nave, 2013). Only recently the five-dimensional Happy Workplace Index (HWI) developed by Kaeodumkoeng (2012) was introduced notwithstanding the lack in the theoretical model and the lack of sound empirical guidance. Therefore, this study aims to fill these voids by developing an Organizational Happiness Index (OHI) through a theory-driven conceptualization and operationalization modes among employees in service industries of Malaysia. Hence, the research objectives for the study are to propose the Organizational Happiness Index as a theoretically driven measurement to benchmark employee happiness and to validate the measurement of Organizational Happiness Index based on 3-domains of job satisfaction, satisfaction with work-life balance, and employee well-being in a context of services industry.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## What is Happiness?

Everybody in this world would certainly agree that happiness is essential in life and consideration of what contributes to happiness is very worthwhile pursuit. Abraham Lincoln very astutely said that 'most people are as happy as they let themselves be'. This recognizes that there is an individual propensity to a certain level of happiness, however positive psychologists would argue that happiness is not hardwired – only about 25% as opposed to 40-60% for most hereditary traits. Rather it is malleable and can change with context. This makes it a particularly important issue for organizations. In the organizational context, often money or material wealth are given considerable 'air-time'. Yet wealth and material benefits aren't always a key to happiness; for example it has been shown that lottery winners are happy in the short term, but after a little while their happiness levels revert back to the norm. In fact, research suggests that happiness levels have remained virtually the same in industrialized countries since World War II, despite incomes rising considerably. So, despite growth in GDP and economic prosperity, general levels of happiness have tended to remain stable.

## Do We Really Want to Measure Happiness?

The benefits of doing this are quite clear for managers. First of all, it provides an index of how well things are going within the organizational context. The ability for an organization to track well-being over time is a very useful litmus test of the 'climate' and the success of policies and practices. And this impacts substantially on organizational performance. There is no one key to happiness or life satisfaction, but rather a recipe that includes a number of ingredients. So some of the key ingredients which can be impacted by organizations are how much individuals enjoy their work, whether it is paid or unpaid, and whether they feel that it is meaningful and important. These aspects contribute to life satisfaction. On the contrary if work is going poorly because of bad circumstances or a poor fit with a person's strengths, life satisfaction can be lowered. Another key ingredient to happiness is social relationships, making supportive work colleagues and

managers important. It is also important to have goals that are in synchrony with personal values, and to be able to make progress toward those goals.

## So, What Makes for Happiness?

Managers need to look at the ingredients within the recipe to address well-being and happiness in an organization. The organizational context has a number of major elements where policies and practices can be put in place to support satisfaction and development in individual employees. We have known for quite some time that within the organizational context there needs to be a focus on elements such as organizational climate, the philosophy and ethos of the organization. Another aspect would be social relationships and how supportive management is. Yet another would be, for example, how supported the individual feels in achieving their career and work aspirations, with such measures as training and development and career support. In an organizational context, there are issues other than money which must be given consideration in supporting well-being, and are major constituents of the recipe for happiness.

Recent research indicated that the work environment, company culture and workplace morale were the most important factors for New Zealand office-goers, while salary is one of the least significant of all. Aspects such as how supported they feel, how positive the organizational climate is and the support network and policies and practices within the organization are more important than purely finance and salary. So ensuring as far as possible good person-organization fit, person-job fit and job matching, training and development provision, career management, performance management, a healthy and safe work environment and good communication are significant contributory factors to both organizational and individual well-being.

At present, many organizations simply measure their employee happiness using unidimensional measurement e.g. Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) [1] or by engaging non-theoretically driven scales by various consultants (Paco & Nave, 2013). Only recently the five-dimensional Happy Workplace Index (HWI) developed by Kaeodumkoeng (2012) was introduced notwithstanding the scarcity in theoretical models and sound empirical guidance. The model of Happy Workplace Index (HWI) is as per Figure 1.
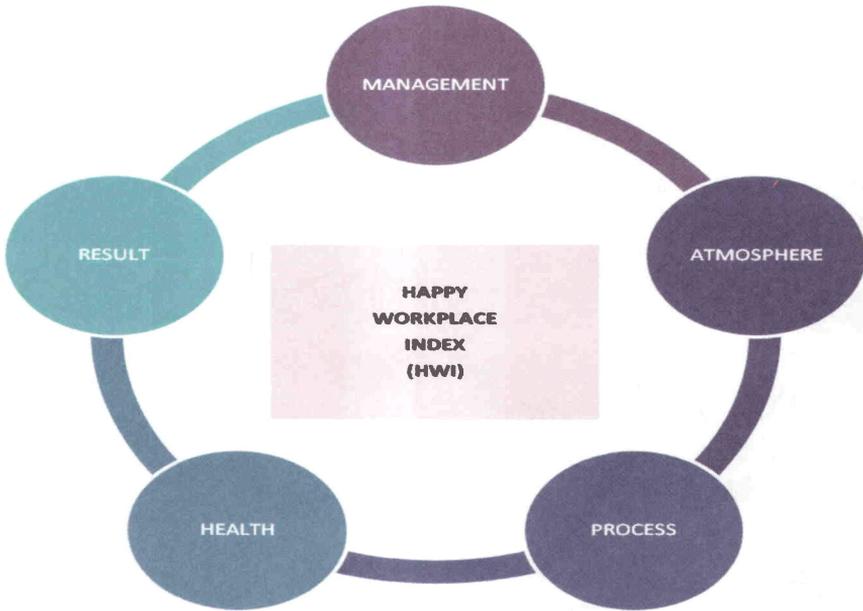
**Figure 1: Happy Workplace Index (Source: Sinjindawong et al., 2012)**

## How to Theoretically Measure Happiness in Organizational Settings?

Based on Authentic Happiness theory by Seligman (2002), the concept of happiness is derived from three distinct domains; the Pleasant Life (Hedonism's sense), The Good Life (Desire's sense), and the Meaningful Life (Objective List's sense). This theory conceptualized happiness as in the general life of human beings. By inferring this theory into organizational setting particularly towards individual employee view, the state of happiness in terms of pleasant could be implied as satisfaction with the balance between his or her work and life interfaces and this balance could be conceptualized based on three dimensions of time, strain, and behavior (Omar, 2013). On the other hand, the state of happiness in terms of good as per an employee's view could be implied as satisfaction with job that could be measured using nine dimensions i.e. satisfaction with pay, promotion, supervision, benefits, rewards, operating procedures, coworkers, nature of work, and communication (Spector, 1985). Finally, the state of happiness

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in terms of meaningful could be implied as a contentment of well-being that is affectively and cognitively achieved by an employee. According to Paschoal and Tamayo (2008), well-being at work could be measured three-dimensionally i.e. positive affect, negative affect, and fulfillment. In summary, relying on the underpinning theory of Authentic Happiness, the three-domain measurement of Organizational Happiness Index (OHI) is proposed as shown in Figure 2.
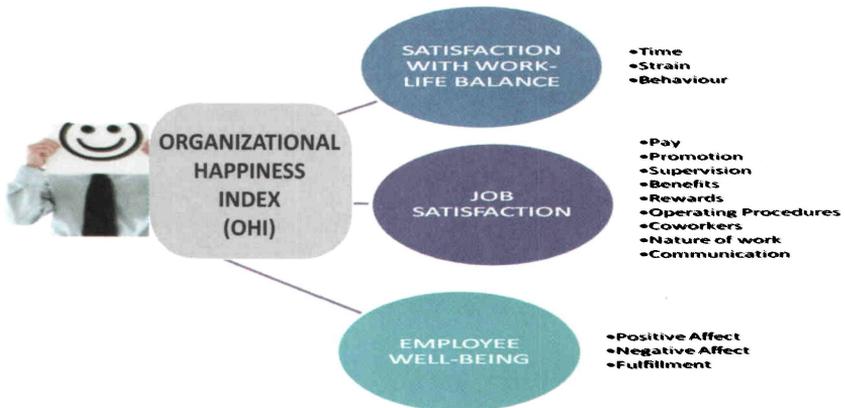


**Figure 2: Organizational Happiness Index**

## Job Satisfaction

Many employment and human related studies include job satisfaction as predictor or outcome as well as moderator or mediator in their studies. Hence, job satisfaction is one of the most studied concepts in organisational behavioural studies. In general, job satisfaction is defined as "the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job as achieving or facilitating one's job values" (Locke, 1969, p. 316). It has also been commonly defined as an attitudinal evaluative judgment of one's job or job experiences (Ilies, Wilson & Wagner, 2009). Conclusively, job satisfaction is a positive attitude deriving from favourable emotional or affective feeling to a job situation inclusive of its certain characteristics, and often inferred by how well outcomes meet expectations.

Another study by Burke, Burgess, and Oberrlaid (2004) found positive associations between job satisfaction and balance value between work

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and personal life. In addition, Virick, Lily, and Casper's (2007) found that based on structural equation modelling, work-life balance (i.e. adapted Hill, Hawkins, Ferris & Weitzman's (2001) work-family balance scale) is positively related to job satisfaction. Jang, Park and Zippay's (2011) study added to the evidence regarding the positive relationship between the availability of scheduling control and work-life balance policies on the one hand, and job satisfaction and mental well-being, on the other.

## Satisfaction with Work-Life Balance

The balance between work and non-work lives has been the subject of debate among academicians, practitioners, and policy makers over the past two decades. This is because significant changes in the demographics in modern societies have blurred the boundary and the interactions between work and other life's interests (Dash, Anand & Gangadharan, 2012). Furthermore, there are increasing number of working mothers, students, dual-career couples, single parents, and older workers in the employment pool. They demanded greater flexible working arrangements, thus making work-life balance a vital tool in today's employment relationships (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). In addition, more employees are bringing their work to home, hence blurring the borders between work and non-work life (Hill, Miller, Weiner & Coleman, 1998). Technological advancement had also assisted or deterred work-life balance by making work more available at all times, day and night, and in terms of facilitating a more flexible method as to when and where to work (Dash et al., 2012). In all, work-life balance has at all times been an apprehension for those concerned in the working life quality and its relation to a broader quality of life (Guest, 2004).

The phrase 'work-life balance' consists of two conjoining requisites; 'work-life' and 'balance'. The first term of 'work-life' encompasses a broad assortment of diverse constructs that include the nexus between paid work and other non-work activities which can be referred to as 'life' (Chang, McDonald, & Burton, 2010). This 'work-life' is a broader concept that extends the past studies of 'work-family' with the inclusion of all other life's interests or activities other than family such as leisure, study, recreation, travel, social, community and hobbies. Hence, it reflects the desires of employees with and without families, spouses, children, parents, or other

home's needs (Chang et al., 2010). The second term of 'balance' is defined as harmony or equilibrium between two domains, e.g. work and non-work (Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006). This 'balance' was also commonly referred to as the opposite continuum of 'conflict', although there were scarce studies to prove this contention (Valcour, 2007).

Taken together, work-life balance is a state of equilibrium in which the demands of both a person's job and personal life are equal. Frame and Hartog (2003) defined work–life balance as "...achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains," and as they pointed out, "to do so requires personal resources such as energy, time, and commitment be well distributed across domains" (p. 81). In other words, work-life balance involves having satisfactory feelings for all experiences: combining paid work with all other non-work responsibilities or aspirations such as family, friends, hobbies, art, travelling, studies, community, personal, and leisure pursuits (Moore, 2007).

The concept of work-life balance is also a lot broader in the sense that it is applicable to all employees, irrespective of marital or parental status so that they can experience an effective juggling act between their career and private lives (Dash et al., 2012). Virick, Lilly, and Casper (2007) suggested that work-life balance is achieved when employees exhibit a comparable deal of time and commitment to work and non-work domains and have the ability to fulfil both responsibilities. On the other hand, Moore (2007) in a two-year-long ethnographic study of an Anglo-German automobile factory explained that defining the "balance" in work-life is subjective and unique to each individual as individuals are themselves unique.

Attesting to the importance of work–life balance research is the increasing prevalence of the phenomenon. Employees are working a greater number of hours than ever before, and there are an increasing number in the workforce who are in some form of alternative work arrangements, such as flexitime, part-time, rotating shift, compressed work week, or telecommuting (Nelson & Tarpey, 2010). Hence, it is both practically and theoretically important to delineate factors that determine the influencing factors and the true effects of particular work-life balance initiatives. Roberts (2007) who conducted a study in the United Kingdom described that work-life balance is becoming important to both men and women irrespective of working standards or non-standard employment (since the publication of Juliet Schor's book of The Overworked American in 1991).

Only after the mid 2000s, the study of work-life balance had evolved as an extension of work-family balance that converged from an overwhelmingly concentrated conflict perspective of work-family interactions towards the positive participation of work and home. However, operationalization of a work-life balance concept, which includes all non-work activities other than family only, has yet to be completely established (Chang et al., 2010). In addition, most studies conceptualise positive reciprocal relationships into different terms and do not comprehensively operationalize the construct as a whole (Butler, Grzywacz, Bass & Linney, 2005). Hence, this study is intended to address the scarcity of empirically verified conceptualization and operationalization of recently established study of work-life balance, by extending the studies of work-family balance studies with the incorporation of other non-work's interest apart from family only.

As not many available theoretically-developed measures were introduced by work-life balance scholars, this study is making reference to the study of Valcour (2007) who conceptualised work-family balance as satisfaction with work-family balance. Valcour's (2007) concept of satisfaction with work-family balance was an overall level of contentment resulting from an assessment of one's degree of success at meeting work and family role demands. In Valcour's (2007) study using hierarchical regression analysis, the unifying construct of satisfaction with work-family balance, was operationalized among full-timers. She found that satisfaction with work-family balance was negatively predicted by work hours and also positively related with perceived control of work hours.

In this study, the newly developed construct of satisfaction with work-family balance by Omar (2013) is adapted through slight adjustments in the measurements by rewarding the items from 'family' to 'life' to entail other non-work interests, not necessarily family only. The similar action was done by Waumsley, Houston, and Marks (2010) in their study assessing work-life and life-work conflict adapted from Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian's (1996) existing measures of work-family and family-work conflict. Consequently, the adapted construct of satisfaction with work-family balance was renamed as satisfaction with work-life balance. Based on Valcour's (2007) study, the construct was measured by seven items including the assessment of three major forms of psychological considerations of work and non-work interactions; time, strain, and behaviour, as suggested by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985).

There were also various reasons indicating why this construct is considered the most suitable construct in assessing an employee's work-life balance, overcoming inconsistent conseptualization, weak measurement and operationalization, and discrepant findings of the past studies. This is because the construct is considered unique and holistic as it consisted of both, the cognitive and an affective component. This was in terms of overall psychological contentment and perceived favourable feelings of all assessed dimensions (Hart, 1999). Other than that, this construct is deemed unitary in the nomological network since it was not centred upon conflict, or positive interactions between two interfaces, and not based on cross-domain transfer processes, such as spillover, enrichment, enhancement or facilitation. Furthermore, it does not imply directionality from work to life or from life to work, as well as not only offering a global perception.

## Employee Well-being

Properly diagnosed the perceptions of well-being at work and identify the major antecedents consist of relevant issues from both managerial and academic standpoints. It is known that the advancement of knowledge about a phenomenon depends on valid and reliable measuring instruments. Although well-being has received consistent attention from social and organizational researchers (Warr, 2007), the main theoretical proposals and measures focus on general well-being and do not include the well-being in specific contexts, such as at work (Diener, Emmons, Griifn, & Larsen, 1985; Waterman et al., 2010; Watson, Clark & Tellegen 1988). When investigated in the work context, well-being tends to be assessed by the absence of negative experiences (Luthans, 2002). Moreover, the existence of two main perspectives in the study of well-being, hedonic (affective) and perceptions of fulfillment and personal accomplishment (cognitive), favor the dichotomy between such experiences (Fave, Brdar, Freire, Vella-Brodrick & Wissing, 2011). Studies and measures tend to focus on one or another element of well-being, failing to include important dimensions to its understanding.

As a result of the general well-being studies, the organizational literature has started to define and operationalize the well-being at work in either affective or cognitive end fulfillment terms. Authors who adopt an effective approach dealing with the well-being as a cumulative experience of affect at work, define the phenomenon in terms of emotions and moods

of the worker (Daniels, 2000). The well-being is higher the more frequent and intense are the positive emotions and the more they prevail over the negative affect of the worker. Affect at work refers to the moods and discrete emotions experienced by the worker (Brief & Weiss, 2002). A more cognitive approach of well-being, in turn, emphasizes the experiences of fulfillment and expression of individual potential (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 1993). In the same vein, Van Horn, Taris, and Schaufelli Scheurs (2004) argue that well-being at work extrapolates the affective dimension. According to Van Horn et al. (2004), well-being at work is the positive evaluation of various job characteristics comprising emotional, motivational, behavioral, cognitive and psychosomatic aspects.

As to validate the proposed measurement of Organizational Happiness Index, this study hypothesizes the significant relationships among the three domains, where a partial mediation framework using structural equation modeling is developed considering job satisfaction, satisfaction with work-life balance, and employee well-being as shown in Figure 3.
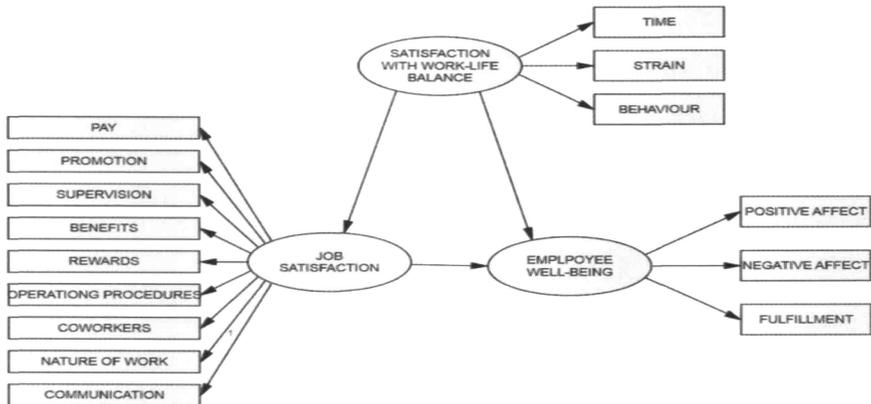


**Figure 3: Partial Mediation Framework of Job Satisfaction, Satisfaction with Work-life Balance and Employee Well-being**

## METHODOLOGY

The study will be conducted quantitatively using a standardized questionnaire. The targeted population is employees of the services industry in Malaysia. Therefore, the unit of analysis is individual employees working

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in service organizations in Malaysia. However, this study targets two representatives of the service industry i.e. education and healthcare. A few organizations (public and/or private) in the Klang Valley, Malaysia will be invited to participate voluntarily. Hence, using purposive sampling method, this study aims to collect a minimum sample of 300 employees so that the data could be analyzed using structural equation modeling.

The measures of job satisfaction, satisfaction with work-life balance, and employee well-being will all be adapted from prominent scholars (Spector, 1985; Omar, 2013; Paschoal & Tamayo, 2008). The collected data will be analyzed using SPSS and AMOS software, thus an exploratory and confirmatory analysis as well as alternative mediation model analysis could be performed.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study are significant as they provide both practical and theoretical implications. From a practical standpoint, the result will provide information on the proposed measurement of Organizational Happiness Index. By validating the measurement that is theoretically conceptualized and operationalized among services industry employees, the index could be implemented as a benchmark to assess happiness level intra and inter-organization. By knowing this information, policy makers, practitioners and other relevant parties can work synergistically to design specific and structured interventions such as awareness campaign to promote happiness in Malaysia. The index could also be used as a reference to rank employers as the government is planning to ensure a sustainable development towards Vision 2020.

The finding of the study will contribute to the body of knowledge in terms of happiness and its measurement procedures. Hence this study shall fulfill the scarce in terms of theoretically driven multi-domains measurement. Apart from that, the finding of the study may allow the government and the industry to better understand the need to measure and maintain employee happiness so that a systematic assessment of sustainable development could be achieved.

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