

JOB SATISFACTION AND INDIVIDUAL HAPPINESS AMONG EMPLOYEES AT A PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

Employees are the most important asset of organisations. Making them happy with their workplace and the work itself will benefit not only the employees but also the organisations. Employee satisfaction is also based on their awareness of future development. Hence, this paper aims to determine the relationship between job satisfaction and five variables of pay, colleagues, management, nature of work and promotion toward individual happiness. Data were collected from 126 respondents from Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM), a public higher education institution in Malaysia using simple random sampling. Subsequently, the data were derived using SPSS Version 22.0. The findings indicated that there is a positive relationship between pay, colleague, management, nature of work, and promotion. Based on the results, the nature of work and promotion are the most important factors that influence employee happiness, thus leading to job satisfaction. Moreover, the result from the hypothesis test revealed that there is a significant relationship between pay, colleagues, management, nature of work, and promotion. These findings may guide the implementation of policies by human resources or other organisation management in a higher education institution. For instance, they may use job happiness (mental well-being) as a predictor of employee behaviours



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and then formulate recruitment policies that will help maintain employee happiness and satisfaction, thereby helping in employee retention.

Keywords: job satisfaction, job performance, individual happiness

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Life satisfaction refers to a judgemental and cognitive process (Diener, Emmons, & Larsan, 1985) in which people evaluate the quality of their lives based on a series of criteria, as the relationship between these two elements has been statistically proven in many significant ways (Abuhashesh, Al-Dmour, & Ed Masa'deh, 2019). Consequently, it is yet to be affirmed when it comes to the association between the happiness of workers and productivity in the workplace. The common consensus is that a happy employee will become a productive employee (Joo & Lee, 2017, Abualoush, Khaled, & Aladwan, 2017). Moreover, Maryam, Fathola, Mozhgan, and Ashraf (2017) mention that happiness and exhilaration are the most essential demands of human innate psychological needs that affect both physical and mental health.

Happiness is an inner state that is derived from human judgement and experience (Uchida & Oishi, 2016). The scholars believed that happiness is a collection of fun, a combination of maximum positive effects and the least negative emotion without pain. Happiness and vitality are the most essential human innate desires and psychological needs. So, happiness and its determinants have been considered as an important subject (Mehrdadi, Sadeghian, Direkvadmohgadam, & Hashemian, 2016).

This owes to the fact that engaged workers appear to have a greater level of motivation and demonstrate a greater level of involvement in their jobs and organisations (Shaffer, Reiche, Dimitroya, Lazarova, Chen, Westman, & Wurtz, 2016). These employees are also more productive and have a greater level of readiness in giving more than what they are supposed to in contributing to the survival and success of their organisations (Shaffer

et al., 2016; Obeidat, Abualoush, Irtaimah, Khaddam, & Bataineh, 2018). Job satisfaction is a key factor in employee engagement and will help in achieving small businesses' organisational objectives. Antecedents of work satisfaction and rewards influence the level of employee engagement (Sugandini, El Qadri, Kustiyadji, & Muafi, 2018). Factors such as good pay, colleagues, management, nature of work, and promotions have been identified (Fogaca & Antonio, 2016). Few studies investigated the association between employee happiness and performance through a rationale of the individual's level of income, job satisfaction, workplace, and environment. The premise upon which the research was built suggests that a high level of employee satisfaction at a workplace leads to improved performance (Bakan, Buyukbese, Ersahan, & Sezer, 2014). High levels of happiness and satisfaction among employees indicate high returns for the organisation (Adel Haddad, Ali Ameen, & Muaadh Mukred, 2018). Employee happiness and job satisfaction are important to any organisation and numerous studies have been conducted by several scholars, academicians, and management leaders.

In contrast, job and life dissatisfaction will influence individual happiness. Recent literature review of organisation behaviours revealed that the turnover rate of employees within organisations rose day by day. This trend may be attributed to organisations that focus more on profit and return rather than on the satisfaction amongst employees (Abdulbaqi Ameen & Ahmad, 2011). Malaysians ranked 4th in SEEK Asia research on employee job happiness that covers seven countries: Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam (Jobstreet, 2017). According to the World Happiness Report (2019), Malaysia was ranked the 80th happiest nation in 2019, a massive drop of 45 places compared to 2018 when Malaysia was ranked 35th place (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2019). Employee happiness in public organisations has not received much attention compared with studies of satisfaction, motivation, and organisational commitment. Moreover, Randstad Employer Brand Research Report (2017) also showed that Malaysian employees were planning to leave their companies in the coming six months, with around 35% looking for new career opportunities. The reasons why employees were planning to leave, with the third-largest factor in Malaysia was due to lack of appreciation from management. Indeed, management needs to be wary of the high risk of losing their staff by ensuring their employees get desired appreciation

and happiness at work. Nesreen, Siti, and Fadillah (2019) state that since the 2000s, special attention has been devoted to the study of employee happiness, such as its causes and relationship with other factors. A study by Judge, Weiss, Kammeyer, and Hulin (2017) proved that dissatisfied employees willingly try to escape duty, have a high level of absenteeism, and even when they are in the job, they try to hide away from it and do not think about organisational issues which negatively affect organisational productivity. Prior research in human resource and organisation behaviours endeavoured to test direct relationships between job satisfaction and employee performance and turnover intention (Fatah, Kamal Abdel, & Kamal Abdel Fatah, 2017). They found evidence of a positive relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance. Meanwhile, this study focuses on five factors that contribute to employee satisfaction in an organisation, namely, pay, colleagues, management, nature of work, and promotion as the independent variables and employee happiness as the dependent variable. Studies have also discussed the theories that underpinned job satisfaction. Considering Herzberg's inspiration hygiene theory on 1964, Mehrad (2020) highlighted about the theory, in which, satisfaction and dissatisfaction are two separate points in the working environment that relies on various factors. Maslow's (1943) Need Hierarchy Theory discusses the level of the human need that relates and reflects on satisfaction. These theories will support and strengthen the findings on the job satisfaction of staff. Mohamad Hasmi, Nasina, and Loganathan (2019) emphasize that although numerous studies have been carried out primarily in the West, rewards and work motivation among Western workers may be different from Eastern countries such as Malaysia. This is because there are differences in management patterns, organisational culture, technology development, economic status, and extensive political patterns as well as social and religious factors. Thus, this study aims to identify the relationship between job satisfaction and pay, colleagues, management, nature of work, and promotion toward individual happiness among employees at Universiti Teknikal Melaka Malaysia (UTEM).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Individual Happiness

Happiness has become one of the most talk subjects among academicians, practitioners, and even policymakers. Some may focus on happiness in terms of psychological and subjective well-being. Happiness at work is when a person enjoys what he or she is doing (Pangarso, 2019). Happiness frequently brings positive effects as well as an entire sense of whole life satisfaction (Rogala & Cieslak, 2019). Businesses need to employ workers who please their customers by using various methods, then reward and acknowledge their appropriate behaviour. A high level of happiness has also extended to workplace experience among employees (Mohammed & Mohammad, 2019). Over a decade, the concept of happiness and positivity at workplaces has gained significant importance, including job satisfaction, work engagement, work enjoyment, and positive emotions at work. Moreover, Alaarj and Mohamed (2017) highlight that employee happiness is achieved when there is a trusting culture, pride, and enjoyment in doing the work with other co-workers. It is supported by Abid and Barech (2017) who emphasize that the source of a trusting relationship between the employees and employers comes from respect, fair treatment, and credibility. According to Khosrojerdi, Tagharrobi, and Sharif (2018), happiness has different meanings, including momentary joy, long-term joy, and joy at total life. Happiness is perceived as among the most basic human needs, the most central motives for human efforts, and the most important strengths of human beings. It promotes creativity, helps individuals more easily attain their goals, improves decision-making ability, life satisfaction, and quality of life, alleviates negative emotions, promotes physical and mental health, and enables individuals to enjoy their lives. It also helps them achieve success in different aspects of life, such as working life and reduces job burnout, absence from work, and intention to leave their job.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is defined as a sense of fulfilment, gratification, or contentment that develops because of working in a specific job (Flora, Glascock, & Knight, 2017). It is an extent to which one feels positively

or negatively about the intrinsic and/or extrinsic aspects of one's job. The researchers claimed that job satisfaction is perceived as an emotional response to all the factors that the individual experiences in the place of employment. How satisfied an employee is with his or her job depends on their values and motives (Abdulwahab, 2016). Moreover, a study by Waleed, Ali, Osama, Gamal, and Ahmed (2019) found that job satisfaction has a significant positive effect on job performance, indicating that a higher salary is reasonable for the amount of work in the organisation, the supervisor praises people who do good work, relationships with other workers in this company are very good, and current job offers the right professional development opportunities to be effective in the job tasks, more employees perform well because they receive the recognition for their efforts and always reach the targets at work. The idea that job satisfaction and job performance are positively associated with each other is supported by several previous studies. For instance, Vroom (1964), Opkara (2002), Guest (2004), Silla *et al.* (2005), Schermerhorn *et al.* (2005), Spector, (2008), and Davar and RanjuBala (2011) investigated the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance and found that there is a direct association between the two. Researchers of these studies suggest that organisations should focus on keeping their employees satisfied and happy to increase productivity. Existing literature also confirmed that satisfied employees have improved performance, and they greatly contribute to the overall achievement of the organisation (Davar & RanjuBala, 2011). The humanitarian viewpoint postulates that employee satisfaction level is linked to the degree to which employees are receiving fair and appropriate treatment in the organisation (Abdallah, Obeidat, Aqqad, Al Janini & Dahiyat, 2017), whereas the utilitarian viewpoint indicates that employee satisfaction contributes to behaviours impacting the operation of the organisation (Yucel, 2012). Job satisfaction expresses how employees feel about their job and its related aspects (Cook, 2015) and the extent to which employees like or dislike their job. Therefore, job dissatisfaction and job satisfaction can arise in any given work situation. Job satisfaction represents a combination of positive and negative feelings shown in the workplace, and it is highly associated with the behaviour of an employee at the workplace. Various determinants of job satisfaction, such as pay and level income, promotion opportunities, co-workers, job conditions, communications, personal growth, security, and working environment, are rising in number (Wu, 2012; Cook, 2015).

Pay

Pay is defined as the total amount of monetary and non-monetary pay provided to an employee by an employer in return for work performed (Hee, Yan, Rizal, Kowang, & Fei, 2018). According to Mohamad Hasmi *et al.* (2019), reward is very indispensable to direct the staff towards achieving the goals of the organisation. In an organisation, there will be employees working at different levels. Rewarding and motivating efficient employees will boost their productivity. This will indirectly contribute to providing the highest quality services to customers through an organisation. In addition, motivation and rewards can also enable employees to accept any change or development in the organisation. In accordance with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, safety requirements are a requirement to protect against environmental hazard threats. Salary is a benchmark often used by employees as a means of their contribution to the organisation they are working for, and they regard it as their value to the organisation. A study conducted by Fatma and Firdouse (2017) revealed that the employees of Shinas College of Technology at Oman are motivated by salary and on-duty allowance rather than the other monetary incentives or benefits. The monetary incentive in its various forms encourages employees to be more productive and self-motivating towards the welfare of the organisation to which they belong. Hence, it is posited that:

H1 - Pay positively influences individual happiness.

Colleague

Interpersonal relationships at work are important, especially for the well-being of employees (Haar, Schmitz, Fabio, & Daelenbach, 2019). A study conducted by the researchers which examines positive relationships in the workplace focus on relational management, including the self. It is suggested that employees can build their individual competencies that enable them to accomplish and succeed when facing workplace challenges. Specifically, these competencies are built around skills relating to socialisation, relationships, and social support (Haar *et al.*, 2019). Further research has supported early conclusions, suggesting workplace friendship to impact job performance, job involvement, job satisfaction, as well as organisational commitment and identification (Ting & Ho, 2017;

Akila & Priyadarshini, 2018). A qualitative research conducted by Pignata, Boyd, Winefield, and Provis (2017) revealed that supportive colleague friendships act as a buffer from stressful work tasks and situations. Aalto, Heponiemi, Josefsson, Arffman, and Elovainio (2018) found that physician's wellbeing factors, such as sleep quality, workability, and distress, to be positively impacted by collegial support and a good team climate. Persson, Lindstrom, Pettersson, Nilsson, and Blomqvist (2018) further suggested healthcare employee's workplace relationships to be strongly linked to health promotion efforts. Such findings further highlight the importance of a need for greater understanding of the relationship colleague friendships hold with wellbeing. Co-worker support has a stronger impact on job performance (Yang, Shen, Zhu, Liu, Deng, Chen, & See, 2016). On the other hand, poor relationship with a co-worker and lack of motivation reduces job satisfaction, and thereby, the low job satisfaction eventually influences employees' integrity and increases the potential of a criminal act (Mun, Ying, Lew, Wei, & Ning, 2017). Accordingly, it is hypothesized:

H2 - Colleague positively influences individual happiness.

Management

A study by Vallina, Alegre, and Cabrales (2020) examined that there is a positive link between well-being-oriented human resource management and employees. Management can show support for their employees or staff by considering their viewpoints and communicate effectively. Management has to do with directing resources and efforts of the business toward opportunities for economically significant results. Management also helps organisations achieve their tasks by taking actions, motivating, and training employees, and providing information that guides employees to help them take more effective actions. Baro, Bosah, and Obi (2017) stress that organisational leaders must understand the importance of making the necessary changes from the current lifestyle to a potential culture that promotes productivity, performance, and increases job satisfaction. Flexibility to change, openness to technology, motivating, and promoting trust among team members are among the vital leadership tasks and skills needed for leaders to build a healthy and sustainable corporate culture (Belias & Koustelios, 2015). Thus, it is posited that:

H3 - Management positively influences individual happiness.

Nature of Work

The physical work environment is a primary factor in increasing employees' job satisfaction as employees spend so much of their time in the office, the physical work environment can make a difference in job satisfaction. For example, a good desk, a little privacy, and separating the social and quiet areas, good lighting, and some plants are among the factors that increase job satisfaction (Malik, Javed, & Hassan, 2017). Wnuk (2017) stresses that employees want to maintain status, high ranks, and authority in exchange for their capabilities, such as knowledge, ability, education, and skills. The employees who cannot meet their expectations in their jobs become dissatisfied. Thus, dissatisfaction affects the organisation for which individuals work. Job satisfaction is vital for a person's motivation and contribution to production. Hence, leadership skills that increase job satisfaction are essential to promote the sense of belongings and to motivate employees and reduce replacement costs. Workers' job satisfaction is quite sensitive to daily hassles, such as unnecessary busy work, or senseless administrative tasks (Akwuole, 2017). According to Akwuole (2017), an employee may accept to do a job for a specific motive, but that does not mean he or she gains satisfaction. Job satisfaction occurs when the nature of work and the rewards derived from the work match the motivational needs of the employee. Accordingly, if leaders create work environments that attract, motivate, and retain hardworking employees, individuals will be better positioned to succeed in a competitive environment that demands quality and cost-efficiency (Malik *et al.*, 2017). Thus, it is posited that:

H4 - Nature of work positively influences individual happiness.

Promotion

Promotion is said to happen when an employee makes a shift in the upward direction in the organisational hierarchy and moves to a place of greater responsibility (Mohammed & Mohammad, 2019). The tedious work in the same position for many years and perform the same daily activities may create boredom, but with new responsibilities and tasks, this can be overcome. According to Abdelmoula and Boudabbous (2019), employees who are dissatisfied with the opportunity available for promotion show a greater intention to leave the organisation. Employees who get a fair

promotion, reward, and recognition from their superiors are more motivated and perform well in their job (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). When employees perceived that there are golden chances for promotion, they feel satisfied with their respective place in the organisation (Zewdu, 2019). Hence, it is posited that:

H5 - Promotion positively influences individual happiness

Research Framework

The preceding literature review supports the following research framework that effectively describes the relationship between variables in this study. Meanwhile, the framework of this study is adapted from Spector (1985) and Hills and Argyle (2002), as shown in Figure 1.

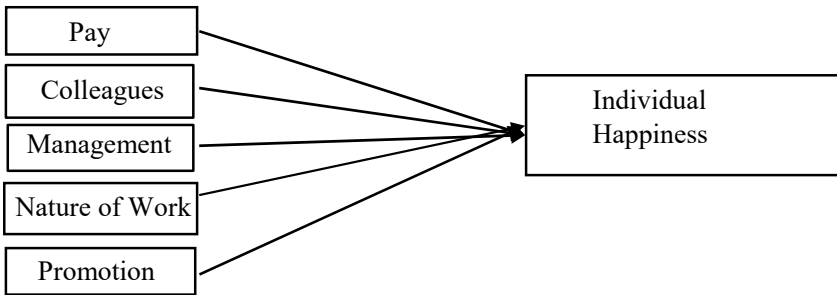


Figure 1: Research Framework. Source: Spector (1985) and Hills & Argyle (2002)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The process of analysing the result from this study stemmed from the 5-points Likert scale measurement in the questionnaire. It was designed purposely to test the relationship between job satisfaction and individual happiness among employees. Five variables of pay, colleague, management, nature of work, and promotion were identified as factors, following the Spector (1985) and Hills and Argyle (2002) model. The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was converted into an electronic form due to the COVID 19 pandemic and distributed to the targeted respondents. A total of 126 e-questionnaires were distributed using Google Form. The online questionnaires were distributed to respondents at Universiti Teknikal

Malaysia Melaka (UTeM), a public higher education institution in Melaka, Malaysia. The sample size of the population was identified using a simple random sampling method. The target population of the study was employees who had worked at UTeM for at least a year which then were considered to having working experience. The returned questionnaires were initially screened for usability and reliability, and 126 responses were found to be complete and valid for data analysis using Statistical Programme for Social Science (SPSS) 22.0 software. Five variables were measured in this research, namely pay, colleagues, management, nature of work, and promotion, which were adopted from different sources to meet the purpose of the study. They were adapted from Spector (1985) and Hills and Argyle (2002). All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

RESULTS

The demographic makeup of the sample was composed of 37 (29.4%) men and 89 (70.6%) women. 39.7% of the sample were from 36 to 45 years old, 33.3% were at the age of 46 until 55 years old, 15.9% were at the age of 56 until 60 years old, and 11.1% were at the age of 26 years old to 35 years old. All of them (100%) were full-time workers of the institution. 14.3% of the respondents possessed a master's level and most of them held a bachelor's degree. 96.8% of the sample had an income level more than RM4000 and 3.2% had an income level from RM3000 to RM3999. Out of 126 respondents, 110 (87.3%) had worked above ten years, 11 (8.7%) had worked between six to ten years, and only five (4%) had worked between three to five years in the institution.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha Statistics

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	No of items
Pay	0.962	3
Colleague	0.911	3
Management	0.878	3
Nature of Work	0.847	3
Promotion	0.883	3
Individual Happiness	0.938	13

A reliability test was carried out to ensure that the items used in this study were reliable and valid, as shown in Table 2 below, with the acceptable cut-off Cronbach’s alpha values at a level of 0.70 (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). As this study aimed to identify the relationship between five factors of job satisfaction with employee happiness, correlation analysis was carried out to find these answers. Table 2 below indicates the sources of strength of correlation used and interpreted in this study by using strong or positive relationships between variables as suggested by Salkind (2012).

Table 2: Strength of Correlation

Correlation	Range
0.80 to 1.00	Very Strong
0.60 to 0.79	Strong
0.40 to 0.59	Strong enough
0.20 to 0.39	Weak
0.00 to 0.19	Very Weak

Source: Salkind (2012)

Table 3 below shows the result of correlational findings that revealed the significant relationship between pay, colleagues, management, nature of work, and promotion as elements towards individual happiness.

Table 3: Results of Correlation Test

Relationship	r Value	Result
Pay and individual happiness	0.397	Weak and positive relationship
Colleague and Individual Happiness	0.493	Strong and positive relationship
Management and Individual Happiness	0.430	Strong and positive relationship
Nature of Work and Individual Happiness	0.527	Strong and positive relationship
Promotion and Individual Happiness	0.524	Strong and positive relationship

It was revealed that a weak relationship between pay and individual happiness at a value of ($r=0.397, p<0.05$). Pay seems to have only a minimal relationship with employees' happiness at this institution. The correlation of colleague and individual happiness in this study showed a

strong relationship with individual happiness at a value of ($r=0.493, p<0.05$). Similarly, the result of correlation for this study revealed that there was a strong relationship between management and individual happiness at a value of ($r=0.430, p<0.05$). Moreover, the result of correlation for nature of work and individual happiness in this study showed that there was a strong relationship between the nature of work and individual happiness at a value of ($r=0.527, p<0.05$). Finally, the result of correlation for promotion and individual happiness in this study also indicated a strong relationship between promotion and individual happiness at a value of ($r=0.524, p<0.05$). The result suggested that the nature of work and promotion have a strong relationship to increase employees' happiness like other factors (management, pay, and colleagues). Hence, this study answered all five hypotheses of H1 until H5; and the results are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Hypothesis Results

Hypothesis - Statement	Significance	Results
H1 - Pay positively influences individual happiness	0.397	Supported
H2 - Colleague positively influences individual happiness	0.497	Supported
H3 - Management positively influences individual happiness	0.430	Supported
H4 - Nature of work positively influences individual happiness	0.527	Supported
H5 - Promotion positively influences individual happiness	0.524	Supported

DISCUSSION

The objective of this research was to examine the relationship between pay, colleagues, management, nature of work, and promotion, and individual happiness among employees. From the results, the nature of work and promotion are the most important factors that influence employee happiness, thus leading to job satisfaction. However, further study needs to be carried out since Akwuole (2017) has revealed that just because an employee accepts a job for a specific reason does not imply, he or she is satisfied. Job satisfaction happens when the nature of the task and the benefits obtained from it are aligned with the employee's motivating needs. The remaining

three independent variables, which are pay, colleagues, and management also influence employee happiness and lead to job satisfaction with a strong relationship. As mentioned by Mohamad Hasmi *et al.* (2019), rewards are critical in motivating employees to achieve the organisation's goals. It is proven that rewarding and promoting staff can increase their output. However, this study revealed that pay has a weak relationship with individual happiness, thus, other potential elements need to be further investigated.

CONCLUSION

All independent variables significantly influence job satisfaction and individual happiness among employees of this institution. This study was established based on relevant past studies. Further study needs to be carried out since current literature suggests that there has been a lack of studies on the subject in the context of other industries/fields. Hence, aside from being an expansion to theoretical development, this study is of value to the management of higher education institutions in the development and implementation of practices for the improvement of employee performance. However, it is recommended that future studies should involve a larger sample size to increase generalisability. Since the central point of this study was the education field, other organisations were neglected. Hence, future studies could be conducted in other types of organisations to enrich the body of knowledge. A quantitative technique as the primary method of data gathering and analysis used in this study may limit the outcomes, in terms of accuracy. Hence, future work could employ other techniques, such as case studies, to increase the accuracy of the outcomes, particularly for the conjectured relationships. Finally, this study only involved a public higher education institution as the study population. Hence, it is suggested that future work should look at other types of organisations or industries in exploring organisational commitment to improve the generalisability of the study.

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