

The Role of Psychological Well-Being in Job Performance:

A Fresh Look at an Age-Old Quest

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The thirst after happiness is never extinguished in the heart of man.

(Jean Jacques Rousseau,
Les Confessions [1781–1788], IX)

Like social philosophers such as Rousseau, both business executives and organizational researchers have long been fascinated with the happy/productive worker thesis. There is a very strong practical basis for this interest. Most readers are familiar with the famous Hawthorne experiments undertaken during the 1920s and 1930s at the Western Electric Company in Cicero, Illinois. Initially undertaken to examine the role of such physical job factors as level of illumination on productivity, the studies evolved into much more, eventually securing a prominent spot in the folklore of modern management thought. In particular was the belief widely held by a number of Hawthorne researchers, including Elton Mayo and G.A. Pennock, suggesting that happiness (broadly defined) *should* produce better job performance. In addition, happiness provides a number of positive benefits for not only the happy individuals themselves, but also for those with whom they come in contact. Seen in this light, happiness is almost a responsibility to ourselves, to be

sure, but also to our coworkers, who often rely on us to be steadfast and supportive in difficult times.

Prior research efforts to test the thesis have, unfortunately, often not matched this strong practical appeal. Simply stated, the results to date have been rather disappointing and, similar to the conclusions reached by Staw and his colleagues in the mid-1980s, still remain a source of much controversy and confusion. Extending the seminal work of Staw, we suggest that the primary reason for these disappointing findings lies in how happiness has been operationalized. Traditionally, happiness has been considered as employee job satisfaction, with literally thousands of job satisfaction studies already published and hundreds more published every year. In the pages that follow, we will explore our ideas in greater detail. As we shall see, our central theme is that it is both reasonable and highly practical for both business executives and management scholars to understand that happiness is a valuable tool for maximizing both personal betterment and employee job performance.

But first, as proof positive of this trend toward the positive, consider the uplifting results from a study on the handwritten autobiographies of 180 Catholic nuns. The

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autobiographies, composed before the nuns took their final vows at a mean age of 22 years, were coded for both positive and emotional content. An example of positive emotional content is taken from one nun's autobiography: "... The past year which I have spent as a candidate studying at Notre Dame College has been a very happy one. Now I look forward with eager joy to receiving the Holy Habit of Our Lady and to a life of union with Love Divine." Providing solid testimony to the value of "thinking positively," positive emotional content was strongly associated with longevity six decades later. Happier, more productive nuns lived significantly longer (and healthier). Nuns in the highest quartile of reported positive emotion sentences taken from their autobiographies lived healthier and an average of 6.9 years longer, compared with those in the lowest quartile. The moral of the story: Being happy and positive in one's outlook on work and life has a number of tangible benefits, including living longer and healthier. As much as this may make intuitive sense to many of us, an emphasis on the positive has been a surprisingly neglected topic in organizational research.

ACCENTUATE THE NEGATIVE!

Historically, the organizational sciences have been preoccupied with negative aspects of work and life. This focus on the negative can be traced back over 100 years to the very beginnings of applied research in the latter part of the 19th/early part of the 20th centuries. The prevailing belief of early organizational research was that the most profitable business techniques were those that focused on the negative, as opposed to positive, aspects of human motivation. As a case in point, the following example, taken from a series of studies conducted in the 1920s and published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, clearly emphasizes this early, applied focus on the negative. In particular, and strongly influencing this accentuation on the negative, the first systematic applications of applied psy-

chology to business problems involved how to generate increased sales dollars through "better" advertising. Essentially, increased sales were thought to result from advertisements all too often designed to frighten and scare potential customers into buying the product!

The research involved an ad test campaign for a proprietary medicine. Five advertisements were created and circulated in 15 eastern American cities of roughly equal size. The advertising appeals ranged from a highly positive one promoting the attainment of good health and its preservation, to a strongly negative one warning against the dire and costly consequences of ill health. The results speak volumes: Positive appeals to good health met with so little success (sales actually went down 10%) that they were, for the most part, discarded. Alternatively, negative appeals to the potential consequences of ill health from not purchasing the medicine met with tremendous success, with sales increasing 171%! Drawing on recent, fascinating work on human emotions, we provide a brief explanation for *why* this widespread focus on the negative, to the apparent neglect of the positive.

A key assertion made by many traditional models of emotion is that human emotions are associated with specific action tendencies. A leading positive psychologist, Barbara Fredrickson, defines a specific action tendency as "the outcome of a psychological process that narrows a person's momentary thought-action repertoire by calling to mind an urge to act in a particular way." In other words, a specific action tendency is what helps to get our attention. For example, anger leads to attacking behavior and fear leads to escape behavior. In a distinction that will become more relevant as our discussion unfolds, a number of prominent researchers on human emotions suggest that specific action tendencies better describe both the form and function of negative, as opposed to positive emotions.

To further illustrate this critical distinction, consider the primary role of negative emotion in our most basic decision to "fight

or flee" in a given situation. In the fight or flight (flee) scenario, the negative emotion of fear is best viewed as an evolved adaptation that was highly instrumental in assisting our prehistoric ancestors' to survive various life-threatening situations. For instance, one of the authors currently lives at the base of the Sierra Nevada Mountains on the Nevada/California border. The mountain area is highly populated with such wild animals as mountain lions and bears. If, on one of his hikes in the mountains, the author happened upon a huge, ferocious bear, his initial response would most likely be to become frightened and then attempt to escape from this dangerous situation. In other words, the negative emotion of fear initiates the specific action tendency to flee from the fear-evoking stimulus of the man-eating bear. As our thoughts about various actions narrow to, and then focus on, these specific urges, the body's role becomes one of mobilizing optimal physiological resources to meet the life-threatening challenge. Our prehistoric survival instincts take over. This constricted or narrowed thought-action sequence can be highly adaptive in nature and helps foster quick, decisive and potentially life-saving action.

While potentially adaptive in nature, the focus on negative, to the neglect of positive emotions, can be [and has been] very problematic if overindulged in the business environment. An excellent example of this negative focus is the typical yearly performance evaluation procedure. Why so? The answer rests on the apparent need of many evaluators to primarily focus on various negative aspects of employee behavior. Your employee neglected to do this, or, your employee failed to do that. This overemphasis on the negative by many evaluators has repeatedly been shown to have a detrimental effect on subsequent employee goal achievement. Is it any wonder that managers and employees alike widely report that the most stressful job-related task is to give/get performance evaluations?

How "successful" or widespread has this buy-in to the negative been in social science

research? Well, a recent computer search of contemporary literature in psychology found approximately 375,000 articles on "negative" (i.e., mental illness, depression, burnout, anxiety, fear and anger) and only about 1,000 articles on various positive concepts and capabilities of people. This constitutes a negative/positive ratio of approximately 375/1.

Once again, consider our advertising example. The primary purpose of the negative warnings against the dire and costly effects of ill health was to narrow the potential product buyer's thought-action response repertoire to focus on the detrimental consequences of not purchasing the product. The negative message was one intentionally framed to be perceived by the potential customer as distressing, fearful or anxiety inducing. The intended message was that a failure to take this medicine would result in grave consequences. Similar to the bear scenario, in our advertising example, the effect is immediate and significant. Over the years, these and many similar results, covering a wide gamut of organizational topics, got the full attention of a business audience highly interested in maximizing short-term revenue.

This prevailing emphasis on the negative is especially ironic when one considers the increasing prominence of the Positive Psychology and Positive Organizational Behavior/Scholarship movements. We say ironic because Abraham Maslow first introduced the term "positive psychology" to us 50 years ago in his ground-breaking book, *Motivation and Personality*. In his last chapter titled "Toward a Positive Psychology," Maslow laid out a research agenda proposing investigation of such "new" and "central" concepts as growth, self-sacrifice, love, optimism, spontaneity, courage, acceptance, contentment, humility, kindness, and actualization of potential. Do these concepts sound familiar today? Given Maslow's earlier work, they should! However, Maslow was unsuccessful in bucking the prevailing viewpoint and, unfortunately, as a result, organizational research continues to focus on the negative. Adopting a "repair shop" perspective, and

extending our advertising example, applied research has tended to unduly concentrate on identification of the pecuniary costs to the organization of distressed, dissatisfied, and unhappy employees. In addition, the cause of this employee dissatisfaction and unhappiness is typically seen from this negative-based or 'repair shop' perspective as being deeply embedded in the emotional maladjustment of the employee, as opposed to aspects of the job itself. As a result, the "cure" for this malady usually involves some type of prevention-based employee therapy. Among others, the authors have previously referred to this approach as the disease model and suggest that while important, the disease approach is incomplete in scope. However, as we now demonstrate, the potential benefits of a positive, what we call a health approach, can also be very evident, especially over time, when considering the role of employee psychological well-being (PWB) in the happy/productive worker thesis.

BACK TO THE FUTURE: PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL- BEING AND HAPPINESS

"Happiness" is a lay construct, replete with personal meaning for each of us. In order to study the idea scientifically, we need a more precise definition that lends itself to systematic measurement. In this regard, scholars have tended to treat "happiness" as PWB, also referred to as emotional well-being or subjective well-being.

PWB is usually thought of in terms of the overall effectiveness of an employee's psychological functioning. Definitions of happiness/PWB have at least three characteristics. First, happiness is a subjective experience. People are happy to the extent that they believe themselves to be happy. Second, happiness includes both the relative presence of positive emotion and the relative absence of negative emotions. Third, happiness is a global judgment. It refers to one's life as a whole. PWB is not tied to any particular situation. Additionally, PWB has been shown to exhibit

consistency over time. How one feels today influences how one feels tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, even years in the future. Fortunately, this does not mean that PWB is immutable to change. PWB has been shown to be strongly influenced by any number of environmental events and is considered to be responsive to therapeutic interventions. In sum, it is generally accepted that happiness refers to a subjective and global judgment that one is experiencing a good deal of positive emotion and relatively little negative emotion. As we shall see, recent research has consistently demonstrated that high levels of PWB can boost performance on the job, while simultaneously increasing each individual's capacity to appreciate new opportunities and experiences.

JOB PERFORMANCE: THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF HAPPINESS

In support of the happy/productive worker thesis, a growing body of empirical research has found significant links between various measures of employee PWB and measures of job-related performance. In one study involving M.B.A. students, participants high on well-being were shown to be superior decision makers, demonstrated better interpersonal behaviors, and received higher overall performance ratings. These results are important for two reasons. First, the study design used objective, quantifiable indices of performance (e.g., an "in-basket" measure). This argues against the possibility that correlations between well-being and job performance are simply misperceptions. Second, the experimental design of this research suggests a causal relation: that performance increases when PWB is high. In another study, employees high in well-being had superior performance evaluations and higher pay 18 months later. Considered together, these PWB studies clearly demonstrate that PWB is predictive of both a subjective measure of performance, supervisory

performance evaluations, and a more objective indicator of performance, actual pay. In addition, the consistency of PWB over time is especially relevant for practitioners concerned with issues involving employee selection, training and development, and placement. Using a sample of experienced management personnel, our next example clearly demonstrates the magnitude of this stability.

Incorporating multiple measures of both PWB and performance, one of the present authors recently found that PWB significantly predicted not only contemporaneous employee performance, but also subsequent supervisory performance ratings several *years* in the future. In addition, PWB predicted subsequent employee performance even after controlling for their prior performance. In a series of studies involving well-paid management personnel from a variety of different organizations and occupations, the current authors have found that PWB remained significantly related to performance even after controlling for employee age, gender, ethnicity, job tenure, and educational attainment level.

These findings are important for at least three reasons. First, the use of longitudinal research designs supports the possibility that PWB is not only correlated with performance, but could also be a cause of job performance. Incorporating multiple measures of both performance and PWB, these research designs provide a measure of rigor not typically found in research conducted in actual organizational settings. Second, the fact that both subjective *and* objective quantifiable indices of performance have consistently been found to be related to PWB strongly argues against the possibility that the significant findings are the result of supervisory misperceptions, a consequence of what is typically referred to as the 'halo' error.

Halo error is a potentially serious problem in performance evaluation. Halo error is defined as the tendency to evaluate an employee's overall job performance primarily based upon how well they perform, or are perceived to perform, on one salient perfor-

mance dimension. In the present case, this salient performance dimension might be the employee's level of PWB and the possibility of halo error can be explained in the following manner. Employees who are more psychologically well may be seen by their supervisors as more likeable and fun to be around. Because people in general, and supervisors in particular, tend to be more tolerant of those they like, they may provide more positive performance evaluations for those subordinates considered to be more psychologically well. As a result, rather than being directly related to changes in performance, PWB could serve as a systematic source of halo in performance evaluations. If true, halo error could bias our ability to interpret these findings of a relationship between PWB and job performance.

Though one cannot totally rule out the halo alternative, drawing on previous research in the area, we offer three basic arguments minimizing the possibility of halo error. First, a number of the studies reported here have used longitudinal designs, affording the opportunity to measure the influence of PWB on incremental changes in job performance evaluations over time. A major strength of having multiple measures of performance over time is the ability to capture any halo contained in the prior measure(s) of job performance. Second, PWB has been related to job performance in a number of studies which have also examined a number of possible third variable explanations, including job satisfaction, positive employee affect, negative employee affect and employee burnout. If halo bias was accounting for the obtained relationship between PWB and job performance, then we can also expect significant relations between these other measures of employee affect/emotion and job performance. The results have consistently demonstrated that this is not the case. In fact, the available data point to a common conclusion: When employee happiness is operationalized as PWB, it is positively related to various measures of employee job performance.

Third, this line of research is important because significant correlations between

PWB and job performance have typically been found in the .30–.50 range. Not only are these findings *statistically* significant, they are *practically* relevant. As a case in point, taking a correlation of .30 between PWB and job performance indicates that roughly 10% of the variance in job performance is associated with differences in PWB, while taking a correlation of .50 points to a substantial 25% of the variance in job performance being associated with differences in PWB.

The available data consistently point to a common, highly practical conclusion. Whether measured with subjective ratings or objective indices, whether examined in quasi-experimental, cross-sectional or longitudinal designs, even after controlling for the effects of a number of possible confounding variables, when happiness is measured as PWB, it is consistently and positively related to various measures of job performance. In the following sections, using current research and theory emanating from the Positive Psychology/Positive Organizational Behavior movements, we propose an expanded role of PWB for those interested in enhancing worker performance.

BROADEN-AND-BUILD: THE HUMAN CONSEQUENCES OF HAPPINESS

All things being equal, not many individuals would prefer to be unhappy when they could be happy. At least since the time of the famous utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham (circa 1748–1832), many would agree that seeking pleasure and avoiding pain is fundamental to human motivation. Certainly many organizational reward systems are predicated on this assumption. Consistent with this hedonistic approach, positive emotions can be seen as providing the distinct value-added of making us feel good. In fact, the balance between positive and negative emotions contributes to how we view our life.

Of noteworthy relevance is Barbara Fredrickson's broaden-and-build model of positive emotions. According to the broaden-and-

build model, a number of positive emotions, including the experience of employee PWB, all share the capacity to "broaden" an individual's momentary thought–action repertoires through expanding the selection of potential thoughts and actions that come to mind. For example, the positive emotion, interest, fosters the desire to explore, assimilate new experiences, encounter new information, and grow. Likewise, the positive emotion, joy, creates the urge to play, to think outside the box and be creative. Positive emotions have the beneficial effect of potentially widening one's available arsenal of thoughts and actions by "enlarging" the available cognitive context. Properly implemented in the workplace environment, the manifestation of such positive employee emotions as joy and interest fosters employee perceptions of enhanced meaning from their work. As a result, those employees who see positive meaning in their work often come to view it as a Calling, not just as a Job or Career. Those with a Calling orientation work not only for the positive financial rewards (Job orientation) or personal achievement (Career orientation), but also for the personal fulfillment that doing one's job can bring. One practical consequence is that those who view their work as a Calling may well be more productive.

Executive Illustration

"Today's workers are not committed anymore" is a lament we hear expressed by an ever-increasing number of corporate executives. If accurate, and using the Job, Career and Calling categories as our framework, more and more of today's employees view their work as merely a Job. When work is considered as a Job, the employee focuses on the material benefits derived from working. Work is simply the necessary means to a financial end. The fulfillment of personal happiness and contentment are sought during one's time off the job. On the other hand, those with a Career orientation work for the rewards that accompany their advancement, either organizational or professional in nature. Employees with a Career orientation are

driven by the strong desire to obtain power and prestige through the increased pay and promotional opportunities that Career advancement brings. Alternatively, employees with a Calling orientation do not work primarily for either financial or promotional advancement opportunities. Instead, they work for the fulfillment that doing their work affords. Doing their work well is considered an end in and of itself. Considered together, employees with a Calling orientation report a much more rewarding relation with the work itself, spend more time on work-related activities, and appear to gain more enjoyment, fulfillment and satisfaction from it. Those who are optimistic and conscientious appear to be more likely to report themselves as having a Calling orientation. Interestingly, and highly relevant when one considers possible intervention strategies, recent research indicates that many employees have the ability to accurately differentiate their work orientation among the Job, Career, and Calling categories.

Fascinating research has further confirmed that the enlarging effect of positive emotion has a physiological base and is linked to increases in brain dopamine levels. In addition, while negative emotions have been shown to adversely increase both heart rate and blood pressure, positive emotions can suppress or “undo” these lingering maladaptive effects! More specifically, compared to such negative emotions as anger and sadness, positive emotions have been shown to produce more rapid returns to the individual’s normal cardiovascular baseline levels. In other words, following the initial, evolutionary surge in heart and blood pressure rates which typically accompany our response to stressful situations, positive emotions help speed the body’s recovery to its normal, pre-stress levels.

Based on Fredrickson’s work, we also propose that these positive emotions assist in “building” the individual’s enduring personal resources, ranging from physical, psychological, intellectual and social in nature. This capacity to experience the positive seems to be crucial to one’s capacity to thrive, men-

tally flourish and psychologically grow. This sense of flourishing appears to make psychologically well or happy people more proactive, resilient to adverse situations, and less prone to stress symptoms. As a result, a continued focus on these positive feelings expands (broadens) and builds on these positive urges, creating a potentially moderating “upward spiral” effect, which can further enhance employee character development. This capacity to experience positive feelings is considered to be a fundamental human strength.

Good Morning America Case

Positive emotions help people to not only survive, but also to thrive when confronted with adverse situations. This capacity to overcome potential adversity was vividly demonstrated on a segment of the *Good Morning America* program. C.R. Snyder, one of the founding fathers of positive psychology and a psychology professor at the University of Kansas, gave a test of positive emotion to the *Good Morning America* regular cast. Not surprisingly for many regular viewers of the popular show, host Charles Gibson outscored everyone else by a wide margin. Then, testing the hypothesis that positive or happy people have developed the necessary psychological and physical resources for coping with adversity, Snyder had the members of the crew hold their hand in a bucket of ice before the live cameras and studio audience. Consistent with Snyder’s prediction, everyone in the cast removed their hand before 90 seconds had elapsed, everyone that is, except Charles Gibson! In fact, Gibson still had his hand in the ice bucket [while continuing to smile, not grimace] right up until the commercial break, well beyond the time endured by the rest of the program crew. Gibson’s resilience to the pain and ability to cope with adversity was clearly attributable to his positive, optimistic personality.

Consider the positive emotion, interest. Interest has both individual and organizational benefits. At the individual level, interest creates the urge to explore, take in new infor-

mation and experiences, and expand oneself in the process. At the organizational level, interest, considered collectively, can facilitate meaningful interpersonal encounters. These meaningful interpersonal encounters result in enhanced social connections and team-building behavior. A beneficial organizational consequence is the creation of a better work climate and increased productivity.

This upward spiraling effect is in marked contrast to the effects of a number of negative emotions. Consider the case of depression. Distressingly, depression has reached epidemic proportions in the United States. Recent figures indicate that literally tens of millions of Americans have taken (or are currently taking) various forms of anti-depression medications. Unlike the uplifting effect of positive emotion, negative feelings of depression or anger or fear tend to lead to narrowed, pessimistic thinking which can produce a further downward spiral, leading to ever-worsening moods and feelings.

HOW HAPPINESS HELPS US TO GROW: A DEMONSTRATION OF THE BROADEN-AND-BUILD APPROACH TO MANAGEMENT

We have already seen that happiness, when defined as PWB, promotes higher levels of job performance. We have also learned that those high in PWB are in a better position to benefit from positive work experiences than are their counterparts who are lower in PWB. Through the impetus provided by high levels of PWB, happier or more psychologically well employees are more easily able to “broaden-and-build” themselves and become more creative, resilient, socially connected, physically and mentally healthy, and more productively effective. In addition, and of further benefit, these effects are seen as persisting over time and across situations.

As an illustration of this idea, consider a recent study by the present authors. In this study we found strong empirical support for the idea that those high in PWB can benefit

more from a satisfying job than do those low in PWB. In other words, employee PWB moderated or influenced the job satisfaction to job performance relation. Specifically, the more positive the PWB of the employee, the stronger [more statistically robust] was the observed relation between job satisfaction and job performance. Considered together, PWB, job satisfaction and the PWB by job satisfaction interaction (the moderator effect) accounted for approximately 25% of the variance in employee job performance ratings. This finding strongly supports our premise of a distinct competitive advantage for those organizations able and willing to foster a psychologically well workforce and work environment.

To emphasize the potential pecuniary benefits of these findings, consider the following example. Suppose you manage 10 electrical engineers. Furthermore, each engineer is paid \$1,250 per week, or \$65,000 a year in salary. You know that, for a number of reasons – including their PWB – each engineer’s productivity varies by as much as \$500 a week, or roughly \$25,000 a year. (This is consistent with national averages across occupations, which indicate your engineers are typically productive for only 4.8 hours for every 8 hours that you pay them!) Let us put this in the context of our reported results. PWB and job satisfaction account for roughly 25% of this \$500 a week in performance variance for our engineers. This translates into \$125 per week/per person in lost productivity! With 10 employees, this translates to \$1,250 per week in performance variance, for 100 employees, the numbers are \$12,500 per week or \$650,000 per year. Of equal importance, as we will momentarily detail, various intervention strategies can be used to select psychologically well job applicants. Current employees can also be more effectively trained and placed based upon knowledge of their PWB. In our concluding sections, we provide suggestions for proactive business executives interested in developing progressive, employee-centered intervention strategies designed to serve the dual purpose of enhancing both PWB and employee performance.

HOW TO BUILD A HAPPY WORKFORCE

Employee-focused, positive psychological-based interventions at work can take three general forms: composition, training, and situational engineering. Composition emphasizes selecting and placing people into appropriate positions, training emphasizes assisting workers so that they “fit” their jobs more closely, and situational engineering emphasizes changing the work environment so that it more closely fits the needs of one’s employees. Our “extended” happy/productive worker thesis has implications for each approach.

The Composition (or Selection) Approach to Promoting Happiness

Research has clearly established that PWB is stable over time. In fact, one of our studies has established substantial test-retest correlations of up to 5 years in duration. These findings give clear support to the notion that people who report being happy (or unhappy) at one point in time are likely to be happy (or unhappy) at another point in time, and provide evidence supportive of the notion of the heritability of happiness.

Interesting research on the possible heritability of happiness (and job satisfaction) has been reported by a number of scholars. While beyond the scope of the present discussion, the possibility of a genetic basis for various employee attitudes and emotions has been highly controversial in organizational research. Nevertheless, and very relevant from a management perspective, research supportive of a possible genetic basis does not necessarily imply that well-being stability is solely due to the personal characteristics of the individual. Employee PWB, and level of job satisfaction for that matter, may well be stable over time because one’s life or job circumstances are stable as well. For example, an employee may remain at the same job or at a very

similar one for any number of reasons. As a result, the “fact” of employee attitudinal stability should not solely be used to argue against the possibility of successful training and situational engineering-based interventions.

We should point out that selecting the happiest employees does raise the specter of some potentially serious ethical issues. The failure to select prospective employees on the basis of their level of PWB could depress these individuals further, which in turn could make these job candidates even more unemployable in the future. This can engender considerable human and societal costs. As a consequence, careful consideration of these and other related issues is of paramount importance for management personnel, employing organizations, and practicing consultants, interested in using various measures of PWB to select happy workers.

Training

Another option is to change employees by helping them learn to be happier. There is good evidence that various types of stress management training can have positive effects on worker happiness. A number of strategies exist where individual employees can proactively self-monitor or manage their personal perceptions to enhance positive, and discourage negative, displays of momentary mood and emotion. For example, constructive self-talk is a conscious effort to replace negative with more positive and reinforcing self-talk. There are a number of other cognitive restructuring techniques designed to be beneficial in temporarily altering an employee’s current emotional state or providing more permanent or dispositionally-based changes in their behavior. One such trait is learned optimism. Learned optimism is viewed as a developed trait or style emphasizing positive thought patterns. As the name indicates, employees can be trained to better utilize ‘learned’ optimism techniques, both within and outside the work environment. As one benefit, research has clearly demon-

strated that optimistic employees perform more effectively on a wide range of jobs and occupations, especially those involving significant interactions with others.

Metropolitan Life Case

As everyone knows, selling is not easy. It requires great persistence in the face of seemingly consistent rejection. The executives at Metropolitan Life learned this fact all too well. While they rigorously selected less than 1 in 10 sales agent applicants, half would quit in the first year. Equally disheartening, of those who stayed, most produced less and less the longer they remained with the company as sales agents. In any event, by the end of the fourth year, 80% were gone. As it turned out, employee optimism predicted level of sales. Sales agents ranked in the top half on an optimism scale sold 37% more insurance on average in their first 2 years than those agents who scored in the lower half of the scale and were more pessimistic. Even more impressive, agents who scored in the top 10% on optimism sold 88% more than those in the bottom 10%. As executives at Metropolitan Life discovered, the best news was that an optimistic approach is learnable.

Situational Engineering

The third approach to possible interventions involves changing the environment so that it promotes, or at least does not impair, worker PWB. Situational engineering would appear to be a promising technique, in that there is evidence that working conditions strongly affect employee PWB. As with the selection and training approaches, situational engineering provides a variety of options for organizations to create a happier, more satisfied, workforce. In fact, research has documented that something as simple as providing tangible social support can help reduce the negative impact of stressful jobs. More generally, employers can manipulate or reengineer any number of organizational factors (i.e., physical, role, task, and/or interpersonal demands) shown to be related to

increased displays of employee emotion at work. For example, work-family conflict seems to diminish life satisfaction and increase negative displays of emotion. Alternatively family-friendly policies, such as flextime and childcare programs, should increase employee PWB. Finally, we should not neglect the more obvious change strategies. Research has shown that equitable pay tends to promote high levels of PWB. In short, there are a number of available options for designing human resource techniques to enhance PWB and subsequent employee performance.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Applied research's interest in employee happiness has long centered on the happy/productive worker thesis. However, the results have sometimes proved disappointing. Fortunately, recent work shows great promise. It seems that the generations of managers and business executives who believed that a happy worker is a productive worker are correct when considering employee happiness as PWB. Of noteworthy relevance in the "holy grail" pursuit of providing greater insight into the happy/productive worker thesis is the further development of such positive-based approaches as the broaden-and-build model. The broaden-and-build model provides the necessary framework to explain the possible interactive role of PWB on the job satisfaction/job performance relation. Considered individually, PWB has demonstrated statistically significant relations to employee performance. The psychological well-being/job performance correlation is consistently in the .30-.50 range. Furthermore, results were discussed here which clearly demonstrate that consideration of the interaction effects of PWB on the job satisfaction/job performance relation are significantly more statistically robust.

In addition to PWB, the broaden-and-build model supports the possible adaptive and interactive nature of a number of other positive-based employee emotions. Joy, exhi-

laration, optimism and interest all share the potential ability to broaden an employee's momentary thought-action experiences and provide valuable assistance in helping to further build the employee's personal resource arsenal. This means that in addition to studies on happy/productive workers, we may eventually see [and we actively encourage] research on serene/thoughtful workers, caring/helpful workers, joyous/honest workers, and exhilarated/creative workers.

We close by emphasizing an important point. Employee PWB has both theoretical and applied relevance in today's society. Using the Positive Psychology/Positive Organizational Behavior (POB) framework, it seems evident that promoting employee

PWB is an intrinsic good for which all should work. If this approach promotes better job performance, which the findings strongly suggest is the case, then so much the better. Regardless, the pursuit of employee PWB remains valuable for its own sake. In closing, roughly 2,500 years ago, Aristotle posed the question of what constitutes the good life. Similar to Aristotle, our response is that the pursuit of happiness (*eudaimonia* to Aristotle), properly defined, is a pivotal first step in any attempt to address this age-old question.



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