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# EXPERIENCING HAPPINESS AND COPING WITH STRESS AS THE KEY FACTORS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTELLIGENT ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE IN ENTERPRISES APPLYING THE IDEA OF E-LEARNING

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***Abstract:** Contemporary literature studies concerning the essence and importance of organisational culture increasingly present the discussed concept as ambiguous or even controversial. This fact makes the discussion of organisational culture extremely inspiring, opening many new areas for scientific exploration. The aim of the article is to present intelligent organisational culture and the key determinants of the effectiveness of the process of creating its model in enterprises applying the e-learning idea, with the emphasis on the essence and importance of two research categories: experiencing happiness and the ability to cope with occupational stress.*

**Keywords:** E-learning, happiness, intelligent organisation, occupational stress, flow experience

## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world of rapidly developing information technologies, where distance learning is more and more often used, not only in school education but also in business, the basic values which determine human (mental) well-being are increasingly at risk. Such values definitely include experiencing happiness and the ability to cope with stressful situations. Therefore, it seems extremely important to study the issue concerning experiencing happiness, which is the key element of well-being, and coping with the 21st century's omnipresent stress in the context of

intelligent organisational culture of enterprises applying the e-learning idea. Experiencing happiness understood as *flow experience* is a concept considered one of the most important approaches to the conceptualisation and evaluation of educational activities and the possibility of improvement of teaching and learning methods, not only in school but also in business (Yi Maggie Guo, Young K. Ro, 2008). Therefore, it is worth analysing the relationships between experiencing happiness (understood as flow experience and the ability to cope with stress) and the development of intelligent organisational culture in companies applying the e-learning method as one of the basic tools of knowledge acquisition and raising employees' competencies. The main aim of the article is to highlight the new problem - how modern technologies, particularly as popular as e-learning, may influence the level of experiencing happiness and stress in the workplace. The above-mentioned, very important, problem may be treated as a research gap. The present article is theoretical in nature. The methodology used in it is based on the synthesis of the subject literature and its critical analysis. Such a method may be a good way to use, in next steps of the scientific exploration, induction methods and advanced empirical research. Final results of them are highly anticipated.

## **1. EXPERIENCING HAPPINESS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE USE OF E-LEARNING IN CONTEMPORARY ORGANISATIONS**

Worldwide development of modern information technologies, also occurring in organisations and enterprises, usually results in limited direct interpersonal contacts. Consequently, nowadays we can see an increasing crisis of fundamental values, often resulting in emotional problems and reduced well-being. Therefore, it seems vital to discuss the problem of relationship between well-being (whose key component is positive experiences, e.g. experiencing happiness) and the use of contemporary IT solutions, such as e-learning, i.e., education via modern information technologies (Łysek 2005).

The analysis of this relationship is also important because research results prove that the benefits from having positive emotions, satisfaction with life and optimism are measurable and objective, and happiness is like a lottery ticket – it gives us an opportunity to win (Czapiński 2004 p. 237). Research carried out so far clearly shows that happy people have more successes and generally do better than unhappy ones (Czapiński 2004; Porczyńska-Ciszewska 2013), which undoubtedly affects the functioning and development of enterprises they work for. Empirical studies confirm that people who frequently experience happiness enjoy more satisfying interpersonal relations, better health and longer lives, as well as higher income and professional successes, for the very reason that they are happy (Danner, Snowden, Friesen 2001; Czapiński 2004; Pressman, Cohen 2005; Marks and Fleming 1999; Porczyńska-Ciszewska 2013). Professional successes, always depending on people, are an important element of the

functioning and development of enterprises, indirectly contributing to the formation of intelligent organisational culture.

Analysing the relationships between experiencing happiness (which is the key component of well-being) and the formation of intelligent organisational culture in enterprises applying the e-learning idea, first we need to explain what the experience of happiness really is.

As we know, many scholars and philosophers have tried to define happiness, but nobody has been able to produce a single, unquestionable definition, and although scholars have been studying the matter of happiness since ancient times, the problem is still unresolved. Hence, it needs to be emphasised that as we discuss happiness, we need to remember how obscure the term is and distinguish between different ways of understanding it. Still, despite the variety, all definitions have one common feature: they all refer to something positive and valuable (Tatarkiewicz 1979).

Psychologists are also constantly arguing about what happiness is, formulating numerous concepts and theories to explain the phenomenon of “experiencing happiness”. Given the diversity of views of the nature of happiness and concepts explaining its essence with regard to the discussed problem, we would like to point to one of the most original concepts of happiness, proposed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990): the concept of *flow experience*, also known as the flow concept or the engagement concept. The flow experience concept of happiness, understood as the “optimal experience”, is considered extremely useful by psychologists studying the sense of happiness, satisfaction with life and internal motivation, sociologists who interpret it as the opposite of anomie and alienation, and anthropologists dealing with phenomena of collective joy and rituals (Porczyńska 2013).

However, because the employee’s engagement in the work they are performing is highly valued (Armstrong 2011), in a study concerning the formation of intelligent organisational culture in enterprises applying the e-learning idea it seems relevant to refer to the concept of happiness as the concept of engagement by M. Csikszentmihalyi.

According to him, the term ‘flow experience’ means the state in which the person’s skills are just at the level needed to carry out the task. Experiencing happiness, which M. Csikszentmihalyi calls flow experience, is the state when people feel deep satisfaction, and the mental state called flow means concentration to the point of complete immersion in the present activity. Usually it is connected with the feeling of strength, freedom, lightness and effortlessness. Someone who is experiencing happiness has the impression of controlling the situation, has no doubts or complexes, and uses their abilities to the full. The person loses the sense of time and emotional problems and feels wonderful, complete joy (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). We can say, then, that it is the state of maximum engagement in the present activity.

As proved by scholars, flow experience involving concentration, control and pleasure may lead to better learning effects in business education (Yi Maggie Guo, Young K. Ro 2008). The most important conditions that must be met to experience happiness in the meaning of flow, such as balance between the challenge and skills, feedback and goal transparency are the elements that link optimal experiences with learning, also learning with the use of modern IT methods.

Dynamic development of technology in the contemporary quickly changing world definitely forces business workers to engage even more in raising their competencies and qualifications, often using distance learning (e-learning) methods, understood as the process of transferring selected information via different electronic means (Penkowska, 2010). In this context, it seems that people who often experience happiness in the meaning of M. Csikszentmihalyi's concept of engagement will be more willing to engage their time and energy in improving their skills and raising competencies, both hard ones (i.e., expertise, computer literacy, foreign languages) and soft ones (i.e., creativity, time management, communicativeness or coping with stress), using not only traditional methods but also modern methods of distance learning, thus contributing to the development of intelligent organisational culture. It is noteworthy that apart from threats such as alienation or problems with interpersonal communication, modern technology undoubtedly ensures the right conditions for the transfer and popularisation of knowledge with the use of distance learning techniques.

It appears that acquiring knowledge and raising competencies through e-learning courses has some common features with flow experience. The scholars who study the phenomenon of flow experience have observed that the feeling of flow occurs when the person is faced with clearly formulated goals, which require specific behaviours. Usually, e-learning courses are designed exactly this way, to make the recipient's goals and tasks clear and precise. Moreover, typical of acting in flow is the presence of immediate feedback: when doing something, the person knows immediately how well it is going. This aspect also occurs in e-learning, since the student usually receives feedback after each task done as part of the course. Scholars also add that the feeling of flow mostly appears in situations when the person's skills are fully used, when overcoming difficulties or accepting extremely difficult challenges. Optimal experiences are generally characterised by a kind of balance between the requirements, challenges and capabilities of the person (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). These conditions also seem to be met in e-learning, which usually includes activities relevant to the student's abilities, and according to M. Csikszentmihalyi (1988), such activities give us the greatest satisfaction and lead to the state of engagement, or flow experience.

Therefore, it seems that people who use modern distance learning technologies can more often experience maximum engagement, i.e., flow experience, which according to M. Csikszentmihalyi are tantamount to experiencing happiness, and as we have already mentioned, well-being is the cause of prosperity (Czapiński

2004), which means that happy people fare better, have more successes, also professional ones, and as a result they have higher self-esteem and better cope with stress than people who do not experience happiness so often. We may presume, then, that experiencing happiness, which is an indicator of well-being, is related to effective coping with stress and has an influence on the form of intelligent organisational culture of enterprises that apply the idea of e-learning.

## **2. AREAS OF STRESS AND COPING WITH STRESS IN LEARNING ORGANISATIONS USING THE E-LEARNING METHOD**

From the point of view of an individual, in the process of work every factor connected with carrying out professional tasks may be the source of stress (Zimbardo, Ruch 1994). Work-related stress generates a whole range of problems, not only for the very individual but also for the organisation, and as a result, for the whole community. Occupational stress is currently very common, and its indices do not only remain high but are also constantly and considerably growing (Le Blanc, de Jonge, Schaufeli 2003). Obviously, work can arouse ambivalent emotions: on the one hand, it can provide satisfaction, opportunities for development, and enable people to satisfy many significant needs, such as the need of security or the sense of belonging, thus promoting health. On the other hand, work can cause many mental burdens and lead to serious emotional problems, being strongly pathogenic for organisational, social and family functioning of the person (Ogińska-Bulik 2006; Bańka 2001). It seems that for most employees work-related stress is a negative experience connected with the expectations and demands they face in their working environments. The available studies on stress also focus on negative effects of stress (Hellriegel, Slocum, Woodman 1995). Actually, occupational stress should be understood and regarded as sure and inevitable. Every day, a worker needs to confront difficult task areas and other people, who are the source of stress for them (Oyster 2002).

In many independent studies on stress at work a significant relation was found between the person's job and their mental and physical state. For example, a study carried out by Northwestern National Life showed that 40% employees consider their jobs very stressful, and the World Health Organization points out that nearly half of all working people feel unhappy at work. Studies by Stanford Prevention Research Center show that stress disturbs the functioning of the human organism, causing so-called stress-related disorders referred to as psychosomatic disorders (Białek 2012, Le Blanc, de Longe, Schaufeli 2003, Michie, Williams 2003). Apart from the medical effects of stress, an important stress-generated factor is the mental burden experienced by employees. It directly contributes to increased absence from work, constantly intensifying rotation of employees, lower productivity, an increased number of conflicts between employees, and reduced morale of work teams (Noblet, LaMontagne 2006).

Occupational stress factors are classified in source literature using many different criteria. It seems, however, that even solid arrangement of the criteria in specific theories is less important than the determination of space where stress can be discussed with reference to the specificity of contemporary organisations (Kraczlą, 2016). Generally, there are four areas associated with work: the content of work, working conditions, employment conditions and social relations at the workplace (Le Blanc, de Jonge, Schaufeli 2003). Apart from these traditional, well-known and recognisable planes of stress, there are some organisational factors resulting from the new “face” of contemporary organisations.

It must be emphasised that the level of stress in contemporary organisations is growing steadily. It is connected with the popularisation of new forms of work and working hours arrangements. It also results from growing globalisation and introducing innovative solutions or modern technologies in interpersonal communication. As shown by research results, if the level of innovation is too high, this may generate excessive stress and as a result lead to reduced performance (cf. Cowan, Sanditov, Weehuizen 2011, Moreno, Cavazotte, Alves 2017, Poczowski 2003). A modern form of reaction to intense changes in the world is so-called learning organisations, which have developed the ability of constant adaptation and change, as this is the only way contemporary organisations can survive for a long time (Kim 1993). In the face of challenges they meet, this appears to be the ideal model. However, its success depends on the proper course of many processes, inter alia the ability to develop intelligent organisational culture (Kofman, Senge, 1993).

Organisational cultures in contemporary public and business institutions are beginning to have a specific character determined by new technological resources. The workers of modern intelligent organisations can no longer imagine their functioning without technology and the freedom it gives. At the same time, this technology causes some problems resulting from excessive presence in the workers’ lives. As electronic hypercommunication is increasing, working environments are undergoing significant transformations, generating sources of tension and frustration unknown before. In assumption, modern technologies are to facilitate life and functioning and be a considerable help, making our actions faster. However, the technological advancement within the last decade has changed the mode of interpersonal contacts: instead of face to face, we now communicate remotely. And this has some disturbing consequences. Two conditions must be met for interpersonal contact: physical presence and emotional and intellectual attention. The replacement of such contacts with various technologies results in the fact that people feel lonely, isolated and feel confused at the workplace. This alienation at work paradoxically does not result from insufficient communication but from the excess of new, “virtual” communication, which lacks many signals inherent to direct contacts. This arouses anxiety and confusion and generate fears connected with the uncertainty of correct understanding of the message content (Hallowell 1999).

The inventory of modern electronic ways of communication, such as e-mail, text messages or voice mail, is now extended with developmental and educational technologies: audio or video conference lectures, forum of chat room discussions, virtual consultations and diverse multimedia educational materials. These solutions are no longer technological novelties but are the organisational reality of numerous companies and institutions, following the idea of e-learning. In publications devoted to this topic we can find different definitions of and approaches to e-learning (Hedge, Hayward 2004, Sauer 2001, Jones, Reid, Bartlett 2008). The very term 'e-learning' refers to a complex process of education with the use of modern information and communication technologies. The idea of e-learning (or distance learning) can be interpreted as an interactive process of education, allowing easy access to knowledge from any place and at any time (Hedge, Hayward 2004, Sauer 2001).

E-learning as a remote education mode has multiple advantages. First of all, it makes education flexible, generating significant time and financial savings. Naturally, e-learning also has many disadvantages, the most important of which is the limitation of interpersonal contacts. Furthermore, people need to activate their internal motivation in order to acquire knowledge this way, and this depends on the level of self-awareness and self-discipline (Newton, Doonga 2007, Oterholm 2009, Brown, Charlier, Pierotti 2012). Students' skills in operating the e-learning platform, as well as the platform's technological friendliness and usability, also play a role (Gaskell, Mills 2014, Moreno, Cavazotte, Alves 2017).

We may say that the above-mentioned modern trends in learning and development based on e-learning programs are already a typical feature of contemporary enterprises. These tools undoubtedly offer many opportunities and facilitate learning at the workplace. At the same time, they may make a new – yet unexplored but increasingly important – area of stress, being a challenge for employees and whole organisations in terms of achieving balance between traditional and modern forms of organisational participation.

### **3. DEVELOPMENT OF INTELLIGENT ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE BASED ON E-LEARNING METHODOLOGY**

As an open system, every organisation is under constant influence of both its internal subsystems and elements and the factors that affect it from the outside. An interesting view of the specificity of the environment of contemporary organisations is proposed by Bauman (2011, p. 5), who claims that it is more and more liquid, because like a liquid, it is unable to stay unchanged and maintain the same form for a long time. Other authors, e.g. Sull (2009) and Sun Young Sung (et.al., 2015) also point to the great dynamics of the environment, emphasising that we can now see the collapse of an organised structure of events, omnipresent transition and turbulence. Urbanowska-Sojkin (2014) refers to the 21st century environment as chaos, and Sztumski (2006) calls it turbo-world. The survival of an



organisation in this environment full of pressure and instability, as well as the achievement of competitive advantage, is only possible when the pace of its activity matches the dynamics of environment development and the specificity of changes in it (Cyfert 2013; Wilden & Gudergan 2015). This, however, causes certain implications for employees and provides a new image of the working environment, whose key characteristics are high dynamics, flexibility, creativity and the ability to obtain, collect and apply knowledge, i.e., high level of intelligence (Zukauskas et al. 2018, Dźwigoł-Barosz 2015). Intelligent enterprises are expected to display systemic thinking, open communication, synergy of autonomous teams, personal mastery and fluency, as well as internal entrepreneurship (Ziębicki 2000; Zimniewicz 2009). It is crucial to be open to new trends, to be an ambidextrous organisation, i.e., an enterprise that simultaneously and successfully engages in exploration and exploitation, both using the existing competencies and discovering and creating new opportunities (Cao et.al. 2009), able to achieve short-term goals (survival) and long-term goals (growth and development), incremental and radical innovations, at the same time using transactional (market) and relational (network) opportunities (Luo & Rui 2009). The company's ability to act in different (opposing) directions at the same time requires excellent leadership, strategic refinement, considerable resources, thorough knowledge, dual structures and adaptive systems (Cao et.al. 2015); it also calls for the ability to cope with constant pressure and stress (Semmer et al. 2015; Sonnentag&Frese 2013; Semmer&Beehr 2014) disturbing the sense of happiness at work. Currently, a special challenge to intelligent organisations is the extremely dynamic global digital transformation. The development of information technologies has recently led to popularising the so-called third ICT platform, referred to as SMAC (*Social, Mobile, Analytics, Cloud*), making a specific ecosystem of IT solutions which allows organisations to develop their activity with lower expenditure and the maximum range of influence. The platform is a natural expansion of possibilities concerning digital maturation of an organisation by offering new opportunities, including the improvement of e-learning methodology. The ever-growing amount of data provided by mobile devices, social media platforms, Internet browsers and loyalty programs make a new model of business based on information generated by the economic circle, creating a novel model of intelligent organisation. According to Cisco Global Cloud Index (Cisco Global Cloud Index 2013–2018, p. 77), at the end of 2018, half of the world's population will have access to the Internet, and more than 53% will use tools to store data in the "cloud" via mobile devices (Adamczewski 2018; Denecken 2015; Corcoran&Datta 2016). Practical shortening of the time needed to do anything in the cyber space and the irrelevance of geographical boundaries considerably accelerate business processes in global logistic chains and create new challenges to the model of organisational culture of an intelligent organisation. The traditional approach to the essence of organisational culture understood and interpreted in very diverse ways by different authors, e.g., as 'organisation's personality', 'philosophy behind the organisation's policy', 'core values that determine the

company's philosophy or mission', 'customary and traditional ways of thinking and action', 'organisational climate', 'symbols, language, ideologies, routines and myths', 'values, standards and knowledge', 'thinking patterns', or 'speech or jargon' (Zbiegień-Maciąg 1999, p. 17; Srokowski 2011, p. 26; LaMontagne 2016, p. 9; Wudarzewski 2013, pp. 59-78; Schneider et al. 2013, pp. 361-388), is now beginning to evolve, exposing new directions of exploring the concept, inclined toward the identification of characteristics of intelligent organisational culture. The extremely inspiring character of search of these characteristics must inevitably draw the researcher's attention to humans and human capital as the key determinants of creating the model of intelligent organisational culture based on the use of e-learning methodology. The huge role of human capital in the process, including knowledge, is emphasised by many authors (Ertemsir&Bal 2011; Navimipour et al. 2015; Aparicio et.al. 2016; Stone et. al. 2015). According to Koźmiński (2012, p. 24), knowledge is a primary resource, one that controls the processes of multiplication and change of configuration of other resources and is their necessary component. Thus, on the one hand, knowledge is a category of key importance in the process of modelling intelligent organisational culture, and on the other hand, intelligent organisational culture is a factor that stimulates the effectiveness of knowledge management. Digitization in business, including the development of e-learning techniques, significantly affects the effectiveness of both processes. It is emphasised in source literature that knowledge is a social entity (Białynicki-Birula 2014), and its importance for the organisation results from being able to use it, not from just having it. Only then can it be valuable for the organisation (Lenart 2014). In this context, knowledge management, and particularly knowledge sharing, becomes especially important (Witherspoon et al. 2013, p. 250). But the process of knowledge sharing, so significant for intelligent organisations, can be disturbed by a number of factors. Some internal factors are demographic characteristics, individual features, attitudes, approaches and intentions (Bock et al. 2005, pp. 88-89), and emotions (Tenorio et al. 2017, p. 1). External factors include the support of the managerial bodies, leadership, organisational culture and climate, the system of rewards (Li et al. 2014: 554), team characteristics and trust (Słocińska 2016: 89) and authority (Ajmal et al. 2010: 161). The factors which have a destructive influence on the process of development of intelligent organisational culture applying e-learning definitely include employees' level of stress and happiness at work.

## CONCLUSION

Organisational culture always refers to a set of basic characteristics valued by the organisation. Its understanding and definition is not easy due to a number of underlying determinants. In addition, in the structures of the contemporary world this process must take into consideration the modern phenomena integral to sets of cultural meanings. Nowadays, the methodology of e-learning, implemented in modern, intelligent organisations and based on advanced ITC technologies, is one

of such phenomena. E-learning programmes at work are supposed to help employees learn faster to improve their skills and as a result ensure better organisation performance. The design and implementation of e-learning education surely shapes the new dynamics of opportunities for the employees and the whole organisation. However, we should bear in mind that technological innovations in communication and in the process of development are also a new source of stressors that have never occurred before. A contemporary worker needs to be able to cope with them and learn to reduce the level of anxiety and isolation resulting from the excessive use of modern electronic communication tools. Coping with stress is closely connected with experiencing happiness, a category of high importance for building an organisation with intelligent culture. The research curiosity of the Authors of this study directs the discussion from the theory to the area of empirical exploration so as to confirm the relationships between experiencing happiness and the ability to cope with stress in the development and growth of intelligent organisational cultures which have included e-learning in the process.

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