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INCREASING HAPPINESS IN THE WORKPLACE

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INCREASING HAPPINESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Workplace-related happiness has become a topic of interest in today's business world. Happiness at work can be seen as a byproduct of work-related engagement and meaning. Happy workers exemplify engagement while using their strengths at work and find meaning in using their strengths for a higher purpose (Davis, 2016). These conceptualized constructs of happiness are not genetically limited, since happiness can increase as these aspects increase (Davis, 2016). Jocelyn Davis, from Nelson Hart LLC, is an expert in the fields of assessment and positive psychology. In her seminar, *Happiness at work: Measure it for success*, she gives an explanation of the aspects of engagement and meaning that lead to greater workplace happiness. Additional research has been collected to support the research conducted by Davis (2016) in an attempt to better understand work-related happiness, engagement, and meaning, and the importance of those factors in today's business world.

Engagement

Work-related engagement is the process of an employee completing tasks and working with others. In their 2016 study, Bakker and Oerlemans hypothesized that those who are engaged in work are happier than those who are experiencing burnout, and that low levels of burnout would not be enough to increase happiness. Therefore, it was suggested that those with low levels of burnout would have not engage in work related behaviors such as completing core and administrative work tasks, interacting with clients and colleagues, and participating in meetings (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2016). Bakker and Oerlemans' second hypothesis was that those who had high levels of engagement would have scores that relate positively to the factors listed above in satisfying work-related happiness. They also hypothesized that psychological need satisfaction by way of happiness will mediate the time spent on engaging work activities. Happiness at work

is measured as a moment-by-moment function that examines behaviors, feelings, and thoughts throughout the day.

Bakker and Oerlemans (2016) collected a sample of 136 participants through a link sent out through social media. The sample was of working professionals in the fields of consulting, accounting, engineering, research, financial planning, human resources, and education (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2016). Participants filled out a survey that measured enduring levels of burnout, work engagement, psychological need satisfaction, and happiness. In addition, participants filled out a happiness diary at the end of each workday by listing the activities they completed, time spent during activities, and how happy the activity made them feel on a scale from 0 to 10.

Results of the study indicated that highly-engaged employees have higher levels of happiness than employees with low engagement or burnout (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2016). The study supports the claim that those whose psychological needs are met through engagement in their work are the happiest at work. Those with high levels of burnout do not have their psychological needs met. Because of this, those individuals spend more time on the same tasks and are less happy (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2016). When work-related tasks are stimulating, an individual is more likely to find psychological satisfaction in those tasks and experience higher levels of happiness. The tasks that best meet psychological needs are those where an employee spends time with other colleagues or clients. However, for employees with high levels of burnout, client interaction was negatively associated with need satisfaction. To prevent employees from experiencing burnout, Bakker and Oerlemans (2016) suggest that management create a more resourceful environment for employees, with more opportunities for support, variety, and development.

One of the most salient forms of engagement is personal resources. Davis (2016) describes personal resources as vitality, happiness, confidence, and resilience. In general, personal resources involve personal traits that an individual can draw upon to increase well-being and health. Personal resources can propel an individual toward happiness by acting as a support system or feedback loop for the employee. There are two main ways of leveraging personal resources through engagement. The first is flow, which occurs when the employee's skills and the workplace challenges are balanced (Davis, 2016). When an employee is in a state of flow, he or she can grow in the work environment. The second is engagement with others and with work-related tasks. Employees who practice engagement at work are emotionally attached to the people, the work, and the organization in which they work.

Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2014) contribute to Davis' (2016) point of work engagement through their own study on the concept of job crafting. In their study, they proposed that there would be a positive relationship between job crafting and employee well-being. Job crafting refers to how employees make physical or cognitive changes in approaching their work to line up with the employee's values and interests and to produce more job satisfaction (Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2014). Task, relational, and cognitive dimensions of crafting were measured in this study. Task crafting is the change to the number or type of activities in which an employee engages. Relational crafting refers to changes made in personal connections at work. Cognitive crafting is the process of changing how much meaning individuals find in their jobs. Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2014) predicted that need satisfaction would mediate the relationship between job crafting and well-being. With more needs met through job crafting, an individual would be happier at work.

A group of 334 employees took a survey covering job crafting, intrinsic need satisfaction, and well-being. The portion on job crafting asked participants to assess themselves on task engagement as well as relational and cognitive crafting. In addition, an intrinsic needs satisfaction scale was used to measure employee need for autonomy, competence, and work-relatedness. Well-being was also measured with dimensions of subjective well-being, focused on positive emotion, as well as psychological well-being, focused on psychological functioning (Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2014). Results of the study showed that job crafting predicted subjective well-being because that strategy met psychological needs. Subjective well-being increased, and thus psychological well-being increased as well. In other words, employees were happier when they were engaging with their work and practicing job crafting.

Meaning

Another key aspect of happiness, according to Davis (2016), is meaning. Meaning, better defined as purpose, indicates a sense of completing a task that causes a change. Having a sense of purpose leads to contentment and satisfaction in the workplace. A person who finds purpose through internal motivation will have a greater commitment to the workplace and will display a higher level of functioning (Davis, 2016). Davis (2016) measures functioning with four questions: Does the employee have strong work relationships? Does the employee make progress daily? Does the employee have a sense of control? And, is the employee able to be him or herself?

Judge and Hurst (2008) conducted research on functioning that built on Davis' point, but they focused on it as a product of self-evaluation. The researchers attempted to measure career success of individuals who benefitted from the Matthew Effect. The Matthew Effect is the disproportionate accumulation of productivity and rewards (Judge & Hurst, 2008). The

researchers assessed whether self-evaluations and initial success trigger the Matthew Effect. They also investigated why self-evaluations may influence career success by means of education and health, as well as the pace at which individuals experience career growth and its relation to the Matthew Effect. Specifically, Judge and Hurst (2008) hypothesize that those with high self-evaluations experience more, and will grow more in, job satisfaction and pay, and they obtain more impressive positions compared to those who scored low on self-evaluations. In addition, growth in education and health problems were observed to mediate the relationship between self-evaluations and growth in job satisfaction, job pay, and occupational growth.

Over 7,000 participants were followed over the course of a longitudinal study. Starting in 1979, participants annually filled out a survey on job satisfaction, pay received each year, occupational status, education, and health problems. Core self-evaluations were also measured using a core evaluations scale that examines locus of control, self-esteem, neuroticism, and self-efficacy. Results of the study indicated that those who gave themselves positive self-reports were more likely to have more career advancements (Judge & Hurst, 2008). On the other hand, those with negative self-reports reached higher levels of education more slowly and had gradual increases in growth pays, promotions, and job satisfaction.

Another aspect of work that can contribute to happiness is variety in activity. Etkin and Mogilner (2016) sought to research the relationship between variety in activity and levels of happiness. Specifically of interest was the perceived duration of time spent on an activity and its relation to happiness. The hypothesis was made that more variety in activities over long periods of time would increase happiness through stimulation. In addition, more variety in activities over shorter periods of time would lead to decreases in happiness through feelings of unproductiveness. Eight studies were employed by Etkin and Mogilner (2016). Studies 1A and

1B measured happiness caused by variety of tasks over long and short time periods. Study 2A measured a variety of shorter and longer time periods and the perceived variety of activity. Study 2B measured variety among activities. Lastly, Studies 3 through 6 measured the impact of stimulation and productivity.

Results from the studies by Etkin and Mogilner (2016) showed that perceived duration of time spent on activities impacted the happiness of individuals more than the actual time spent on varied activities (Etkin & Mogilner, 2016). When given longer time periods, participants were happier with more activities, whereas the opposite was true for shorter time periods. Etkin and Mogilner (2016) suggest the reasoning for the results is that both stimulation and productivity are key to happiness. Specifically, variety over shorter time periods decrease the sense of productivity, whereas it provided more stimulation over long periods (Etkin & Mogilner, 2016). By knowing the impact of variety, companies can utilize job-related tasks to benefit the employee.

Relation to the Current Business World

The big questions for businesses is why employee happiness should be a goal of the organization. Davis (2016) lists two major reasons why employers should be concerned with employee happiness. First, the workplace is changing as the boomer generation is retiring. Within the next five to ten years, 35 million people will be withdrawn from the workplace (Davis, 2016). With such a change comes different generational changes, in addition to change in the employer/employee contract. Today's generation of employees do not expect to stay with the first company they are hired with. However, increasing employee happiness in the workplace makes an organization more attractive to the outside employee. The more attractive a position, the higher the likelihood of employee retention and productivity.

Secondly, Davis (2016) states that sustainability of the employee is essential in productivity. If the employee is not well cared for, he will not be a high-performing employee (Davis, 2016). Creating an atmosphere that encourages employee happiness ensures that the employee is being taken care of and will function at higher capacity. When a person is in a place where he or she can flourish, the company does better and begins to excel in productivity, profit, sales, creativity, customer service, and retention of customers and employees (Davis, 2016). Proudfoot et al., (2009) attempted to study the impact of cognitive behavioral therapy on increasing employee sustainability. The researchers hypothesized that a training program based on cognitive behavioral therapy techniques would improve employees' work-related self-esteem, job satisfaction, well-being, productivity, and turnover. 166 participants were involved in weekly sessions for seven weeks, a six-week maintenance program, and one review session three months after the training program ended. Results from the study indicated that there was a significant relationship between the training program and positive changes in employees' psychological distress, self-esteem, job satisfaction, and intention to quit (Proudfoot et al., 2009). Specifically, because of the training stress dropped from 37% of the sample to 10%. In addition, Proudfoot et. al., (2009) found that prior to training, only 29% of employees were performing at acceptable standards, whereas after training 65% were performing above average.

Conclusion

Happiness does not need to be an emotion that is neglected at work. According to research, work-related happiness is an important factor for the employee and organization. Engagement and motivation as defined by Davis (2016) and seen throughout previously conducted research gives insight into why employers should be concerned with employee happiness. However, work-related happiness is a responsibility of both the employee and the

organization. Employees can work toward increasing their happiness through engaging with and finding meaning in their work. Studies by Bakker & Oerlemans, (2016) and Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2014) found that engagement with tasks, relationships, and job crafting leads to an increase in happiness. Employers should be aware of the benefits of creating an environment that promotes happiness because their companies will benefit from increases in productivity and employee retention (Proudfoot et. al., 2009). By understanding the balance of stimulation and productivity, as seen in the study by Etkin and Mogilner (2016), employers can leverage tasks to promote employee happiness. Davis (2016) and other various researchers have given support to the idea that that happy employees run productive organizations. Engagement and meaning are parts to the puzzle of work-related happiness. These pieces begin to fit together to demonstrate the importance of measuring happiness in employees today.

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