The Relationship of Employee Engagement on Happiness at Work: A Literature Review

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Abstract

The study aims to review and analyze the literature on the relationship between employee engagement and happiness at work. The study mainly adopts descriptive analysis to objectively screen and analyze the collected literature based on a yearly timeline. This study used a comprehensive literature review method to select 9 articles related to the topic of this study from 142 literature reviews. It was found that employee engagement can have a relationship with happiness at work, however, it remains to be confirmed. The study provides a theoretical foundation for the application in future work fields and offers clear guidance strategies for enterprise management in practical applications.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Happiness at Work, Literature Review, Work Field

Introduction

With the development of times, the working environment of workplace personnel is gradually improving, and the issue of concretizing employee engagement has always been a focus of attention because a highly dedicated workforce can enhance the profitability of enterprises. A relaxed and even happy working environment is also reflected through employee participation (Salas Vallina, 2018). Since the COVID-19 epidemic has swept the world, the pattern of all aspects of life has also changed. People have begun to pay attention to personal habits and quality of life. Looking at the research literature in the last five years, we can find that there are many studies on employees' own needs and development. The work environment created by employees' engagement in the general situation deserves attention (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). Employee engagement at work is the process of requiring employees to participate in various tasks and workflows, realize their value in the process, and ultimately obtain any sense of happiness that satisfies employees (Kustiawan, 2022).

Employee engagement can reflect employee activity. Hafeez (2024) study on employee engagement shows that employee engagement reflects the specific situation of the work environment. The more employees engage, the healthier and more positive the work environment is. This indicates that employees believe the company is reliable and

psychologically feel happy. From a historical perspective, happiness at work has been influenced by different factors in different eras. Therefore, considering the current situation among Chinese manufacturing employees, there is a greater need for high employee engagement to optimize current enterprise management. Therefore, this study conducts relevant literature research and analysis on employee engagement and happiness at work.

Employee Engagement

The origin of the term employee engagement was proposed by Kahn (1990) in the last century. Its core concept mainly refers to employees investing their physical, cognitive, and emotional energy into a psychological state, and the amount of energy invested reflects the level of employee participation, ultimately leading to different outcomes. Based on this concept, Schaufeli (2015) extended it by analyzing three dimensions of employee engagement through his research: vigor, dedication, and absorption. These three dimensions clarify the concept of employee engagement, accurately reflecting employees' strong sense of autonomy and their specific attitudes toward work (Petrović et al., 2017).

This study provides a comprehensive review and scholars agree that employee engagement is a positive, fulfilling, and work-related psychological activity. Essentially, employee engagement can reflect many influencing factors, and after more than a decade of research, the connotation of employee engagement has become more enriched, according to Kwon (2020). From this, it can be concluded that employee engagement has not only been a hot topic of research but also has a significant impact on other work processes and procedures.

Happiness at Work

The term 'happiness' began to appear in the 20th century, and its meaning is very broad. Therefore, with the rapid development of empirical theory research and the times, research on happiness has also begun. scholars began advocating for the positive psychology movement, which is mainly related to happiness. Until 10 years ago, happiness had a precise definition of "the attribute of feeling happy once" (Raibley 2012). This study mainly focuses on job satisfaction, as the concept of happiness in the workplace is becoming increasingly important for human resource management (HRM) research. Although happiness has different structures or formation factors, measuring the happiness experienced by individuals at work is becoming increasingly important in future research (Salas Vallina, 2021).

In this situation, the core of happiness lies in the happiness that employees feel when pursuing their value and potential. This is a dynamic process that involves not only organizational support but also the need for sustained personal effort and investment. It is reflected in a sense of belonging at work and being recognized as a positive emotion (RAMIREZ-ASIS, 2023). Therefore, the meaning of happiness at work in the study is mainly based on the quantitative content of happiness at work proposed by García del Junco (2013). It includes 15 items, which measure happiness at work through enjoyment, happiness, health, love, internal stability, feeling good, career stability, fair rewards, good atmosphere, excellent boss, enjoying work, good workplace atmosphere, high intrinsic motivation, carefully designed tasks, and extroversion.

Employee Engagement and Happiness at Work

When employees can gain support or engage more in decision-making in the work environment or decision-making process, they may demonstrate their abilities and enthusiasm for their work. This statement can be verified by the research of Barreiro and Treglon (2020), who proposed that in actual work environments, employees with high levels of engagement also have a very high sense of happiness during the process. In the past decade, literature on these topics can be found, such as research on corporate welfare by Gulyani (2018), which reflects that high employee engagement stimulates enthusiasm as well as creates a relaxed and pleasant work atmosphere.

Happiness at work is an emotional state and a sign of the working atmosphere in a company. Monica (2023), study on employee engagement and work environment shows that the correlation between the two can be found. Employee engagement expresses employees' work attitude. Although the ultimate goal of employees is to achieve work performance, in this process, a positive work attitude affects the surrounding work environment, allowing employees to find happiness in their work.

However, in recent years, studies on the correlation between the two have mostly adopted cross-sectional research designs, such as in De Stasio et al. (2019); Field (2011) and Hafeez (2024). Most of the related studies focused on the relationship between job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee engagement. It reflected different research models to study the factors that affect happiness at work. The conclusions also show that there is a relationship between employee engagement and happiness at work. Therefore, to verify the relationship between employee engagement and happiness at work, this study proposes the hypothesis and further analyzes the existing literature to validate it.

Method

Han (2022), proposed that data analysis in quantitative research involves calculating numerical values based on actual measured data, describing things, and obtaining results without subjective consciousness. Based on this viewpoint, the study adopted the project content of Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) to analyze the objectives (Page et al., 2021). Therefore, according to Page et al. (2021), this study also applied this analysis and evaluation step to conduct research. These six steps are progressive relationships that require careful handling (Gurbuz, 2018). The first step is to formulate the research problem. After identifying the problem, relevant literature is searched and collected. The following will explain in detail the comprehensive evaluation and screening of the collected literature.

Research Analysis and Synthesis

In the screening stage, there are generally three steps: target search; title and abstract selection, and eligibility. The initial target search was mainly to identify the ranking (authority) and citation count of journal articles. The literature that needs to be searched in this study is mainly IEEE Xplore, ACM Digital Library, Springer Link, Science Direct, Scopus, etc. The implementation of search strategies is based on search keywords (employee engagement or happiness at work). The author screened the titles, keywords, abstracts, and methods of the 108 collected papers and set screening criteria. The inclusion criteria are as follows: firstly, the research subjects of these papers must be employees and enterprises; Secondly, these studies must include research on employee engagement and happiness at work. According to the timeliness of the literature, employee engagement and happiness at work were concepts

proposed before 2000, and literature before 2010 needs to be filtered out. In order to ensure quality and sufficient objectivity, the screening criteria are shown in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Decision
The paper was published in a scientific peer-reviewed journal	Inclusion
The paper should be written in the English language	Inclusion
The paper clearly describes the research objectives	Inclusion
The paper includes a literature review, background, and research background	Inclusion
The paper presents the relevant work of previous research to demonstrate the main contribution of this study	Inclusion
The paper describes the proposed model architecture or the methods used	Inclusion
The paper has research results	Inclusion
The paper presents conclusions related to the research objectives/questions	Inclusion
The paper provides suggestions for future work or improvement	Inclusion
Papers that are duplicated within the search documents	Exclusion
Papers that are not accessible, review papers and meta-data	Exclusion
Papers that are not primary/original research	Exclusion
Papers that got published before the year?	Exclusion

Table 2.1 shows the nine criteria and four exclusion criteria to be included in the review. Based on these criteria, the literature was screened for eligibility, which is the third and final stage of screening. This study thoroughly examined the research titles, abstracts, and key content of these papers to ensure accuracy. Among the examined papers, 76 were excluded because they were not empirical studies or did not match the subject of this study. Therefore, 66 papers were excluded, and a total of 9 papers ultimately met the criteria.

Data Synthesis

This study used the PRISMA analysis method to further analyze the 142 literature identified based on screening criteria, such as listing the researchers and publication year, research objectives, research samples and methods, research background, and findings. By comparing these aspects, 9 available pieces of literature related to the research objectives were ultimately selected, and innovative points were discovered through research analysis. According to Bozkurt et al. (2015), the review process includes the following stages: 1) Coding (organizing research data into tables); 2) Filter relevant information on employee engagement, happiness at work, and their mutual influence; 3) Find the final suitable literature. The detailed process can be seen in Figure 2.2.
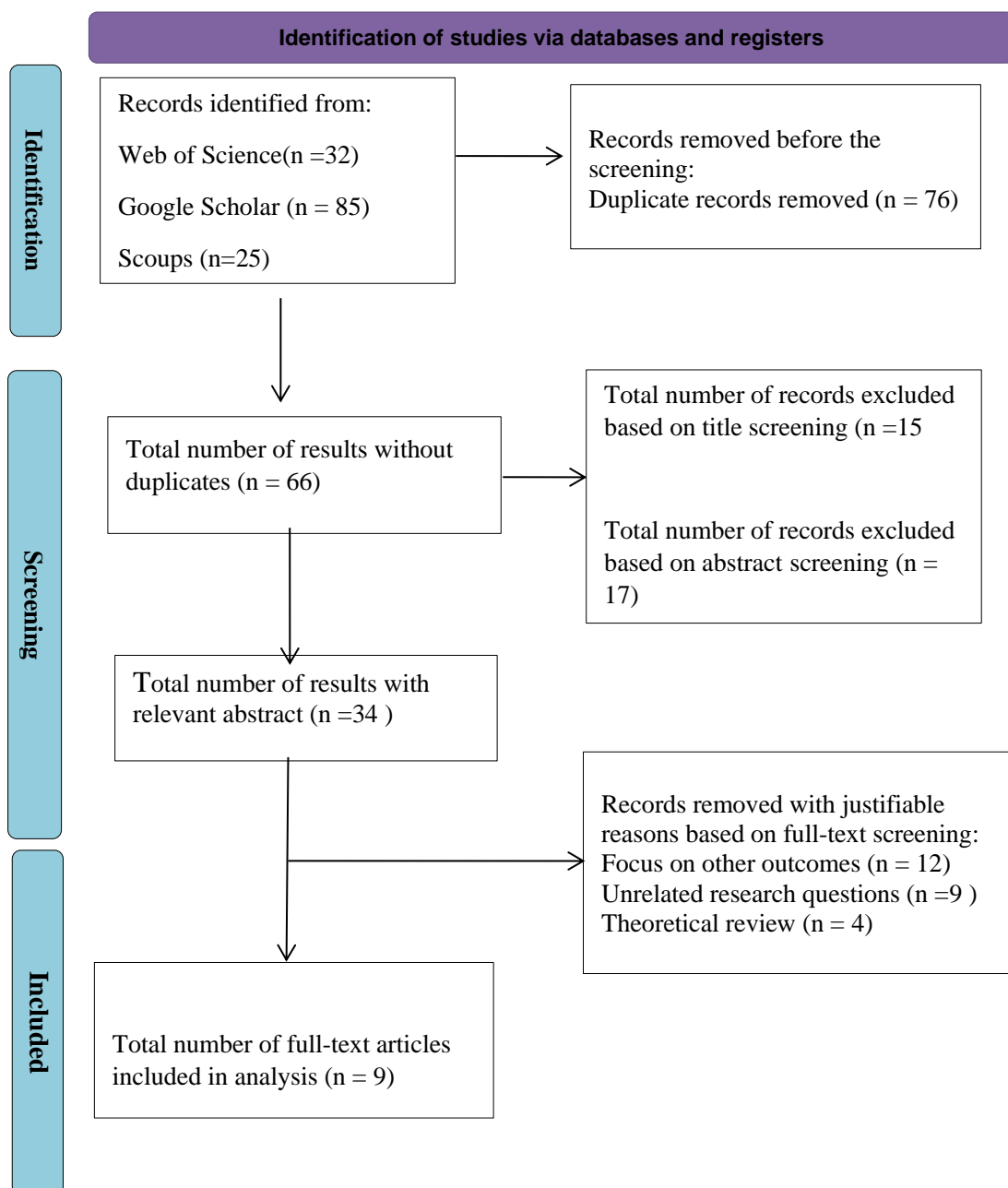
Identification of studies via databases and registers

Records identified from:

Web of Science(n =32)

Google Scholar (n = 85)

Scoups (n=25)

→ Records removed before the screening:
Duplicate records removed (n = 76)

Total number of results without duplicates (n = 66)

→ Total number of records excluded based on title screening (n =15

Total number of records excluded based on abstract screening (n = 17)

Total number of results with relevant abstract (n =34)

Records removed with justifiable reasons based on full-text screening:
Focus on other outcomes (n = 12)
Unrelated research questions (n =9)
Theoretical review (n = 4)

Total number of full-text articles included in analysis (n = 9)

Identification

Screening

Included

Figure 2.2. PRISMA Flow Diagram

Result

Through screening, this section summarized and analyzed the main research objectives of these 9 articles. The results show that among the studies conducted from 2011 to 2024, 9 articles used quantitative research, and only one article used a mixed method research. In order to further clarify, these literature were summarized mainly based on data over time and distribution types. Table 2.3 mainly displays the annual fees, data source types, research methods, and distribution countries of the literature.

Table 2.3
General Info about the studies

Criteria	Categories	n	%
Years of publication	2011 – 2015	3	33.3
	2016 – 2020	2	22.2
	> 2020	4	44.4
Types of data sources (primary vs secondary)	Primary data	8	88.9
	Secondary data	1	11.1
Research Approaches	Quantitative	8	88.9
	Mixed-method	1	11.1
Research Design	Case Study	1	11.1
	Survey-based	8	88.9
Country	Pakistan		
	Indonesia		
	Korea		
	America		
	India		
	South Africa		
	Jordan		

The main purpose of Table 2.3 is to display the year, data sources, research methods, and distribution regions of these 9 articles. It can be inferred that these documents are mainly distributed in Asia, with a few in the United States. From the perspective of age, literature from 2020 onwards accounted for the highest proportion of 44.4%, indicating that compared to ten years ago, people are gradually paying attention to their physical and mental health and the atmosphere of their work environment - happiness at work. From the perspective of data collection and analysis methods, first-hand data accounts for 88.9%; The proportion of quantitative research methods used is 88.9%, which can serve as a support for maintaining objectivity in this study. However, from a regional perspective, there are more regions in Asia and a few in the Americas, and the situation of these countries is also very representative, which is suitable as a reference.

Table 2.4
Crosstab

	Quantitative	Qualitative	Mixed-method	Primary	Secondary
2011 – 2015	2	-	1	3	-
2016 – 2020	2	-	-	2	-
> 2020	4	-	-	3	1

COMPARED to the table above, Table 2.4 displays the application methods of 9 literature reviews with a focus on time years. It can be seen that research on the effect between employee engagement and happiness at work has only become popular in the past three years, and quantitative methods have been used. Generally, testing the relationship between the two requires the use of quantitative research methods, which are the most objective. Therefore, based on previous research, different research models have emerged in different eras, indicating a connection between the two, which provides strong support for the questions raised in the study.

Conclusion

Nowadays, people are paying attention to personal and environmental comfort, which is reflected in the happiness experienced in the work environment - work happiness. This fully reflects that employees are not only engaged in work but also pay attention to shared happiness. De Stasio et al. (2019) argue that if employees in an organization have the right to engage in decision-making, they can play a greater role and feel happy, which is happiness at work. The comprehensive analysis of the literature on both can also help optimize the procedures in practical management practices of enterprises, enabling them to pay more attention to the inner activities of employees and thus enable them to exert their effective value.

In recent years, there have been mature studies on employee engagement and happiness at work. However, in these studies, it can be determined that employee engagement affects employee happiness. However, research on happiness at work cannot show a direct relationship between the two, and the timeliness of this data also has a certain relationship. Since people in the early days did not attach importance to their happiness and the happiness of the surrounding environment, if this study proposes that employee engagement can directly affect happiness at work, it is necessary to collect data again to determine the relationship between the two. Overall, through these analysis methods, it can be seen that the research background of the questions raised in this study is well-founded, and there is indeed a certain connection between the two. However, in terms of specific dimensions and meanings, there is still a lack of objective data to support the relationship between employee engagement and happiness at work.

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