

Towards Developing a Framework on Happiness and Productivity among Personnel in Institution of Higher Learning

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Abstract

Happiness undeniably facilitates staff's productivity in the workplace. Productivity could be changed by the developments in the level of knowledge, income or the technology innovation. The focus of this paper is to ascertain the prospective factors that will influence the level of productivity among personnel in Institution in Higher Learning. Numerous factors were identified and it will be a useful input for future researchers that are seeking directions to investigate the contributing factors of productivity in a higher learning institution.

Keywords: Happiness, Productivity, Higher Learning Institution

Introduction

Happiness was a grave concern for human beings for centuries. Being happy is prominent to most people and has been found to be a highly valued goal in most societies (Diener, 2000). The happy feeling is important for human well-being but nevertheless, this feeling is not manifested to some of the individuals due to a number of factors (Diener and Diener 1996). This is because individuals are provoked to a certain level of happiness due to certain incidents, and usually will revert to that set point rapidly relatively. People's moods normally change but there is substantial stability over time and across situations in the average levels of mood and emotions that a person feels. According to Seligman (2002), the way to achieve authentic happiness is by developing and nurturing noble personalities such as kindness, gratitude, optimism, curiosity, playfulness, humor, open-mindedness, and hope. The frequency of positive emotional experience can be separated from its intensity explained happiness. It shows that frequent positive feelings are adequate for happiness without these experiences being intense.

Higher learning institutions are one of the vital aspects of people's education and life. The existence of learning institution culture has shown to encourage growth and development of an institution. Learning institution is a type of an institution that develops its capabilities on a continuous basis for long-term benefits. This means that institutions that implement learning institution culture would have the skills and capabilities in order to produce, accomplish and utilize the knowledge, and transform individuals to be happier and productive. In higher institution even though the core product is academic learning, it is indeed necessary for it to show happiness and productivity as their core culture. Happiness in working place is a prominent issue in order to increase productivity. People perform their work in exchange for either monetary (salary and benefits) or non-monetary rewards (psychological fulfillment from work) (Stiglbauer & Batinic, 2012). The changing work environments (new technology/system, Key Performance Index (KPI) and new practices) indicate to the revolutionizing nature of work (Connell, Gough, McDonnell, & Burgess, 2014). Nature of work is defined as "the actual content of the job or work characteristics" (Benrazavi & Silong, 2013). Other than that, the effect of human resource management (HRM) practices by downsizing, outsourcing, and temporary employment can impact the nature and scope of work. Restructuring and downsizing that are projected to reduce the workforce for improving institutional performance probably can make employees feel unsatisfied with their jobs (Klehe, Zikic, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2011). Employees' job satisfaction has an impact on the growth of an institution. If employees are satisfied with their work, it is presumed that their productivity would be increased (Barmby, Bryson, & Eberth, 2012).

In any organization, happiness at the workplace is crucial for improving productivity. It refers to how satisfied people are with their individual's subjective well-being. A happy staff is more productive person compared with the unhappy since the unhappy might not execute their work productively. In order to escalate and sustain productivity, institutions should be able to maintain long-term happiness (Wesarat, Sharif, & Majid, 2015). Thus, there is an urge to map the patterns that could affect staff happiness in order to effectively enhance happiness and productivity at the workplace. However, research on staff happiness is limited in the past. During the past two decades, maintaining a level of happiness at work has become more significant and relevant due to the intensification of work caused by economic uncertainty and an increase in competition. Companies with higher than average staff happiness exhibit better financial performance and customer satisfaction. The issue of happiness at the workplace needs to be properly conceptualized so that useful research on it could be conducted. This paper presents a conceptual framework of happiness at the workplace that could give a valuable contribution to future research in this area.

Productivity

According to Gardner & Benninger (1996) productivity is defined as the ratio of output to input for a specific production or service. Increasing productivity denotes that either more output is produced with the same amount of inputs, or that fewer inputs are required to produce the same level of output. In either case, it is not difficult to understand the importance of productivity changes for general well-being, happiness including environmental concerns. Mihaiu, Opreana, & Cristescu (2010) indicate that productivity is defined as the efficient and effective use of resources with minimum waste and attempt to achieve the outcome. In contradiction, productivity is represented by waste, which must be removed in order to improve productivity. Thus, productive is directly linked to the use and

availability of resources. Productivity is measured by items related to work efficiency and effectiveness, achieving results, goals, utilizing skills, quality of work, customer satisfaction and team performance (Ramirez and Nembhard, 2004; Ramirez and Steudel, 2008; Wännström et al., 2009). These are all predictable issues related to productivity, reflecting the internal efficiency of the worker and the effectiveness of the outcomes (Palvalin et al., 2013). Effectiveness is defined as ‘doing the right things’, while efficiency means ‘doing things right’ (Tangen, 2002). The abundance of literature denotes that efficiency is strongly linked to the utilization of resources and mainly influence the input of the productivity ratio. This means that efficiency in higher learning institution can be seen as the minimum resource level that is theoretically required to be obtained by the staff, compared to how much resources are actually used (see Figure 1). While productivity is a fairly specific concept related to the ratio between output and input, performance is a term which includes almost any objective of competition and manufacturing excellence such as cost, flexibility, speed, dependability and quality. However, as illustrated in Figure 2, various performance objectives can have a big impact on the productivity. In addition, productivity has significantly effect on the rate of absenteeism (Mitchell et al., 2013). Apparently, people are significantly more productive when they are happy. The key then emerges to lie in cultivating a workplace environment in which individuals can feel happy and fulfilled.

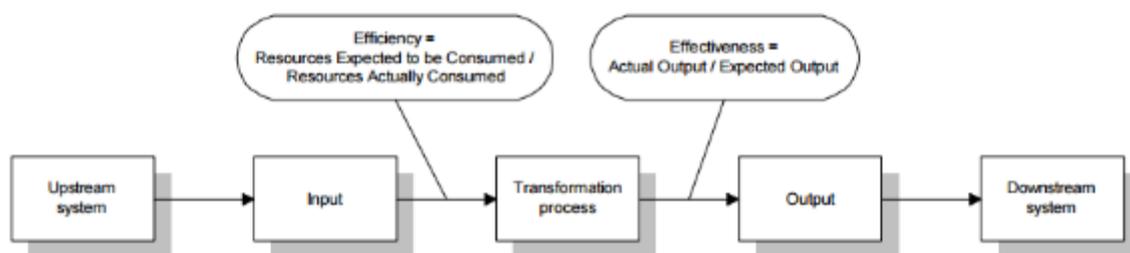


Figure 1: Efficiency and effectiveness

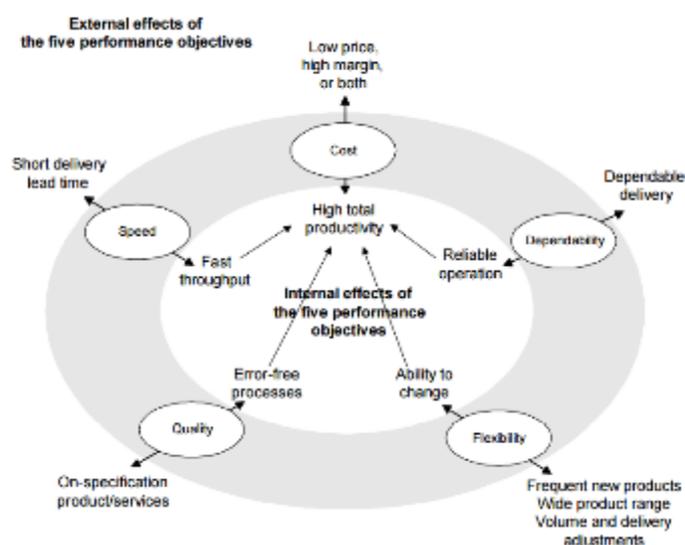


Figure 2: The external effects of the performance objectives

The main goal of the public sector including staff working in institutions of higher learning is to meet the aspirations of the country. Speaking at the 14th General Public Service Council, YAB Prime Minister Dato 'Seri Najib Tun Razak stressed that emphasis on national growth

through productivity and innovation is important to meet the country's new reality (YAB Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Bin Tun Abdul Razak, 2015).

As in other sectors, the productivity of civil servants is also influenced by many factors. The human factor is referred to as one of the major factors that can affect the productivity of civil servants. Therefore, the management action that needs to be taken is to motivate employees to produce excellence through recognition in various forms. In the event of a thorough refinement, the employee's recognition of the management is aimed at generating happiness in public servants to continue contributing to work productivity. In other words, the aspect of staff happiness is an important foundation towards productivity.

Happy employees will usually perform their daily tasks in a calm and comfortable manner that will impact on productivity generation such as quality work and satisfactory service quality (Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia, 2012). Hannagan (2002) explained that most human actions are determined and shaped by intentions. This paper will try to map the possible factors that contribute to the happiness and productivity in higher learning institution.

Possible factors affecting happiness and productivity among personnel in higher learning institutions

Career Development

Career development is one of the most vital purposes of human resource management. Career development comprises "vertical" concerns such as promotions and upward mobility, but also "horizontal" movement (job transfers) within the organization (Merchant, 1992). Career development objective is to develop the abilities of a person and institution as a holistic unit; hence career development consists of personnel and overall growth of the employees as when employees of the organization would flourish the institution and the personnel performance would increase (Elena, 2000). Champathes (2006) also concurs to this idea that when employees feel that they are more developed, they would be happier with the job, more dedicated with the job and the productivity would be improved. When institutions provide a number of career development activities, the employees would work hard; apply their full skills and efforts to achieve the goals of the institutions. Thus, this will lead to the enhancement of institutional productivity and happiness.

Workload

In a higher learning institution, other than an academic officer, there are also the support staff, management officer, and non-academic staff. These staffs are pertinent to perform a high quality and given workload in order to achieve individual and institutional KPI. Staffs will turn out to be stressed when they undergo enormous piles of work in a given target timeline (Mustapha, 2013). Houston, Meyer & Paewai (2006) revealed that staffs were moderately satisfied with the freedom to choose their own method of work, their level of responsibility, and the amount of variety in their job that resulted to overtime. An overtime paid can increase an individual's income but their happiness level is affected by working hours (Binswanger, 2006; Paul & Guilbert, 2013). People may be unsatisfied with their jobs if they have long working hours (Georgellis, Lange, & Tabvuma, 2012). Goh, Ilies, and Wilson (2015) indicated that workload is a job stressor domain that signifies a consumption of energy in terms of time and psychological resources. Thus, it will affect to fulfill the demands in the staff work life

balance (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Ilies et al., 2007). High workload negatively affects individuals' family role performance, resulting in daily work–family conflict (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). This may occur through a lack of time needed to accomplish one's duties for the family or through a lack of energy needed to engage in the family domain (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

Infrastructure

Numerous higher institutions have attempted various new designs and techniques to construct office buildings, facilities, and equipment which can increase productivity and happiness among the staff. The abundance of literature noted that the physical layout of the workspace, convenience facilities and traffic system, and together with the efficient management processes, play a major role in boosting staffs' productivity and improving institution performance (Leblebici, 2012). The issues are based on equipment, greenery environment, the flexibility of using provided equipment and one stop center (for example bank, bookstore, and souvenir shop) (Springer Inc, 1986; Leaman, 1995). On the other hand, adequate infrastructure reduces absenteeism among the staff (Leblebici, 2012). Staffs do not need to take any leave to settle any personal issues if the facilities provided is within their parameter. Hence, it helps them to achieve individual productivity.

Work Ecosystem

Work ecosystem is defined as a close relationship among colleagues in the workplace (Huang, 2008). This bonding indicates that relationship among individuals with their peers, subordinates, and superiors (Lee, 2005; Mao & Hsieh, 2012). Besides, staffs need a support system to express their emotion and behavior (Huang, 2008). Thus, it has a positive impact on institutional productivity and staffs' work attitudes towards their jobs (Song, 2005; Bader et al., 2013). The abundance of studies shows the significant effect between interpersonal relationship and happiness (Demir & Davidson, 2013; Søraker, 2012; Westaway, Olorunju, & Rai, 2007). The relationship between these groups makes them more committed to their work and leads them to a higher productivity because staffs who have meaningful working ecosystem are happier than those who are alone (Dotan, 2007; Snow, 2013). This factor is pertinent that most sociable people are happier and productive (Ganser, 2012).

Salary/Incentives

Salary, wages, compensations and incentives have an important role in order to achieve productivity and happiness in the working area. A high and reasonable salary or incentives can ensure that the institution can attract and retain high-quality staff and work (Noe et al., 2006; Mudor & Phadett, 2011). This factor has significant effect towards job productivity (Ting 1997). This statement is also agreed by Caporale, Georgellis, Tsitsianis and Yin (2009) who mentioned that there is a strong relationship between an individual income and life satisfaction because higher income has more chances to have desired goods and services (Frey & Stutzer, 2002; Schnittker, 2008). Moreover, by comparing their income with others, they are likely to be happy when they perceive income equality (De Prycker, 2010; Oshio & Kobayashi, 2011; Lembregts & Pandelaere, 2014. Hopkins (2008) denotes that income inequality can positively affect the happiness of some competitive people who gain more income than others. Competitive people are likely to make the difference between their own and other rewards. Beyond this, the greater freedom of action and consumption that income provides could allow for greater self-actualization and more successful goal pursuits.

Conclusion and Way Forwards

Happiness is contagious from the office to home; likewise, they also transfer their happiness from their home to the office. This suggests that there is a possible close interrelation between an individual's work and life. Staffs are happy when they experience stable employment and productive working environment. Thus, it gives impact to the rate of employee turnover and institution performance. The sustainability of staff happiness is essential to ensure availability of workforce. Many institutions have hurdles retaining the high-talent employees who have high potential to accomplish institution goals. This a challenge for the institution to maximize productivity by enhancing happiness at the workplace. Since the notion of happiness is crucial for institution performance and productivity, human resource department needs to be on a constant alert and design an institutional action plan.

Undoubtedly the factors mentioned above are important to enable to boost productivity and increase happiness among staffs in a higher learning institution. If happiness is a leading measure of society's well-being, public policies might perhaps need to be realigned to have more impact and meaning to people's lives. Certainly, further studies need to be carried out to discover factors that would enhance the happiness and productivity in a higher learning institution. After a thorough search on all the available resources, several factors were identified and these factors could be used by future researchers as primary theoretical understanding for predicting and explaining the level of happiness and productivity among higher learning institution. Besides, future studies should be able to picture out whether those energetic and vibrant staffs are ready to embrace the institution mission and vision and perhaps ready to represent the institution to face the challenges posed by globalization and borderless world.

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