

"HAPPINESS AT WORK A GERMAN PERSPECTIVE"

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by

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Abstract

Within the framework of the research semester, the meaning and impact of happiness research was examined for the management (in the sense of leading and motivating employees). Intensive desk research and various expert interview were conducted. Furthermore, with participants from different countries. The empirical happiness research is an interdisciplinary field of study. The definition of "happiness" is not clearly interpreted in science. There are numerous approaches to defining happiness and its success factors for private and professional life. Value based happiness concepts become more important in scientific research. In particular, selected universities in the USA are intensively involved in empirical happiness research. Due to the shortage of skilled workers and the change in values of the younger generations, companies in the IT industry in particular rely on the results of scientific happiness studies in order to sustainably increase employer attractiveness. Here, the corporate culture and an authentic leadership plays a prominent role. In practice, however, there is often an inadequate leadership culture characterized by overburdening, ignorance, greed, power and / or narcissism.

Keywords

Happiness, culture, leadership, values, well-being

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1. Initial situation

Increasing performance requirements in the workplace, new technologies and the desire to be always accessible, create challenges for employees and managers.

Depression, fatigue and addictions increase

In the European Union, around 50 million people suffer from depression, fatigue and addictions. This leads to increased absenteeism at work (Bundesministerium für Gesundheit, 2019; Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin 2017). A Global Emotions study conducted by Gallup (2018a), surveyed over 150,000 adults in over 145 countries on their feelings. More than a third of respondents expressed they were suffering from stress. New work and leadership models are being developed and implemented to strengthen the energy management of workers and managers in the sense of well-being in the workplace. In particular, the IT industry is at the forefront of measures such as above-average social benefits, free food and drinks, sports programs and, above all, mindfulness exercises / meditations during working hours (Gallup 2018 a). The expert interviews underline also further challenges for managers of the changing values of the generations - above all, the Millennium - generation. Compared to the Baby Boomer generation, the Millennium generation values meaningfulness of the job, social commitment of the employer and a balanced work-life are a higher priority.

Happiness is also a decision

The nurse Bronnie Ware (2015) researched about the desire of human beings for a happy life. She identified five things that most dying people from different cultures regret:

The dying wished they had ...

- *the courage to live their own lives.*
- *not worked that much.*
- *had the courage to express their feelings.*
- *maintain contact with their friends.*
- *allowed oneself to be happier.*

There are a lot of studies about happiness, also in connection to management in companies; however, these are sometimes very popular studies. They show great weaknesses in the measurement of

happiness or are influenced by a certain, mostly Anglo-Saxon countries, culture and thus only partially transferable to companies in other countries. The expert interviews showed that the definition of "happiness" is very difficult and has a wide range of interpretation.

Especially in the United States, overall the empirical happiness research field is gaining importance, along with the connection to the workplace and management (eg Harvard Business School, Yale University and University of California, Berkeley). In the United States, universities and companies play a leading role in the research and implementation of success factors of happiness.

2. Research design

2.a Research goals

Within the framework of the research semester, the meaning and impact of happiness research was examined for the management (in the sense of leading and motivating employees). The following core questions were the focus of the investigation:

- What does happiness in general and in specific with respect to the company and management culture?
- How does happiness influence the company's success? What are the derived success factors - from an intercultural perspective?
- What are the consequences for universities in terms of training future leaders?

2.b Research structure

The basic concept for conducting the empirical investigation is a modified Delphi study. As part of the expert interviews, the results of the scientific studies, the expert interviews and the carried-out workshops were discussed with the experts.

The following research activities were carried out:

- Analysis and evaluation of existing scientific studies from home and abroad (primarily from Western culture).

- Participation in academic conferences and workshops in Copenhagen (Happiness at Work), Mauritius (International Business Conference), Budapest (European Conference on Positive Psychology) and IHK Wolfsburg ("Corporate Happiness").
- Online seminar on "The Science of Happiness at Work" at the University of California, Berkeley.
- Carrying a 1.5-day kick-off workshop with master students of the Faculty of Economics (22 participants from Germany) and the *ASTP (Automotive Service Technology and Processes)* master students of Automotive Engineering Faculty (28 participants from India).
- In addition, two half-day discussions with Master and MBA students from different cultures at Ostfalia.
- Expert discussion at the interdisciplinary public event series "Happiness and fulfilled life" at Ostfalia, Wolfsburg Campus (organized and moderated by the author (since the winter semester 2017/2018 the series of events is held once per semester, each with about 120 visitors).
- interviewed experts on "happiness" of the following areas
 - Universities:
 - Dr. Maggie Cullen and Dr. Roger Muller, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa
 - Tobias Rahm, Institute for Educational Psychology, TU University Brunswick;
 - Emiliana R. Dr. Simon Thomas, University of California Berkeley, USA, and scientific director of the Greater Good Science Center
 - 12 experts from psychology, coaching, mediation
 - 2 experts from the religion
 - 8 experts from the economy

3. Research results

3.a Definition of happiness

Empirical happiness research is interdisciplinary

Various scientific disciplines are concerned with the subject of happiness (Ruckriegel 2017). The social sciences examine happiness in relation to groups or nations. The Neurobiology considers the various types of biological factors that causally linked to states of happiness (individual genetic susceptibility), such as the amount collected and processed happiness transmitters dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, endogenous opioids and opiates (endorphins). Positive psychology examines the conditions and factors for a happy and fulfilling life. The results of the "*positive psychology*" are increasingly input into the economic studies. In management research and teaching "happiness" is considered as a value-based management within the meaning of "*positive leadership*" and "leadership by promoting *positive emotions*." It explores new forms of leadership, motivation and engagement.

Happiness is coincidence and feeling

The term "happiness" is interpreted very differently and is difficult to specify. There are also ambiguities in the translation into happiness. Basically, in the definition of terms in German usage, a distinction must be made between coincidence and feeling.

- **Chance** ("Luck") is a stroke of fate "*I was lucky*". This definition is not pursued.
- **Feeling** ("Happiness") is a mental or emotional state of the people, a subjective well-being, a pleasant state of mind and a state of inner satisfaction and elation ("*I feel happy*"). Here, a distinction must be made between a short-term, an instantaneous and a long-term approach. The present study is based on the long-term view of happiness in terms of life satisfaction and well-being.

Happiness as well-being and value happiness

With regard to time and content, a further distinction can be made between: (Huta 2015; Bayertz 2010)

- the **well-being happiness** in terms of "the good life" or positive emotions (hedonic happiness; derived from the Greek "pleasure", "joy"). The feel-good happiness is more pleasure-oriented and can be divided into two components.

- from a **cognitive** perspective, the focus is on previous life satisfaction and our living conditions.
- the **emotional** component compares the relationship of our positive and negative emotions. Here is significant that even negative feelings can be allowed.
- the **value happiness** (eudaimonic happiness) in the sense of "the fulfilled life" or values and meaning. The term goes back to Aristotle and describes a fulfilling life that builds on its own strengths and potentials. Things are done for their own sake.

Diener (1994) and Esch (2014) define happiness as subjective well-being. This includes

- a subjectively perceived high life satisfaction (cognitive) as the result of a target-actual comparison between the desired and actual life situation.
- positive emotions (affective) as well.
- negative emotions (affective) these can lead to positive emotions in coping with great challenges.

"Authentic" happiness

Seligman (2005) from the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA, and founder of positive psychology defined happiness positive psychology as the "authentic " happiness with the scale of life satisfaction. He derived happiness elements:

1. Positive happiness in the sense of feeling, that desire heat, ecstasy and comfort lead to a "good life"; hedonic element
2. Engagement in the sense of a flow, cessation of time and the loss of ego-consciousness during an activity. In the state of flow, one melts with his task (Csikszentmihaly 2005).
3. Meaning, because man is looking for a meaning for his life, which is greater than the ego. The "meaningful" life is expressed in the "serving". Therefore, the human being creates positive institutions; for example, in religion, political parties, ecological movements or the family.

In the course of the research activities Seligman (2011) revised his definition, because the term "happiness" is overused and difficult to define. His theory of "authentic" happiness he has made following reasons developed further:

- Happiness is equated by most people with a happy mood and positive emotions.
- Fortunately, satisfaction surveys often measure the current moment, meaning that the current mood significantly affects the outcome.

PERMA

On the basis of his theory of the "authentic" happiness Seligman developed (2011), the theory of "well-being" and added two additional elements "positive relationship" and Accomplishment " added (**PERMA**):

P = **Positive Emotions**: positive feeling, pleasant life; life satisfaction

E = **commitment** in the sense of FLOW

R = **positive relationships**: connection with other people and relationships; a friendly act towards other people

M = **Meaning**: meaning of life

A = **Accomplishment**: goal achievement (or success) as a temporary manifestation of "successful" life

Happiness meaning "flourishing"

In theory of well-being by Seligman (2011), it is ultimately about the degree of "flourishing" in their own lives. Huppert and Sun (2009) from Cambridge University have interviewed over 40,000 people in 23 European countries in terms of their flourishing in private life and called in the following additional characteristics: self-esteem, optimism, resilience, vitality and self-determination. Denmark is ranked with 33% of the population, followed by Switzerland, Finland and Norway. According to Seligman, the success of a government is not just the gross domestic product, but the prosperity that makes other people flourish.

Simon-Thomas (2018), Scientific Director of the *Greater Good Science Center* at the University of California Berkeley, defines happiness as "*the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, coupled with the feeling that a person's life is good and meaningful.*" Overall, in terms of working life, happiness is *the feeling that we enjoy our time, are motivated from the inside, and know that what we do is important - at work.*" This research report is based on this definition,

3.b Meaning of "happiness" for private and professional life

Happy people have a significantly reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, depression and are more successful at work. A study by the University of Warwick reveals that happy employees make a positive contribution to company success. The productivity can be increased by up to 12% if the management culture "Happiness" and "Wellbeing" sustained support in the workplace. Sick leave and staff turnover go back, morale, employee engagement and confidence in the work give rise (SgROI 2015). According to a study of the Penn State University (Grandey 2005) smiling employees have a significant positive impact on their colleagues and clients. They look friendlier and customers rate interaction with those smiling employees with higher customer satisfaction.

Hotel chain Upstalsboom

The example of the hotel chain Upstalsboom in Germany confirms this study results. Since the introduction of a happiness-based, value-based leadership culture, employee satisfaction has increased by 80% over the past three years, with sick leave and staff turnover both down by 50%. The customer referral rate increased by 98% and sales doubled.

World Happiness Index shows great importance of trust for the feeling of happiness and well-being

Focusing on the life satisfaction of nations is the focus of the World Happiness Index, which is regularly conducted in more than 150 countries at the initiative of the United Nations (Helliwell, Layard and Sachs 2017 and 2018). The following criteria are used:

- gross domestic product
- life expectancy
- social network and generosity (measured in donations).

It is noteworthy that the Scandinavian countries have always been among the top 10 nations since 2015; Denmark even among the TOP 3 countries since the beginning of the study. A key success factor for the life satisfaction of a nation is trust in its own government. The American scientist Csikszentmihaly (2018), another founding father of positive psychology and founder of FLOW theory (Csikszentmihaly 2005), supports this thesis. Denmark is characterized by a very high level of public confidence in its own government. Due to a very good welfare models with low income inequality,

Ranking of Happiness by Country

Wohlbefinden	2015*	2016*	2017*	2018*	2019*
Deutschland	26.	16.	16.	15.	17.
USA	15.	13.	14.	18.	19.
UAE	20.	28.	21.	20.	21.
China	84.	83.	79.	86.	93.
Japan	46.	53.	51.	54.	58.
Bhutan	79.	84.	97.	97.	95.
Brasilien	16.	17.	22.	28.	32.
Südafrika	113.	116.	101.	105.	106.
Russland	64.	56.	49.	59.	68.
UK	21.	23.	19.	19.	15.

* Based on previous 3 years

Quelle: www.worldhappiness.report

www.ostfalia.de | www.ostfalia.de | www.ostfalia.de | www.ostfalia.de | www.ostfalia.de | www.ostfalia.de | www.ostfalia.de | www.ostfalia.de | www.ostfalia.de | www.ostfalia.de

"Minister of State for Happiness" in Dubai

The Emirate of Dubai has set itself the goal of playing a leading role in the ranking of the world's happiest nations. The Emirate Dubai initiated a transformation process with various programs for different areas of life with the objective to promote the well-being sustainable (UAE 2018). Accordingly, happiness is defined by two aspects of well-being:

- emotional state at the moment (positive emotions such as joy, love, hope and pleasure overlay the negative feelings)
- individual assessment of one's own emotions in the past and their influence on one's own life satisfaction over a longer time frame. The degree of control and self-determination as well as the meaningfulness of one's own actions play an important role here.

3.c Success factors for "Happiness" in the workplace

The starting point for the research carried out was the *3-E concept* by WillisTowersWatson (2016). The model is based on empirical surveys of national and international employees and shows that the highest sustainable employee productivity is achieved through the interaction of the following three dimensions (WillisTowersWatson 2016).

This is also evidenced by a written survey of more than 500 sellers conducted by the author (Hoffmeister 2015):

- **Engagement** ("I am fully committed and proud to work for the company and recommend it to friends and acquaintances, and the success of my employer is very important to me.")
- **Enabled** ("I have all the tools to provide optimal results and completely over the strategic direction and goals of my employer informed.")
- **Energized** ("I have the physical and psychological condition to perform well, my performance is valued.")

Empirical happiness research docks on the two dimensions of "**Engaged**" (happy employees are more committed to the job) and above all "**Energized**" (psychological stress leads to depression / burnout and ultimately decreases the productivity of companies).

Meaning and importance of professional activity

A study by Sussex and Greenwich University and MIT Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the US reveals that employees want a fulfilling and meaningful career. Meaningful in the sense of

- interesting work
- creative activity
- be proud of his own achievement
- received praise and recognition

Furthermore, this study shows that moments of complete meaninglessness are often caused by executives. In addition, the meaningfulness of the job goes beyond the profession. It is closely related to how much the activity contributes positively to society.

The Write Happiness Index (2019) supports the following factors in order of importance for the personal happiness in the workplace in Germany:

1. salary
2. do a meaningful job
3. flexible working hours and / or the opportunity to work from home
4. location of the office
5. corporate and leadership culture

Comparing Germany, USA and Great Britain

A comparison between different cultures make it clear that the meaning of the salary must be differentiated. One out of every two Americans and Britons has switched to a new job with a lower salary to be happier at work - unlike Germans. Here, only one in three employees has changed his employer for this reason (Wrike Happiness Index 2019).

Appreciation essential happiness factor

One by the author (Hoffmeister 2015) conducted online survey of over 500 salespeople of franchised automotive dealers shows that engagement depends on three factors:

1. praise, appreciation and honest recognition
2. additional bonus / commission
3. professional perspective

According to the study (Hoffmeister 2015), the poor leadership behavior of the supervisor is one of the main reasons for (internal) dismissal. Only 6 out of 10 of the surveyed salespeople agreed that all employees are treated with respect and appreciation in their company. Although every second salesperson felt burned out internally, only 42% of those salespeople said the supervisor was very interested in their health.

"Happiness at Work" (PERK)

Investigations of the Greater Good Science Center of the University of California Berkeley (Simon-Thomas 2019) have four success factors for "Happiness at Work" (**PERK**) identified:

P = **Purpose**: The values of the company are in line with the personal values of the employee.
Meaningfulness and high significance of the work has a significant influence on the purpose.

E = **Engagement**: increase the emotional employee motivation by

- autonomous work
- promotion of personal development
- create a stress-free work environment that supports working in the FLOW.

R = **Resilience**: Encouraging employee skills to deal positively with job challenges. Measures are:

- "Mindfulness", i.e. to be able to reflect one's own action and to make better decisions.
- Being authentic, i.e. actively living and implementing the values of the employer and the employee.

K = **Kindness**: i.e. the attitude of all employees and managers in the company is characterized by the values of respect, empathy, gratitude and compassion.

But especially in the field of "**Kindness**" there is a considerable deficit in the German leadership culture. Businesses often lack appreciation and respect for each other.

3.d Factors influencing a happy and fulfilling life - from an intercultural perspective

All Happiness in the workplace models are wisely designed from a Western perspective. Here, it is assumed that the respective factors universally applicable to different cultures. However, aspects of Eastern and local cultures are often neglected. This was one of the main findings of the conducted joint workshops with German and Indian master students working on happiness. In working groups, the students combined spontaneous associations with the factors influencing moment-related happiness and the happy and fulfilled life (see Tables 1 and 2).

Great differences regarding the cultural dimension "individuality"

When looking at the factors influencing happiness or fulfilling life, there are many similarities between the Indian and German students. Nevertheless, the cultural differences become clear. This is particularly evident in the cultural dimension of "individuality". The leading cultural scientists Hofstede (2017) and Trompenaars (2012) distinguish cultures in the degree of integration in the group. The

cultural dimension of individuality (antipode collectivism) describes the relationships between people. The focus is on the two statements,

- whether individuals primarily see themselves as individuals or primarily define themselves by belonging to a group
- whether individuals base their decisions on their own interests or subordinate themselves to the interests of a collective

Associations of Indian Students	Overlapping associations	Associations of German students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cricket • pray • celebrate festivals • surprise gifts for the family • eat • music and dancing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spend time with friends • enjoy a good meal • buy new things • vacation / Travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • soccer • money • party

Tab. 1: Factors for **momentary** happiness from the perspective of Indian and German master students of Ostfalia; Workshop 2018

Associations of Indian Students	Overlapping associations	Associations of German Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spending time together with the family • to serve other people especially the family • spirituality • good education • be married • save money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • professional career • work-life balance • social commitment • to travel • democracy • love relationship • time for hobbies • new experiences • enjoy the moment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-realization • independence • personal responsibility • own health • financial security • privacy

Tab. 2: Factors for a **happy and fulfilling life** from the perspective of Indian and German master students of Ostfalia; Workshop 2018

The workshop results clearly show that German culture is highly individualistic, and that Indian culture is collectivist. Interestingly enough, there are still many overlaps in the values of the Y and Millennium generations in Germany and India.

Spirituality of high importance in other cultures

The workshops with students from different countries have shown that spirituality or religion in different cultures play an important role for their well-being. For them, faith has a very high importance for a full life. Faith or the values imparted by religion give them orientation and meaning (meaningfulness) for their own actions. This is also confirmed by studies by the scientist and psychotherapist Itai Ivtzan of the University of East London (Ivtzan 2018, Ivtzan , I. Chan, CPL, Gardner, HE, Prashar , K. 2011). Thus, religions with deep spiritual content have a positive impact on the well-being and personal growth of people. In global business, spirituality has a considerable importance and a major impact on business success in certain countries.

Increasingly, spiritual aspects from Asian cultures are being considered for new models of leadership and corporate culture. These include, in particular, the teachings of Buddhism. More and more managers in the Western world are using the insights from the Asian cultural sphere and the spiritual exercises derived from Buddhism for managing company personnel and reducing stress (mindfulness / mindfulness exercises).

4. Recommendations for the qualification of future managers

The topic of happiness is also becoming increasingly important in Germany. Thus, the field of happiness was introduced as a pilot project in over 100 schools. In addition to the elite universities in the USA (Berkeley, Harvard, Yale, Stanford), some universities in Germany are also concerned with happiness research (see Appendix). In addition to empirical research, seminars for bachelor and master students are offered. The focus of the seminars and lectures are, on the one hand, content-related aspects of the success factors for a fulfilled life. On the other hand, the relation to the world of work is increasingly being established and measures taken.

Far too little are the aspects of happiness research methodically integrated into the curriculum of higher education. These include practice-oriented exercises, simulations and critical incidents such as

- mindfulness - or mindfulness exercises, various forms of meditation,
- humor and laughter exercises,
- the development of life visions and strategies with derivations to the future or continuing education courses of the current working life,
- value - based conflict exercises taking into account different personalities and in particular intercultural dimensions and
- cross-disciplinary seminars and events, because happiness research is interdisciplinary.

5. Conclusion and outlook

The empirical happiness research is an interdisciplinary field of study. The definition of "happiness" is not clearly interpreted in science. There are numerous approaches to defining happiness and its success factors for private and professional life. Value based happiness concepts become more important in scientific research. The following success factors are significant for "happiness at work"

- trust in the employer,
- the identification with the company,
- the meaning and sense of the work,
- the promotion of personal development
- the social commitment of the employer
- the appreciative and respectful treatment of managers and employees among each other in the company
- the active implementation of mindfulness exercises or meditations.

In particular, selected universities in the USA are intensively involved in empirical happiness research. Due to the shortage of skilled workers and the change in values of the younger generations, companies in the IT industry in particular rely on the results of scientific happiness studies in order to sustainably increase employer attractiveness. Here, the corporate culture and an authentic leadership plays a prominent role. In practice, however, there is often an inadequate leadership culture characterized by overburdening, ignorance, greed, power and / or narcissism.

It is recommended that universities incorporate much more insights from empirical research on happiness in terms of content and, in particular, methodologically into teaching. This includes Asian management methods (for example, based on Buddhism).

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Attachment

- At the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, students are offered courses on mindfulness, emotion regulation, relaxation techniques, stress management, prevention and coping with depressive moods. (<https://www.pbs.uni-mainz.de/kurse/>)
- The University of Duisburg-Essen cooperates with the Institute for Mindfulness Germany to provide students with adequate workshops, courses, lectures and individual care on the topic of happiness and well-being. (<https://www.institut-fuer-achtsamkeit.de/aktuell-wissenswert/ias-und-universitaet-duisburg-essen-beschliessen-kooperation>)
- The Professor of Educational Psychology Alex Bertrams is researching at the University of Mannheim on the impact of the school subject "Happiness" on the subjective well-being of students. (http://psychologielehrer.de/cnew/_data/T2012_Wickop_Praesentation-Glueck.pdf)
- Under the direction of Prof. Dr. med. med. Tobias Esch developed the research project "Patterns and motives of happiness and satisfaction in the CV" at the University of Witten / Herdecke. (<https://www.uni-wh.de/detailseiten/news/was-macht-menschen-gluecklich-und-zufrieden-6409/>)
- At the University of Hildesheim, the compact seminar "Happiness as a topic in educational work" was offered in 2017. The compact seminar was led by the "happiness researcher" Jochen Dallmer . (<https://lsf.uni-hildesheim.de/qisserver/rds;jsessionid=B3EF133E1587690C79BBB92585B60F56.lsf-web2?state=verpublish&publishContainer=lectureContainer&publishid=63872>)
- The graduate psychologist Tobias Rahm has developed a training course at the Technical University of Braunschweig for the lasting improvement of happiness. The "happiness training" is offered at the University's Department of Educational Psychology. (<https://www.tu-braunschweig.de/gluecksempfinden/training>)
- The Hochschule Osnabrück offers the opportunity to obtain a certificate in the course "Changing the concept of Gross National Happiness Management Processes". The target group consists of managers and specialists from the business sector. (<https://www.hs->

osnabrueck.de/de/studium/studienangebot/weiterbildung/seminare-und-lehrgaenge/gross-national-happiness/lehrinhalte/)

- Prof. Dr. Karlheinz Ruckriegel, whose teaching and research focuses on psychological economics and interdisciplinary happiness research, published a series of essays and contributions on the subject of happiness research at the Nuremberg University of Technology. (<https://www.th-nuernberg.de/person/ruckriegel-karlheinz/>)
- Furthermore, Prof. Dr. med. Bernd Raffelhüschen from the Albert-Ludwigs-University Freiburg and Prof. Dr. med. Uwe Jensen from the University of Kiel with happiness research. (<https://www.uni-kiel.de/experts/index.php?eid=208>), (https://www.fwi1.uni-freiburg.de/ueber-uns/team/bernd_raffelhueschen.shtml)
- Ulrike Graf from the University of Osnabrück deals with the topic "happiness as a subject". (<https://www.noz.de/lokales/osnabrueck/artikel/465876/schulfach-gluck-soll-es-kindern-leichter-machen#gallery&0&0&465876>)