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BEYOND THE SURFACE: A DEEP DIVE INTO CULTURE AND HAPPINESS AT WORK

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines happiness and culture from a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary perspective. Addressing cultural barriers and aligning institutional values with cultural norms is crucial. Developing and precisely measuring a framework for a healthy culture can enhance wellness initiatives at work and foster inclusive workplaces. The cultural viewpoint on employee well-being and the effects of culture on relationships and values must thus be explored through research. Five research questions were designed to answer this purpose: 1) What is the relationship between happiness and culture in various settings? 2) What are the commonalities and differences across the studies? 3) What is the role of culture in promoting employee well-being and happiness? 4) What factors influence this relationship? 5) What are the limitations of the studies and the need for further research? The systematic literature search was conducted using the Web of Science, and the included studies were synthesized using a narrative synthesis approach. The studies demonstrate a complex relationship between happiness and culture in various settings. The research reveals that cultural differences significantly shape employees' perceptions of happiness and the factors impacting their subjective well-being at work. The findings indicate that cultural norms and values influence how employees express and regulate emotions in customer service interactions and the workplace. The research also suggests that the relationship between happiness and culture is complex and can be influenced by factors within and outside the employee. However, the studies have limitations, such as lack of generalizability, and may not fully account for other factors that can impact happiness and culture in the workplace.

Keywords: Happiness, Culture, Employee Happiness, Resilience, Positive Attitudes, Organizational Culture, Work Environment.

JEL Classification: I31, M1, M14.

YÜZEYİN ÖTESİNDE: İŞ YERİNDE KÜLTÜR VE MUTLULUĞA DERİN BİR DALIŞ

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, kültür ve mutluluğu disiplinler arası ve kültürler arası bir perspektiften incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Kültürel engelleri ele almak ve kurumsal değerleri kültürel normlarla uyumlu hale getirmek çok önemlidir. Sağlıklı bir kültür için bir çerçeve geliştirmek ve hassas bir şekilde ölçmek, işyerinde sağlıklı yaşam girişimlerini geliştirebilir ve kapsayıcı işyerlerini teşvik edebilir. Bu nedenle, çalışanların refahına ilişkin kültürel bakış açısı ve kültürün ilişkiler ve değerler üzerindeki etkileri araştırılmalıdır. Bu amaca cevap vermek için beş araştırma sorusu tasarlanmıştır: 1) Farklı ortamlarda mutluluk ve kültür arasındaki ilişki nedir? 2) Çalışmalar arasındaki ortak noktalar ve farklılıklar nelerdir? 3) Çalışan refahını ve mutluluğunu artırmada kültürün rolü nedir? 4) Bu ilişkiyi etkileyen faktörler nelerdir? 5) Çalışmaların sınırlılıkları ve daha fazla araştırma ihtiyacı nelerdir? Literatür sistematik olarak taranmış ve dahil edilen çalışmalar anlatı sentezi yaklaşımı kullanılarak sentezlenmiştir. Çalışmalar, çeşitli ortamlarda mutluluk ve kültür arasında karmaşık bir ilişki olduğunu göstermektedir. Araştırmalar, kültürel farklılıkların çalışanların mutluluk algılarını ve işteki öznel iyi oluşlarını etkileyen faktörleri önemli ölçüde şekillendirdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bulgular, kültürel normların ve değerlerin çalışanların müşteri hizmetleri etkileşimlerinde ve işyerinde duygularını nasıl ifade ettiğini ve düzenlediğini etkilediğini göstermektedir. Araştırmalar ayrıca mutluluk ve kültür arasındaki ilişkinin karmaşık olduğunu ve çalışanın içindeki ve dışındaki faktörlerden etkilenebileceğini öne sürmektedir. Bununla birlikte, çalışmaların genellenebilirlik eksikliği gibi sınırlamaları vardır ve işyerinde mutluluk ve kültürü etkileyebilecek diğer faktörleri tam olarak açıklayabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mutluluk, Kültür, Çalışan Mutluluğu, Dayanıklılık, Olumlu Tutumlar, Örgüt Kültürü, Çalışma Ortamı.

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INTRODUCTION

Organizational culture has garnered widespread attention in organizational studies, attracting the interest of academics and practitioners (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015; Hartnell, Ou & Kinicki, 2011; Katzenbach, Steffen & Kronley, 2012; Lorsch & McTague, 2016). Despite this, a clear understanding of organizational culture remains elusive, including identifying the sources of cultural diversity, its underlying psychology, and its impact on individuals and organizations. Scholars have defined organizational culture in different ways. However, one view is that it is a collection of shared fundamental beliefs that a group has developed over time in response to challenges and obstacles related to external adaptation and internal integration (Schein, 2017, p.21).

As per Schein's (2017) perspective, these assumptions are considered satisfactory and are transmitted to new members as the accurate approach to perceiving, thinking, and feeling about these issues (p.24). Additionally, Burns and Needle (2019) argues that several variables, such as company origin, product, market, technology, strategy, HR practices, management philosophies, and national culture, play a role in shaping organizational culture, which Brown (1998) defines as a harmonization of beliefs, values, and learned practices reflected in an organization's physical setup and member behavior.

The relationship between organizational culture and employee happiness at work is vital for organizations (Di Fabio, 2017) as it has significant implications for organizational performance, employee retention, and community impact (Harter, Schmidt, Aspluna, Killman & Argrawal, 2010). Employees who are satisfied and content with their work tend to be more engaged, motivated, and productive, leading to better organizational performance and success (Kundi, Aboramadan, Elhamalawi & Shahid., 2021). Additionally, when employees feel valued and satisfied with their work, they are inclined to demonstrate a greater commitment to the organization. They are likelier to put in extra effort to achieve goals (Kundi et al., 2021). Organizations prioritizing employee well-being through a positive organizational culture are more likely to attract and retain top talent (Eversole, Venneberg & Crowder, 2012). Studies have shown that when employees feel content and satisfied in their work, they are less likely to leave the organization, thus reducing turnover costs and improving continuity and stability (Al-Suraihi, Samikon, Al-Suraihi & Ibrahim, 2021).

Organizational culture plays a crucial role in shaping employee experiences and influencing factors such as motivation, engagement, relationships, and overall organization perception (Connelly & Kelloway, 2003). A positive and supportive organizational culture can have numerous benefits for employee well-being. It can increase motivation and engagement, resulting in higher productivity and job satisfaction (Setiyani, Djumarno, Riyanto & Nawangsari, 2019). Furthermore, a culture that values collaboration, open communication, and mutual respect can foster positive and supportive relationships among employees, leading to a sense of community and belonging (Men & Yue, 2019). A

team-oriented culture, in particular, is associated with higher levels of organizational identification and lower levels of turnover intention (Dóra, Péter, Péter & Andrea, 2019).

On the other hand, a negative and toxic work culture can harm employee well-being. It can lead to demotivated and disengaged employees, lower productivity, and job satisfaction (Farris, 2021). A competitive, hierarchical culture and lacking trust can foster negative and unsupportive employee relationships (Alattas & Kang, 2016). Negative effects of a toxic work environment on employee happiness and well-being include increased stress and burnout, decreased job satisfaction, poor mental health, reduced motivation and productivity, and high turnover (Seppala & Cameron, 2015; Dóra et al., 2019; Iqbal, Guohao & Akhtar, 2017; Peart, 2019).

A cultural perspective on employee well-being is of utmost importance when considering the impact of culture on the formation of relationships, values, and organizational behavior. Such an approach prioritizes creating an inclusive work environment that values and respects employees' diverse backgrounds and perspectives to promote positive mental and physical well-being for all employees. Companies can develop a sense of belonging and inclusion by aligning corporate values and practices with cultural norms and expectations. Additionally, by understanding different cultural perspectives, organizations can create policies and practices that support diverse employees and alleviate potential cultural barriers that may affect their well-being (Findler, Wind & Barak, 2007). A framework for building a healthy culture is considered a vital step toward accurately measuring a healthy culture (Edington & Pitts, 2016). The growing interest in health culture is encouraging. It is hoped that the professional community can make meaningful progress in creating a healthy workplace culture, thereby increasing the effectiveness of traditional workplace wellness programs (Holt-Lunstad, 2018).

METHODS

This review was designed to answer five questions: 1) What is the relationship between happiness and culture in various settings? 2) What are the commonalities and differences across the studies? 3) What is the role of culture in promoting employee well-being and happiness and using other strategies? 4) What factors influence this relationship? 5) What are the limitations of the studies and the need for further research? A systematic search of the literature was conducted using the Web of Science. The search was limited to articles published between January 1, 2000, when positive psychology emerged, and January 1, 2023. The search terms were “organizational culture” and “happiness at work” relevant to the research questions. Web of Science listed 32 results. When the articles were selected and other document types were excluded, the number decreased to 26. Among these, only the ones written in English were included (22). Studies investigating the effect of culture on employee well-being or happiness at work as an independent or mediator variable were included in the review. Studies were excluded if they were not primary research studies, irrelevant to the research question, and /or

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duplicate publications. Fourteen articles meeting these criteria were included in this study. Then, the data from the included studies were synthesized using a narrative synthesis approach, taking care to be easy to understand (Savage & Yeh, 2019). Meta-analysis was not performed due to the heterogeneity in the study designs and outcome measures.

RESULTS

Results can be categorized under three different subheadings:

Cross-Cultural Studies

In 2010, Grandey, Rafaeli, Ravid, Wirtz, and Steiner studied countries with similar industrialization levels, including the USA, Singapore, France, and Israel. They wanted to see how relational characteristics, cultural differences, and perspectives on occupational/customer service influence display rules in customer service. The study showed that it's harder for customer service representatives to suppress their anger than to deal with other work interactions because of the unique target characteristics of customer interactions. Interestingly, the authors found that it's more acceptable to display anger towards customers in France than in Singapore or the USA but less acceptable than in Israel. The study also looked at how different countries and targets express happiness, with the highest mean scores found in the USA, followed by Israel and Singapore, and the lowest in France. It's generally more acceptable to express happiness towards coworkers than customers or supervisors, with a significant mean difference between the coworker and customer targets. In addition, the study suggests that expressing happiness is less acceptable to supervisors than to coworkers in Israel and France. Overall, the study provides interesting insights into how cultural differences and relational characteristics influence display rules in customer service.

Studies in Western Cultural Settings

Rego and Cunha's (2009) research took place in Portugal, where people are known for valuing working in groups over working alone. Interestingly, their study found that people who preferred working in groups or identified as collectivists were happier than those who preferred working alone. This suggests that collectivists are better equipped to tap into the social and emotional resources they value, resulting in increased emotional well-being. In addition, the study found that feeling a sense of camaraderie in the workplace was linked to higher levels of emotional well-being, further reinforcing the idea that collectivists tend to experience greater emotional well-being. On the other hand, individualists were more likely to experience lower emotional well-being. However, the study also found that an individual's preference for group work was a better predictor of emotional well-being than their belief in the importance of collective interests. Overall, the

study highlights the importance of promoting emotional well-being in the workplace, as it can boost productivity and create positive emotions that can spread throughout the team.

Jenkins and Delbridge (2014) found an interesting way to examine employee happiness through a relational sociological perspective. They believed examining how management practices and employee agency interact in their work environments was important as analyzing organizational practices in a broader context. To test this perspective, they studied VoiceTel, a successful family-run UK business. They discovered that striving for employee happiness was a top priority for the company, which benefited from various contextual factors like being a traditional high-volume call center and valuing care and trust within the organization. The researchers also found that employees' job satisfaction was influenced by several factors, including the company's values, the relationships among employees, and the nature of their work. Their findings suggested that a sociological approach to understanding employee identification mechanisms can help organizations better evaluate and explain happiness levels among their staff.

A study in the Victoria region of Australia by Dickson-Swift, Fox, Marshall, Welch, and Willis (2014) has revealed that workplace culture can significantly impact employees' overall well-being and happiness. According to their research, a company's culture plays a vital role in shaping its employees' emotional and mental health and organizational structure. In fact, something as simple as recognition and support from management can go a long way in boosting employee happiness levels. The study also showed that offering counseling services and implementing effective organizational practices such as communication and management support can create a healthier and happier work environment. Not only can these practices promote employee well-being, but they can also contribute to the financial success and productivity of the organization.

Another research conducted in the Australian Victoria region by Williams, Kern, and Waters (2015) found that an employee's psychological capital and the organization's perception of virtue impact happiness at work. The study revealed a positive relationship between psychological capital and perception of virtue leads to increased reported happiness at work. The authors suggest that organizations focus on individual and organizational-level resources to support employee well-being. However, the study's limitations, such as its correlational design and self-reported measures, make it difficult to establish a causal relationship between psychological capital, perception of virtue, and happiness at work.

Williams et al.'s subsequent study published in 2016 demonstrates that the happiness-culture relationship is intricate and influenced by factors inside and outside the employee, such as their positive attitudes and perception of the organization's culture. The study explored selective exposure and confirmation bias as potential processes underlying this relationship. Results indicate that higher positive attitudes at baseline are related to more positive perceptions of the organization's culture over time.

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In a separate examination, Williams et al. (2017) discovered a connection between happiness and culture with favorable employee attitudes and perceptions of a positive organizational culture. Results indicated that psychological capital and the perception of virtue in the organization were positively correlated and that the perception of virtue was linked to job satisfaction both in the present and over time. However, only the final assessment correlated psychological capital and job satisfaction. The study also analyzed the Iterative-Reprocessing Model of evaluation as the mechanism driving the relationships among psychological capital, the perception of virtue in the organization, and job satisfaction, which supports the idea that both internal and external factors impact job happiness. It emphasizes the significance of promoting positive employee attitudes and perspectives in the workplace to cultivate job satisfaction and the necessity for organizational culture to support and reinforce the outcomes of positive employee development programs.

A study carried out in Spain (Lopez-Martin & Topa, 2019) highlights that a positive organizational culture can lead to favorable outcomes such as increased personal resources, job satisfaction, and positive employee behavior. The study supports the Job Demands-Resources model and rejects previous criticisms that the model relies on other theories to explain its findings. The study found that employees' identification with different foci at work, such as their profession or organization, played a role in job satisfaction and positive behaviors. Moreover, specific dimensions of organizational culture, such as support and innovation, were found to be linked to employee attitudes and behaviors. Interestingly, the study also revealed that goal-oriented cultures could harm employees' health, whereas rule-oriented cultures can have a positive effect. The study emphasizes the importance of cultivating a positive organizational culture to increase employees' resources to deal with job demands and highlights that organizational culture is a critical factor in determining employee satisfaction and behavior.

Foncubierta-Rodríguez's (2021) study suggests that the happiness of Spanish entrepreneurs is tied to three key higher-order values: "Orientation towards the Well-being of the Collective," "Power and Control," and "Success through Innovation." These values were further broken down into three factors, with F1 representing a combination of traits such as conformity, security, benevolence, universalism, and self-direction. Factor 2 represents a desire for power and control, while Factor 3 encompasses the drive to succeed through innovation, breaking from routine, and embracing new challenges. The study also found a strong and direct relationship between Factor 1 values and the transformational leadership style, which has been linked to increased employee happiness. In other words, prioritizing collective well-being while maintaining a balance of power and control and fostering an innovation environment can lead to happier entrepreneurs and employees.

Studies in Non-Western Cultural Settings

Liu, Bao, and Liu (2013) conducted a study in China that used a tri-axial model to examine how happiness and culture are related in public settings. The model evaluated cultural values' significance and association with organizational outcomes, providing a comprehensive understanding of Chinese public-sector culture. The study found that the tri-axial model of emotional-developmental, ethical-social, and economic-pragmatic values captured almost all cultural values except acceptance, harmony, and optimism. The study highlighted that Chinese government civil servants considered emotional-developmental culture crucial to their cultural values. Happiness, belonging, achievement, efficiency, and leadership were the most important values. The study suggests that more research is needed to understand the relationship between cultural values and organizational outcomes. The study also found that demographic factors like gender, age, and working level did not affect the selection of essential values, emphasizing the need for culture building, particularly in the area of ethic-related culture. Overall, the study sheds light on the importance of understanding cultural values and their relationship with happiness and organizational outcomes in public settings in China.

Rastogi (2019) confirmed that the Short Scale of Happiness at Work (S-HAW), created by Salas-Vallina and Alegre (2018), is a reliable and valid measure of workplace happiness in India. This study is particularly relevant in the current globalized era, where promoting happiness in the workplace has become increasingly important for managing talent. While work-related happiness was once considered a secondary issue in developed countries, it has now become a pressing concern for Indian businesses due to the country's growing importance in international business. The study found that the S-HAW scale is an effective tool for measuring workplace happiness and provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of promoting happiness in the Indian workplace.

Chhaing and Phon (2022) explored the complex relationship between happiness and culture in Cambodia's higher education sector. Their research showed that lecturers in Cambodian universities generally enjoy their work, but they have some concerns about their salaries and working conditions. Interestingly, the study found no significant difference in job satisfaction among academics in public and private universities or those working full-time, part-time, or on a casual basis. The authors believe this satisfaction could be due to the flexibility of academic positions in Cambodia, allowing individuals to pursue additional employment or entrepreneurial endeavors outside of the university. However, despite their satisfaction with organizational culture and values, academics in Cambodia expressed dissatisfaction with the research atmosphere and opportunities for professional advancement provided by their institutions. This suggests that factors such as low compensation, poor working conditions, insufficient resources, inadequate financial and non-financial rewards, and a lack of research interest and practical research applications are negatively impacting academic motivation in Cambodia.

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Aboramadan and Kundi (2022) recently conducted a study in Pakistan, which found that positive emotional culture in the workplace has a direct relationship with psychological safety, relational attachment, and overall happiness. Specifically, the study highlights the importance of an expressive culture of joy, which positively impacts psychological safety and relational attachment, ultimately leading to greater happiness at work. These findings align with three well-known theories that emphasize the significance of promoting joy, safety, and strong relationships in the workplace to promote happiness: the conservation of resources theory, the broaden-and-build theory, and the self-determination theory. Overall, the study provides valuable insight into the importance of cultivating a positive emotional culture to enhance workplace happiness in Pakistan.

Ho, Hou, Poon, Leung, and Kwan (2022) discovered that virtues such as collective gratitude, kindness, caring, and forgiveness positively impact employee well-being and organizational commitment. The study, conducted in Hong Kong, revealed that cognitive reappraisal and psychological capital mediated the relationship between these organizational virtues and employee outcomes. Interestingly, the study found that cognitive reappraisal has a direct positive effect on psychological capital, which, in turn, directly influences well-being and organizational commitment. While the authors acknowledge that caring had a weaker impact on certain outcomes, they suggest that cultural or contextual variables may play a role in the relationship between organizational virtuousness and employee outcomes. They recommend that future research examine the specific role of each virtue dimension and potential moderating factors to better understand how organizations can promote employee well-being and commitment.

CONCLUSION

The present study examines happiness and culture from a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary perspective. Through an analysis of several empirical studies, the paper provides a comprehensive overview of how cultural differences shape employees' perceptions of happiness and the factors that impact their subjective well-being at work. The research suggests that cultural norms and values influence how employees express and regulate emotions in customer service interactions and the workplace more broadly. Specifically, the studies reveal differences across cultures in the extent to which employees are expected to display positive and negative emotions and variation in the perceived acceptability of such displays towards different targets. Additionally, all the studies suggest that the relationship between happiness and culture is complex and can be influenced by factors both within and outside of the employee, such as their positive attitudes (Ho et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2015, 2016, 2017), and perception of the organization's culture (Williams et al. 2015, 2016, 2017). The disparities between the studies include the diverse settings and circumstances under which the research was carried out, and the suggested approaches and mechanisms for enhancing happiness

within organizations. For instance, a study examines the correlation between emotional culture and psychological safety in the workplace (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2022).

Furthermore, some studies concentrate on specific cultural contexts, such as entrepreneurship in Spain (Foncubierta-Rodríguez, 2021) or public settings in China (Liu et al., 2013), which might possess distinctive characteristics that impact the connection between happiness and culture. The findings also highlight the importance of group orientation, camaraderie, and organizational culture in promoting employees' happiness and well-being, particularly in collectivist societies. Additionally, the studies highlight the importance of using intentionality in work culture design and development to drive purposeful, meaningful work and the need to differentiate display rules for emotions by work targets to understand better the relationship between culture and emotions in the workplace. Furthermore, the studies indicate that the relationship between happiness and culture is complex and can be influenced by factors both within and outside the employee, such as their positive attitudes and perception of the organization's culture, which are positively associated with each other and with work happiness. The studies propose various mechanisms and strategies for promoting happiness within organizations, such as fostering positive employee attitudes, promoting healthy organizations, focusing on personal resources, identifying with different foci at work, promoting a culture of innovation, encouraging group work, promoting organizational virtuousness, and developing both individual-level and organizational-level resources.

Finally, if we consider the implications of managing customer anger in a culturally diverse setting, the investigation conducted by Grandey et al. (2010) reveals that companies and organizations must train their customer service representatives to handle irate customers to avoid detrimental consequences such as business loss and reputation harm. Moreover, the research highlights the importance of comprehending and considering cultural differences in developing customer service policies and training programs, as display rules governing emotions vary across targets and countries. For example, customer service representatives in different countries may require distinct training to conform to cultural norms and values. Displaying anger towards customers is more tolerable in France than in Singapore or the USA but less so than in Israel. Additionally, the study suggests that companies must be cautious when displaying excessive happiness toward customers, as it may not be perceived as genuine. Thus, companies operating in culturally diverse countries must adapt their communication styles and expressions of emotions to align with cultural norms and values, especially when dealing with irate customers.

Overall, the studies conducted in Western and non-western cultures emphasize the importance of promoting employee well-being and happiness in organizations. Organizations must recognize cultural and organizational factors influencing employee happiness and implement practices aligning with their values and preferences. Should focus on creating a positive workplace culture that supports the well-being and happiness

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of employees, which can improve employee well-being, productivity, and financial outcomes.

In particular, the studies conducted in non-western cultures highlight the significance of understanding cultural values and promoting a positive emotional culture in workplace happiness. Organizations operating in these contexts can use these insights to improve organizational outcomes, talent management, and employee well-being.

This research contributes to a comprehensive understanding of how cultural differences affect employees' perceptions of happiness and subjective well-being at work. It sheds light on the impact of cultural norms and values on expressing and regulating emotions in the professional setting. The studies underscore the crucial role of group orientation, camaraderie, and organizational culture in fostering employee happiness, particularly in collectivist societies. Additionally, the findings provide critical strategies for cultivating positive attitudes, promoting organizational well-being, and nurturing individual and collective resources within organizations. Future research should investigate the relationship between emotional culture and psychological safety, consider specific cultural contexts, and appreciate how emotions should be displayed across various audiences and nations. The ramifications of handling customer anger in workplaces with varied cultural perspectives are also emphasized, highlighting the need for customer service agents to get cultural norms and values training.

However, it is essential to note that the studies have limitations. The limitations of these studies include a lack of generalizability as they are based on specific cultures and contexts. They also may not have a diverse sample and may not represent the studied population.

Furthermore, the studies may not fully account for other factors that can impact happiness and culture in the workplace, such as individual differences and external factors. Also, some studies may be based on self-reported measures, subject to bias and social desirability. Furthermore, most of the studies are cross-sectional, which limits the ability to draw causal conclusions about the relationship between happiness, culture, and work.

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