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## Chapter

# How to Measure the Happy-Productive Worker Thesis

*Natália Costa, Carlos Miguel Oliveira and Pedro Ferreira*

## Abstract

Globalisation and intensifying competition force organisations to create distinctive competitive advantages, transforming classic management models and seeking effective responses to the mutability and dynamics of markets. People management plays a central role in achieving differentiating capacities, forcing more effective management of human resources. In an environment marked by high absenteeism and turnover, followed by the growing difficulty in retaining talent, organisations have been seeking to increase the satisfaction of internal customer needs (employees), working on issues such as well-being and happiness at work. The increasing concern with employee well-being and their association with job performance have been the basis for many research studies aimed at understanding the impact of the concept of happiness on employee behaviour and performance. This chapter seeks to summarise the main ways of operationalising the constructs inherent to the thesis of the happy-productive worker (happiness and performance). This chapter is structured as follows: introduction, exploration of the happy-productive worker thesis (concept and origin and main theoretical frameworks related to the idea), measuring the constructs (happiness and performance), and conclusion.

**Keywords:** happiness, well-being, retaining talent, performance, operationalisation, happy-productive worker thesis

## 1. Introduction

Recently, organisations are facing one of the most significant difficulties regarding human resources. Today, talent retention is one of the most critical issues in human resources management. The lack of human resources that want to stay in organisations is strangling managers, who are beginning to realise that their strategy must involve innovative solutions and discarding classical management forms [1, 2]. The organisational management mind-set is now shifting from an external to an internal perspective, that is, to view their employees as their internal customers [2, 3].

This new vision of managers allows them to perceive their employees as vital resources for organisational development and success [4, 5]; this was only possible due substantial increase in their concern for the well-being of their employees. This growing concern with well-being only begins to spread more widely when managers realise how they can get a return on their investment in promoting the well-being

of their employees. Research following these trends has proven that employees with good levels of well-being are employees who have better performance levels. Happy workers provide superior quality services, adding value, promoting competitiveness and innovation, improving motivation and organisational learning, enhancing employees' commitment to their organisations and improving their attitudes and behaviours [2, 3, 6–12]. In this line of thought, the thesis of the happy-productive worker (HPW) arises based on the belief that a happy worker is more productive.

This chapter aims to answer the following question: in what ways can the constructs of the HPW thesis be operationalised? Based on a systematic literature review, the methods of measuring happiness and performance high in the literature will be elevated, as well as seeking to identify the most common scales for one of the main concepts of the HPW thesis. Hopefully, this exercise will contribute to the systematic and analytical understanding of the components of the HPW thesis.

## **2. Happy-productive worker thesis**

The current topic aims to clarify the concept and origin of the thesis and identify the principal theoretical frameworks that have been used in existing works that explore the HPW thesis in their research.

### **2.1 Concept and origin of the HPW thesis**

The HPW thesis is founded on the belief that happy employees are more productive; that is, the higher the level of happiness of an individual, the better their performance will be as opposed to what is expected of unhappy employees [13–24]. However, there are still doubts about the integrity of the relationship postulated by the thesis, and investigations fail to ascertain a positive relationship between happiness and performance levels [5, 25]. The relationship between these constructs (happiness and performance) is favourable for reducing absenteeism and turnover levels and improving behaviour and results at both organisational and individual levels [3]. Given the above, managers should focus on finding the most efficient ways to promote happiness. Some antecedents are already mentioned in the literature, such as health status and employment situation [21].

The research on this theme faces a significant challenge that has not allowed a more remarkable evolution and exploration. This challenge is related to operationalising the constructs underlying the thesis (happiness and performance), being one of the main reasons pointed out for the lack of consensus in published studies that test the HPW hypothesis [26–28]. Possible ways of measuring happiness and performance will be explored in topic 3 of the present chapter.

This thesis is a more recent research topic than happiness or employee performance studies. However, its origins are also a bit difficult to define. In this sense, some authors argue that the origin of the HPW thesis is associated with human relations theory, focused on the concern for the well-being of workers and developed in the 1930s [4, 5]. Other authors mention the Hawthorne studies as the antecedent of the constitution of this thesis [28, 29], mentioning that it is in the 1930s that the investigation of it takes its most significant point of exploration researchers [23, 30]. Current research also attributes to Positive Psychology some orientations evidenced in the HPW thesis. The first contributions appeared in the 1990s and added knowledge from the fields of Psychology and Philosophy [31, 32].

The pursuit of happiness is a universal goal. Still, it was only in the new millennium that managers realised this is not only an individual project but can also be a collective one [33–36]. Only more recently has the literature emphasised the benefits of promoting employee happiness, attributing both individual and organisational benefits. However, defining happiness and performance is arduous because of its subjective nature. Positive Psychology helps construct the concept of happiness, associating that it can be obtained through the sum of positive experiences to the detriment of negative experiences [17].

Moreover, this area also states that individuals with more positive experiences tend to be people characterised by high levels of resilience, with a greater remarkability to face complex situations, and are more innovative and intuitive, optimistic, and proactive [18, 37]. All these are favourable characteristics for employees considering the current context of high uncertainty levels, unmeasured competition and the intense search for competitive advantage [6, 7, 38]. Thus, the relevance of exploring the theme and its current nature is highlighted.

In the following subtopic, we will explore the theoretical frameworks that have been most often used to justify the analysis models proposed by their studies, whose purpose is to validate the existence of a positive relationship between happiness and performance.

## **2.2 Theoretical frameworks associated with the HPW thesis**

Empirical studies have tried to analyse the relationship postulated by the HPW thesis using analytical models. This modelling is supported by the HPW thesis and complemented by other theoretical frameworks that integrate new variables into the original model. Remember that the model of the HPW thesis only mentions the existence of a positive relationship between happiness and performance. However, researchers have used other arguments even to justify, at times, the constructs that will measure happiness and performance. In this sense, the leading five frameworks considered by these researchers are explored below, clarifying the concept of each one and justifying their association with the HPW thesis.

Thus, of the most recurrent frameworks, the following will be highlighted: social exchange theory, positive psychology, organisational citizenship behaviour, job demands resource model, and broaden and build theory.

Social exchange theory is commonly used in research related to psychology and organisational behaviour [39]. This theory holds that an individual's production of a confident behaviour/attitude is developed according to the individual's perception of the reward derived from that behaviour/attitude. Behaviour/attitudes are conditioned by the expected reward and its impact on the individual's life. This reward can be immediate or posterior, but its relevance is associated with the value that each individual attributes to it, thus determining their behaviours [32, 39]. This establishes a reciprocal relationship in which the employee offers something (behaviour) in to expect from the organisation [40]. Put another way, "it means that people expect to receive resources or actions of similar value to the ones they give, or, vice versa, people tend to respond with resources or actions of similar value to the ones they receive" [39]. Thus, social exchange theory is associated with the HPW thesis in that the primary goal of all organisations is to make a profit. This profit is obtained through customer satisfaction, which can be internal and external [11, 12]. For this purpose, internal customers (employees) are considered, and their well-being/happiness is regarded as a necessary condition for obtaining better results (performance) that are beneficial both at individual and organisational levels.

Positive Psychology is a ramification of Psychology that many researchers credit with creating the HPW thesis, as already mentioned in the previous topic. This field aims to understand how research into affective components can prevent the appearance of psychological disorders and others arising from the above by improving quality of life [34]. Positive Psychology “is a field of psychological science that focuses on the study and observation of positively deviated behaviours, outcomes, and processes at the individual, collective, and societal levels of analysis” [41]. In this sense, Positive Psychology is associated with the HPW thesis. It advocates that happiness can be measured by the sum of positive experiences and the absence of negative experiences [42]. Some researchers have taken advantage of this area’s ideology to justify measuring the construct of happiness regarding the investigations of the HPW thesis [28, 29, 43]. The inclusion of Positive Psychology in the HPW thesis “positive emotions could encourage the acquisition of skills and the construction of social capital” [20].

Organisational citizenship behaviour is “defined as workplace behaviours that are discretionary and not explicitly prescribed, required, or rewarded by an organisation” [15]. These behaviours relate to the social and psychological environment where tasks are performed, thus providing more effective organisational functioning. Here one anticipates behaviours such as helping others and staying overtime to improve a task [15, 27]. Organisational citizenship behaviour has been used to justify reducing absenteeism, improving performance, and providing good relationships, thus suggesting reciprocal exchanges where everyone is rewarded [44].

The job demands-resources (JD-R) model states that “well-being exists when there is a balance between the demands perceived by the worker and the existing physical, social and individual resources, generating less work stress, greater engagement and facilitating job performance” [30]. On the other hand, the JD-R model advocates that these resources improve individual behaviour. Still, it also points out that demand levels produce negative results, leading to psychological problems such as increased levels of burnout [26]. In addition, the higher the levels of demand in the workplace, the worse both the commitment and the performance of employees will be, leading to problems such as high turnover and absenteeism [33]. In contrast, work environments with lower demands generally have more satisfied and psychologically healthier employees [45]. Thus, this model suggests a relationship between the resources that lead to employee motivation, increasing their levels of involvement with their work and ultimately impacting performance. In a way, and considering what was previously mentioned, this framework also studies, in a more indirect way, the relationship between happiness (represented here by motivation) and performance, only adding engagement as a mediating variable between both [32, 39].

Finally, the broaden and build theory, suggested by Fredrickson, is presented. This theory argues that it is necessary to

*broaden-and-build theory, several positive feeling states, traits, or emotions, including the experience of PWB, all share the capacity to “broaden” an individual’s momentary thought-action repertoires through expanding the available array of potential thoughts and actions that come to mind [31].*

The HPW theory has been used as a theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between satisfaction (a possible operationalisation form of happiness), performance and their antagonistic patterns [14]. In this sense, this theory states that “positive evaluative sentiments associated with high levels of job-related satisfaction are further broadened and built upon when the employee is also psychologically well in

general” [31], so this theory relates to concepts such as positive emotions/affection(s), but also psychological well-being and even employee retention [31, 32, 39].

### **3. Ways of operationalising the HPW thesis**

This topic will allow answer one of the objectives of this research. Thus, the following subtopics will list the various ways used in the literature to operationalise the subjacent constructs in the thesis (happiness and performance) individually.

The data provided in the following subtopics were obtained from documents found in the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus databases, whose purpose of their investigation was to study the HPW thesis. In this sense, only 45 documents with these characteristics were found, and it is from these that we based the arguments illustrated below.

#### **3.1 Happiness at work**

Happiness is a universal desire, and society in general lives to find the formula that allows constant happiness. Since the search for permanent happiness has become a utopia, then the new goal of society is to find the procedure that allows its extension in time [33–35]. The difficulty begins with the definition of a concept that is so changeable and intensifies even more when we try to define ways to measure it [42]. However, there is already an acceptance of the concept of happiness, which considers it a state (affective or emotional) related to affections or positive experiences [31, 46].

Before proceeding to the possible ways of measuring this very complex construct that is happiness, it is necessary first to try to define this concept. Thus, and similarly to what has already been mentioned, no consensus in the literature allows us to reference a single definition. It is known that happiness is not something that happens naturally but something for which we all must search and build a way to obtain [37]. In this sense, some authors consider happiness as a set of experiences whose evaluation is subjective [25, 29, 33, 35]. Positive Psychology simplified this definition by referring that happiness is obtained by the sum of positive experiences in detriment of the absence of negative experiences. However, both concepts are dependent on the subjectivity of everyone’s evaluation, as the perceptions of each one of us are different and, therefore, the holistic assessment we make of our life in the face of these feelings/emotions/experiences lacks this subjectivity, complicating, even more, the definition of this concept. However, the question of the purpose of studying happiness remains. The answer is simple, happiness research has been crucial recently because of its multiple advantages at the individual employee level, but it has also played a vital role in determining competitive advantages for organisations. Thus, research that has been conducted seeks to identify the antecedents and continue to list the consequences of promoting happiness in the workplace. Workplace happiness is a “state is perceived by the individual (perceptions), and its presence is influenced by some factors (antecedents). This positive state also impacts individual behaviour in the workplace (consequences)” [42], that is, it serves as a form of motivation to leverage performance.

One cannot talk about happiness without mentioning the classical perspectives on which happiness can be measured, namely the eudaimonic and hedonic perspectives [15, 20, 24, 30, 36, 39, 42, 47]. The hedonic perspective is associated with the pursuit of pleasure and escape from emotions that cause suffering in the individual.

Most frequent constructs	Most common scales	Papers that have used these scales
Affects	PANAS – Scale of positive and negative affects	[5, 28, 29]
	SPANE – Scale of positive and negative experiences	[4, 17, 53]
Well-being	Affective well-being with work by Sevastos (1996) and Watson and Clark (1992)	[29, 47]
Subjective/psychological well-being	Index of psychological well-being	[30, 35, 47]
Happiness	Oxford Happiness Questionnaire	[16, 37]
Happiness at work	Work-related affective well-being scale	[45, 49]
Life satisfaction	Life satisfaction scale	[4, 5, 20, 21]
Intrinsic job satisfaction	The intrinsic satisfaction questionnaire a developed by Cook and Mal (1981)	[29, 45]
Job satisfaction	Job satisfaction scale	[5, 28, 35]

**Table 1.**  
*Main concepts used to measure happiness.*

The eudaimonic perspective relates to the individual perceiving his existence/work as meaningful [20, 36, 42].

The most common ways of operationalising the construct of happiness mentioned in HPW’s thesis have been: affections [5, 25, 28, 29, 36], well-being [20, 29, 33, 35, 48, 49], subjective or psychological well-being [4, 20, 22, 30, 35, 37, 48, 49], happiness [16, 37, 45, 50] and satisfaction, both with life and at a professional level [4, 5, 20, 21, 25, 28, 29, 33, 35, 36, 45, 50, 51]. However, there are also others such as motivations [50, 52], organisational commitment [50], and engagement [36, 50]. In this sense, **Table 1** was prepared to list the main concepts behind the measurement of the concept of happiness, identifying the main scales for this purpose and listing some of the works that have used them.

Before moving on to the concept of performance, it is necessary to define the concepts of well-being, subjective/psychological well-being, and satisfaction. In this sense, well-being is understood as an individual state whose evaluation depends on the holistic view of everyone [16]. On the other hand, subjective or psychological well-being can be perceived “as the cognitive and affective evaluations that the individuals make of their lives, i.e., how individuals think and feel about their own lives and work” [4]. Some authors say this form of well-being is more interconnected with the hedonic perspective [35], which is also related to affections. Subjective well-being is associated with the hedonic perspective, that is, the pursuit of pleasure. Subjective or psychological well-being is a global evaluation of the psychological effectiveness of everyone [35]. Some authors mention that their evaluation is done in stages. People are happier when they trust their abilities, and people in a good mood have a greater tendency to have positive experiences; this self-assessment must consider life holistically and timelessly to measure psychological well-being [28, 30, 35]. Finally, satisfaction can be viewed as “the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one’s job values” [1]. Again, this concept is also subjective, but it is associated with positive emotions [36, 51]. In short, they are the behaviours practised by everyone at work that impacts personal life and the organisation [26].

### 3.2 Performance

The performance construct and its association with the HPW thesis still have some divergences in its operationalisation. The attention of different studies has been more focused on the measurement of happiness [27]. This is usually measured through constructs such as productivity (which can be considered actual values or considering individuals' perceptions), service quality, or performance [1, 32, 54]. These forms may also consider data to obtain levels of performance/productivity at the individual or collective level. Thus, **Table 2** was prepared to list the main concepts that are behind the measurement of the performance concept, identifying the major scales for this purpose and listing some of the works that used them.

Performance is considered the complete set of “actions that are relevant to the achievement of organisational goals” [5]; in other words, they are all actions that, through employee behaviours, allow the achievement of pre-established objectives by the organisation, thus contributing to its growth and development [15, 30]. In this sense, measuring performance will depend on the purpose of the investigation itself since this construct can combine several perspectives and levels. In terms of scope, performance can evaluate a broader level, that is, organisational, or it can be more restricted and focus only on what represents results or quality [1]. Some authors advocate that performance measurement should group data related to “financial performance, operational performance, customer satisfaction, and service quality” [1]. When the focus of the performance is to ascertain quality, it should gather data that allows measuring “product, processes and service quality, employee service quality, employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction and supplier performance” [1].

Most frequent constructs	Most common scales	Papers that have used these scales
Job/contextual performance	Several different scales were used. Some were developed for the study itself.	[4, 20, 24, 26, 33, 35, 45]
Productivity/ Results	Scales were developed according to the research objectives.	[5, 18, 49]
Performance	In the role, extra-role e creative performance.	In role: scale by Williams and Anderson (1991); extra-role: scale by Mackenzie et al. (2011) and creative performance: scale by Oldhamings and Cummings (1996). [27]
	Performance evaluated by superiors.	It was developed for the study.
	Global performance	Adapted from Goodman and Svyantek's (1999). [15]
	Work facilitation, emphasis on objectives, and team building	The scale used is not identified. [28]
Job performance components	Efficacy	Open answer questions. [52]
	Autonomy	The scale of Breaugh (1999). [50]
	Involvement	Adaptation of Kanungo's (1982) scale. [16]

**Table 2.**  
 Main concepts used to measure performance.

## **4. Conclusion**

Globalisation, work flexibility, increased competition, and the need to obtain competitive advantage currently turn the organisational world into a context of pure uncertainty [6, 7]. All these constraints are already more than enough concerns for managers. Still, in addition to these, there are elevated levels of absenteeism and turnover associated with the difficulty in retaining talent [13, 38, 45]. Employees only consider staying in their organisations when they feel committed and loyal to their organisation and to achieving results [20]. However, it is known that today's employees have different perspectives than in the past. They do not intend to stay for a lifetime in organisations, so it is necessary to invest strongly in strategies that lead them to stay due to the changing nature of jobs [40]. In this scenario, the concern with employees' well-being arises and develops until it reaches the HPW thesis.

The HPW thesis, in a very general way, postulates the existence of a positive relationship between happiness and performance; that is, the thesis is supported by the belief that happy workers tend to be more productive or perform better than unhappy workers [13–24]. Thus, from the thesis analysis, it can be assumed that if organisations/managers focus on increasing happiness, they will be able to differentiate themselves from the competition, having a greater probability of gaining a competitive advantage over their competitors. The most significant difficulty in the evolution of research on this topic is the complexity and ambiguity of the constructs that can be considered to operationalise the concepts of happiness and performance.

Answering the starting question that led to the development of this research, we conclude that the constructs of performance and happiness postulated by the HPW thesis can be measured in multiple ways. As for happiness, we highlight well-being (generalised or psychological), satisfaction, and affect. As for performance, productivity (effective or perceived), performance (task/contextual or perceived), and service quality are highlighted.

The research set out in this chapter contributes to advancing research on the topic of people management as it has theoretical and practical implications. At a theoretical level, the study presents the distinction between the concepts underlying the HPW thesis (happiness and performance), assesses the main measurement forms for each construct and lists some lines of future research on the topic under analysis. On a practical level, the study allows to ascertain a new formula for obtaining competitive advantages for organisations, distinguishing them from their competitors and increasing performance. The focus on improving employees' happiness impacts their performance during the development of their functions. This increase in performance allows organisations to gain competitive advantages over their competitors, and even, in the case of services with direct contact with customers, it will enable them to enhance the experience and satisfaction in the provision of services.

The main limitation of the study presented in this chapter is that a limited set of works was considered in further operationalising the happiness and performance constructs underlying HPW's thesis. Future studies should seek to broaden the spectrum of consideration of papers to obtain more significant evidence and to support further the information provided in this chapter. Researchers interested in exploring this topic should focus on mixed studies, develop models that allow for multiple levels of analysis, and verify whether there are differences in the results obtained when considering demographic variables that serve as control variables in the same model. It is also urgent the development of further studies that investigate antecedents and consequences of the model suggested by HPW's thesis, as well as mediator variables

that allow the perception of how organisations can enhance happiness in their employees and, in this way, will enable them to provide better performance levels, that is, adding value to the organisations.

### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### **Author details**

Natália Costa<sup>1</sup>, Carlos Miguel Oliveira<sup>1\*</sup> and Pedro Ferreira<sup>2</sup>


1 ISLA – Polytechnic Institute of Management and Technology, Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal

2 University Portucalense, Porto, Portugal

\*Address all correspondence to: [miguel.oliveira@islaguia.pt](mailto:miguel.oliveira@islaguia.pt)

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