

Working Environment: How Important is it to Make Your Employees Happy



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Abstract: Human resources with high levels of happiness will impact organizational productivity and performance. Employees spend most of their day working in the organization, so it is obvious that working environment is a significant factor that affects employees' emotional and job performance. The findings of this study showed that working environment highly contributed to the employees' happiness with a min value of 3.010. Subsequent findings indicated that the quietest working environment influenced workers to produce high quality work. Although the findings showed that the respondents were satisfied with their current working environment, some respondents still expected further improvements in terms of facilities such as healthy food at the cafeteria and extended nursery services from infants to four-year-olds.

Keywords: employees' happiness, workstation, healthy food, organizational performance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Happiness generally refers to the positive emotion that an individual feels towards the activity he or she enjoys. Individuals who are happy will be more likely to think and act positively in life and produce better quality output (Wulandari and Widyastuti, 2014). In the organizational context, happy employees will be more productive in generating high quality output. This situation indirectly contributes to the organization's ability to maintain its goals. Therefore, it is important for organizations to ensure that the working environment is given due attention so that human resources are working comfortably. This will not only promote happiness among employees but the balance achieved between individual characteristics and the working environment would develop an efficient and effective human resources (Stallworth and Kleiner, 1996).

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Carr (2004), work is one of the domains for humans to find happiness in life other than their own selves,

family, working environment, health and finances (Daughter, 2009). The concept of happiness that is subjective to each individual's interpretation makes the measurement of happiness difficult to achieve and conclude. There are individuals who define happiness at work as something physical such as ergonomic working environment (Zafir, 2010) but many define happiness at work in a more subjective contexts such as interactions with colleagues (Wired, Majid and Sharif, 2015), Staib, 2009; Suojanen, 2012), job satisfaction (Cannon, 2017; Ariati, 2010 and Alfarisi, 2010), good organizational management (Mindtools, 2009), tasks or activities, organizational culture (Wesarat, Majid and Sharif, 2015), etc.

Failure to match the individual's characteristics with the environment can cause psychological distress (job dissatisfaction) or physiological tension (high blood pressure). Jamieson and Graves (1998) stated that discrepancies or misfits between the environment and an individual can have adverse effects on the physiology, psychology and negative behaviors of the individual. According to them, these effects can intensify the signs of fatigue and ultimately disturb organizational productivity. According to Miles (2000), the suitability of an individual to the environment can be demonstrated through improved performance, job satisfaction and minimum stress level. Meanwhile, lack of adaptability can be seen through a decrease in performance, an increase in job dissatisfaction and stress (Gustafson and Mumford, 1995). A good fit between one's personal skills and his or her work requirements will show a minimum level of stress (Schermerhorn et al., 2005).

Prolonged stress will affect the physical condition of an individual depending on his or her response to stress. Response is the process of trying to manage and control threats or desires that are perceived as problems which are beyond one's resources or capabilities (Ma'arof, 2001). The inability of individuals to respond to prolonged stress would result in cardiovascular (heart) diseases and musculoskeletal disorders (disorders of the nervous system, joints, ligaments, muscles and tendons). Occupational musculoskeletal disease statistics from 1995 to 2009 showed a significant increase from 77 cases in 2008 to 161 cases in 2009.

In 2018, the AIA insurance company on its website listed the effects of poorly managed stress including insomnia, difficulty to focus, absentmindedness, headaches, cardiovascular diseases, digestive problems and disturbed emotions. The effects of stress directly disrupt the body's system and affect the thinking and behavior of the individual.

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This situation in turn contributes to many other negative consequences such as affecting employees' compliance with his or her work, low self-esteem, absence of duty, sleeping while on duty and the most feared effect is lack of energy or burnout.

Individuals may experience depletion of energy if stress persists, which will lead to the lack of body defense (Schermerhorn et al., 2005). Excessive stress can also cause employees to make mistakes and be reckless while performing their tasks which could cause accidents, low quality products and adversely affect the overall work system and organizational performance (Jain et al., 2012).

In order to achieve happiness at work, Gavin and Masson (2004) suggested that individuals should work in good organizations. Most studies showed that many employees who are depressed or feel unhappy are influenced by organizational characteristics including their working environment (Fisher, 2010). As such, the aspects of the organizational environment can be a key element in determining the level of happiness of the employees in the workplace because happy employees not only affect their own psychological aspects but also the organizational performance. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine the aspects of working environment that can promote employees' happiness and help improve their lifelong service expectancy in the organization.

III. LITERATUR REVIEW

1. Working Environment And Happiness Of The Employees

Happiness in the workplace is a positive feeling that employees have at work. This feeling arises when employees are able to manage and carry out their tasks so as to produce output that gives them satisfaction (Pryce and Jones, 2010). Happiness in the workplace not only refers to individual intrinsic factors but also to individual extrinsic factors such as the working environment (Zafir, 2010). The working environment is found to be directly related to employees' emotions and work performance as it can improve the quality, morale, job satisfaction and loyalty, all of which can improve organizational productivity (Rowan and Wright, 1995). According to Manuele (1991), Griffin (1992) and Carson (1993), the best working environment can enhance the quality, productivity, job satisfaction and loyalty to the organizations. Meanwhile Hodgetts and Kroeck (1992) stated that organizational factors could increase the morale and job satisfaction, leading to the increase in productivity because among the factors contributing to employees' loyalty in the organization is a safe and comfortable working environment.

A study by JobStreet.com found that more Malaysian workers were comfortable with their working environment, resulting in them spending more time at work than at home. The findings of the JobStreet.com study in 2018 showed that the location, working environment, good coworkers and organizational performance were the key factors that made employees happy in the workplace. The same study conducted by Ranstad's Workmonitor in 2018 also showed that the respondents were comfortable at work because their working environment encouraged them to focus more. The same study also showed that 90 per cent of employees in

Malaysia were more comfortable and happy when they were given the freedom to make decisions and have a flexible working schedule.

According to Ma'arof (2001), human beings are constantly influenced by environmental factors such as noise, cold weather, hot weather, etc. These environmental factors can affect individuals, either positively or negatively (Ma'arof, 2001). In the organizational context, the working environment strongly influences the employees' emotions and motivations to work (Zafir, 2010). A comfortable working environment can reduce the stress levels of the employees and indirectly promote their happiness. As such, it can be said that factors such as ventilation systems, poor lighting, limited workspace, background noise and extreme temperatures can influence employees' stress levels (Sutton and Rafaeli, 1987; Bao, Spielholz, Howard and Silverstein, 2009). Meanwhile, Shikdar and Sawaged (2003) added that the factors of the working environment that can affect job satisfaction and trigger any intention to quit are heat and noise. Among the efforts that organizations can take to improve employees' comfort are monitoring of noise, temperature and lighting, effective workplace design and working schedules, as well as immediate administration of occupational safety and health issues (Shikdar and Sawaged, 2003). The level of comfort and satisfaction of the employees within an organization also depends on the quality of ventilation, lighting, sound and other ergonomic aspects of the working environment (Tarcan et al., 2004). Environmental factors such as noise, excessive temperature, long working hours, stressful shifts, repetitive and dangerous work requirements are contributors to job dissatisfaction (Ket de Vries, 1979; Melamez et al., 1992).

Good ventilation systems in the organization can help employees to be more productive (Zafir, 2010). If the temperature in the organization is too hot, it can cause fatigue and disturb employees' emotions. If it is too cold, it can cause musculoskeletal disorders and affect their health. In addition, among the major causes of job dissatisfaction within the organization are extreme temperatures and dusty or dirty environment (Rollinson, 2005). Moderation in setting the organization's temperature is crucial in ensuring a comfortable and productive working environment. Extreme cold or heat is negatively associated with job satisfaction (Ellis, 1982; Wickens et al., 2004). Griffith (1970) pointed out that the ventilation system and the inconvenient temperature can have an impact on individual's psychology, which in turn can affect work performance.

The aspect of noise also influences the comfort and happiness in the workplace as it enables the employees to focus in the task without any noise nuisance. According to DeCroon et al. (2005), innovative offices need to pay attention on background noise and visual stimuli. Therefore, offices need to be equipped with noise-blocking devices and equipment that can prevent noise such as providing glass barriers between work spaces, soundproof ceilings, printer cabinets, etc. Gawron (1984) argued that excessive and unexpected noise can affect work performance and cause emotional tension.

Not only that, it can also increase blood pressure, disturb sleep pattern, cause headache and hypertension (Greenberg, 2004). Noise disruption can also cause individuals to lose focus, be overwhelmed with fatigue and have lack of confidence, besides affecting the relationships with others and lead to stress at work (Blonna, 2005). Exposure to noise is also strongly associated with heart problems, absence from work, weariness and psychological stress (McDonald, 1989; Cuesdan et al., 1977).

The most important factor required in the organizations is lighting. Lighting plays an important role in ensuring that tasks are performed efficiently and effectively. Improper lighting is a major contributor to visual discomfort such as eye strain, watery eyes, headaches and blurred vision (Blonna, 2005). If these discomforts persist, it can put pressure on individuals and lead to stress (Blonna, 2005). In fact, lighting requirements vary in different organizations according to the type of work performed and it is significantly associated with job dissatisfaction (Wagner and Hollenbeck, 2002). It is difficult to determine the level of lighting required because the suitability depends on the type of work (Sutton and Rafaeli, 1987).

All factors in the working environment have a significant relationship with the attitudes and emotions of the workforce. A conducive and friendly working environment is found to contribute to good work productivity and in turn influences employees' happiness. In addition to that, happiness can be defined as a positive or negative response that affects the level of satisfaction in human life (Diener et al., 1995). According to Jain (2012) happiness in oneself arises from one's emotions and pleasant feelings as well as positive attitude towards something. Happy individuals are more likely to offer help to others besides having the abilities to be creative, pro-social and charitable, as well as become healthier both physically and mentally (Diener & Dean, 2007).

IV. METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted on 100 randomly selected employees of public service organizations. Questionnaires containing open-ended questions were distributed to the employees in order to identify the desired working environment that is believed to contribute to their happiness at work.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the open-ended questions found that almost all respondents agreed that the working environment had an impact on employees' happiness in the organizations with a high min of 3.010. This finding directly showed that the respondents agreed that a pleasant working environment could influence employees' mood and happiness at work. In addition, respondents also recognized that organizational support was an important role in determining their happiness. The respondents believed that responsible and concerned organizations would ensure that a conducive working environment reduces stress at work and a greater alternative for the welfare of the employees. The min score value of each item of the working environment is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Minimum Values and Standard deviations of the Environment at Work

No	Working Environment	Min
B2 6	I am comfortable with the workspace provided.	2.994 (moderate)
B2 7	I am satisfied with the ventilation system provided at my workplace.	2.887 (moderate)
B2 8	The lighting in my workspace is satisfactory.	3.045 (high)
B2 9	The right temperature in my workspace helps me work effectively.	3.030 (high)
B3 0	The quiet working environment helps me produce high quality work.	3.098 (high)

Table 1 shows the min scores and standard deviations for different factors of working environment. Generally, the findings indicated that the respondents were satisfied with the current working environment provided by the organizations. The analysis showed that the respondents were comfortable with a number of factors in their working environment such as quiet environment (Statement B30), satisfactory lighting system (Statement B28) and appropriate temperature (Statement B29). This is because all three factors showed high min scores, namely in Statements B30 (min = 3.098), B28 (min = 3.045) and B29 (min = 3.030). In support of these findings, Banburry and Berry (1998) and Sarode and Shirsath (2011) also stated that factors such as heat, noise and lighting (Chandrasekar, 2011) were found to have direct and indirect effects on employees' psychological aspects, for example noise could affect employees' cognitive performance.

However, these findings were somewhat different from the factor of ventilation system provided in the organization (Statement B27) which had a min score of 2.887. This indicated that, given the opportunity, the respondents preferred a more comfortable space in terms of ventilation system. Limited office space or too many cubicles can contribute to ventilation issues in the workplace. Nevertheless, the findings indicated that the respondents still felt comfortable with the workspace provided by the organizations despite the moderate min score of 2.887 (Statement B26).

Overall, the employees were satisfied with their current working environment, especially in terms of lighting, ventilation and temperature of their workspace. An employee-friendly environment would encourage them to be more comfortable at work and ultimately make them happy. Although the findings indicated that the respondents were satisfied with the organizational environment, the suggestions on improvement in promoting the employees' happiness showed a relatively high value of 58. It was found that the respondents preferred a flexible and comprehensive working environment, for example the provision of healthy food option, a relaxing space at each department and a cafe in each working area.

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In addition, the respondents also suggested that the nursery services should be extended to the care and education of infants from the age of four months. In this context, it would help to provide the female staff who just completed their maternity leave with nursery services that are very close to the organization.

Organizations need to be more careful in ensuring that their working environment is in a better position in order to enable employees to be more productive and competitive. According to Yeow and Nath Sen (2003), ergonomic workspace is the solution to poor productivity, low product quality, poor working conditions and inability to compete in the global market. Although Mansour and Jeanne (2014) stated that the level of hard work does not determine a person's motivation and job satisfaction, Globeforce in 2003 found that 85 percent of happy employees in the organization would be more efficient at work. Zafir and Fazilah (2010) also found that non-ergonomic working environment is one of the causes of stress among employees. It is important, therefore, for employees and organizations to make sure that their working environment is conducive so that the employees are more comfortable in doing their work.

VI. VCONCLUSION

The working environment is psychologically capable of promoting employees' cognitive activity as it will affect their mood. Organizations must ensure that the working environment is conducive, flexible and friendly. Emphasis should be placed in promoting workplaces that further stimulate employees' motivation to work. Because the psychological elements of each person are different, organizations are proposed to give employees the freedom to do their work in appropriate spaces at their convenience. In addition to the traditional office desk, other spaces such as the library, cafeteria or even the lakefront can be suitable alternatives for employees to do their work, as long as they are still in the organization.

Creating a restroom or rest area in the office that suits the employees' hobbies such as a mini garden, a fish pond and a cat shed can be a great alternatives for employees to relieve stress during work. This initiative not only helps to reduce stress, but as a matter of fact, TIMES magazine in its April 2017 issue reported that scientists have shown that pets such as cats, rabbits, fish and horses are found to help improve mental health including those with mental disorders. Although the provision of these facilities is costly, it can provide a good return on the investment for the employees in the organization.

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