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Well-Being and Career Success

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Most people would assume my business success, and the wealth that comes with it, have brought me happiness. But I know I am successful, wealthy, and connected because I am happy.

—RICHARD BRANSON, ENTREPRENEUR

Work hard, be successful, then you will be happy. So goes the formula that our two previous empirical reviews suggested may be broken and backward (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Walsh et al., 2018). Contrary to previous popular beliefs, empirical evidence shows that initially happy people are more likely to be successful later and that inducing greater levels of positive emotions, like joy and happiness, causes people to think and behave in ways associated with success. This evidence appears to have trickled out to the wider public, as a recent corporate survey found that 68% of respondents believed that “happiness leads to success,” whereas only 32% believed that “success leads to happiness” (Indeed, 2020). Thanks to hedonic adaptation—the human propensity to adapt to positive life changes and then want even more—merely becoming more successful may not deliver the happiness results people long for (Fritz et al., 2017; Lyubomirsky, 2011). In this chapter, we revisit and update the evidence suggesting that happiness causes success, rather than the other way around. We also briefly consider how organizations might improve worker well-being, such as by measuring it, building thriving work cultures, and deploying well-being enhancing positive activities.

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Building on our two previous reviews (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Walsh et al., 2018), we begin by summarizing the strongest pieces of evidence linking well-being and career success over the last 4 decades. Although the oldest studies (1975–1985) are well in the past and may not inform current experiences as well as newer studies (2010 onward), we still include the most relevant studies regardless of publication year. Wherever possible, however, we highlight new studies. Each time we return to the empirical psychological literature, we discover more evidence supporting our theory that greater well-being precedes and leads to career success.

Subjective well-being is often defined by three components: the presence of positive affect, the absence of negative affect, and high levels of life satisfaction (Diener, 2009; Diener et al., 1999). Because frequent, moderately intense positive emotions are the hallmark of happiness (Diener et al., 1991), as in our previous reviews, we continue to define a happy person as one who often feels higher levels of positive emotions, such as excitement, joy, happiness, and serenity. Throughout this chapter, we use terms such as *happiness*, *positive affect*, and *positive emotions* interchangeably to describe the habits of happy versus less happy people. Occasionally, we also examine how life satisfaction affects job-related outcomes. Whereas positive affect provides a transient picture of how people feel most days, life satisfaction offers a portrait of people's well-being that is relatively more cognitive, stable, and global (Diener et al., 1985). A person high on life satisfaction generally agrees with statements like "In most ways my life is close to ideal" and "So far I have gotten the important things I want in life." Notably, life satisfaction and positive affect are moderately to strongly positively correlated ($r = .32$ to $.53$; Busseri, 2018; Diener et al., 1985; Headey et al., 1993).

As before, we consider three types of investigations: cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental. First, cross-sectional studies allow researchers to establish whether there is a significant correlation between well-being and work-related outcomes at a single time point. Second, multi-time-point longitudinal studies help establish that well-being at an earlier time point precedes career success at a later time point. Third, experimental studies that randomly assign participants to activities that increase well-being (vs. controls) offer the opportunity to determine whether inducing greater well-being causes people to experience cognitive and behavioral changes conducive to career success.

Each of the three types of investigation comes with its own strengths and weaknesses. For example, many cross-sectional and longitudinal studies provide high external validity because data are often collected in real-world corporate settings with outcomes vital to organizations, like sales and attrition. But cross-sectional studies cannot specify the direction of causality. If happiness and sales are correlated, which comes first and which leads to what? Do individuals who sell more units become happier? Or do happy people ultimately sell more units? Furthermore, both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies are prone to spurious correlations (a.k.a. third-variable problems), whereby an independent variable (happiness) may predict changes in an outcome (sales) only because it is correlated with a third variable (extraversion).

Experiments are better able to control for third variables by randomly assigning people to precise positive, neutral, or negative emotion induction conditions, but they also use artificially constructed lab environments and short time frames to elicit low levels of the intended emotions or related states. In other words, experiments have relatively high internal validity, but they lack external validity. However, together, the three types of investigations (cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental) provide strong triangulating evidence that happiness is related to, precedes, and causes success. We begin with a review of the cross-sectional evidence.

CROSS-SECTIONAL EVIDENCE

The findings from cross-sectional studies largely suggest that happy people tend to experience greater career success than those who are less happy, and this trend consistently emerges across outcomes. To begin, happy workers describe their jobs as varied and meaningful (Staw et al., 1994); they also report a high degree of autonomy, or control, in their work environments, which may buffer against burnout (Iverson et al., 1998). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that people with high positive affect are more satisfied with their jobs than those with lower positive affect (Bowling et al., 2010; George, 1995; Judge et al., 1999; Thoresen et al., 2003). Greater life satisfaction is also associated with greater job satisfaction, less work tedium, and greater work achievements (Adler & Golan, 1981). Well-being may thus foster more workplace success because it makes being employed more enjoyable.

Happiness also predicts better job performance (T. A. Wright & Cropanzano, 2000), a link that appears in a variety of contexts. For example, supervisors tend to evaluate happy employees more favorably than less happy employees (Cropanzano & Wright, 1999; Judge et al., 1999; Staw et al., 1994). In a study at a major U.S. retailer, salespeople supervised by happy managers were rated as more successful by upper and lower management (George, 1995). In a study of first-year Master of Business Administration (MBA) students, MBA students with high positive affect received better peer and staff evaluations than MBA students with low positive affect (Staw & Barsade, 1993). In another study, managers in Australia with high levels of trait positive affect were more likely to receive positive supervisor performance ratings (Hosie et al., 2012). Further research has demonstrated a correlation between positive affect and favorable job evaluations (Cropanzano & Wright, 1999).

Thus, research suggests the happier the employee, the better the performance (as assessed by supervisor evaluations). However, these effects could at least be partially attributable to halo effects (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977)—that is, a positive impression in one area influencing opinion in another area. For example, because an individual possesses one socially desirable trait (e.g., happiness), their coworkers may also assume they exhibit other desirable characteristics (e.g., commendable job performance). Fortunately, some studies imply that

supervisor evaluations do not purely depend on halo effects. Although more studies examining objective job performance indicators (e.g., sales generated, hours worked, contracts signed, widgets produced) are needed, some cross-sectional studies indicate that happy people perform better on objective metrics too. One especially revealing study with sales agents at Metropolitan Life Insurance Company matched the agents' explanatory style and sales commissions (proportional to the amount of insurance sold in U.S. dollars) at a single time point (Seligman & Schulman, 1986). Agents with a more positive, optimistic explanatory style sold 37% more life insurance policies than their less positive counterparts. Additionally, a meta-analysis that examined a range of sports (e.g., basketball, karate, soccer, tennis, wrestling, swimming) and objective indicators (e.g., wins/losses, being selected for teams) found a moderate effect of positive affect on athletes' performance success (Beedie et al., 2000).

Another reason why happy employees may excel is that they are more invested and involved in their jobs (George, 1995; Langelaan et al., 2006). In other words, they experience high levels of work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Being engaged at work could be framed as the inverse of key withdrawal behaviors, such as burnout, turnover, and absenteeism—all of which are negatively correlated with high positive affect (Langelaan et al., 2006; Miles et al., 2002; Thoresen et al., 2003). Indeed, relative to those who are unhappy, happy employees experience less burnout (Iverson et al., 1998; Walkiewicz et al., 2012), emotional exhaustion (T. A. Wright & Cropanzano, 1998), and chronic absenteeism (Gil et al., 2004). Employees with high life satisfaction also feel less emotional exhaustion than those with low life satisfaction (Merkin, 2020). Yet when happy workers are dissatisfied with their jobs, they report thinking more about quitting and actively seeking new employment elsewhere (Bouckenoghe et al., 2013). This may be adaptive, perhaps prompting happy people to exit suboptimal working conditions or distressing company cultures and move on to greener pastures. Conversely, unhappy people may experience a greater degree of learned helplessness (Maier & Seligman, 1976), making them feel powerless and less able to make positive career changes. In general, happy people are more successful at coping with organizational changes (Judge et al., 1999); they also tend to be more loyal and committed to their employers (Judge et al., 1999; Thoresen et al., 2003).

Happy employees might also be more successful due to their tendency to go above and beyond in the workplace. Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) involves voluntary actions that are not part of an individual's delineated job duties (e.g., providing extra help to coworkers, attending nonmandatory meetings) but contribute positively to an organization's overall effectiveness (Organ, 1988). Employees often perform these actions without receiving any formal recognition or reward. Organ (1997) defined a few distinct OCB dimensions, including helping others (altruism), preventing problems for others (courtesy), and sustaining high standards of excellence (conscientiousness). Additional researchers have proposed alternative categories like exerting extra effort, protecting the organization, and spreading goodwill (Borman et al., 2001; George

& Brief, 1992). OCB is a type of prosocial behavior, which involves actions intended to benefit one or more people other than the self (Batson & Powell, 2003)—or in the case of OCB, the organization as a whole. Given the importance of OCB to organizational success, it is worth noting that positive affect predicts greater OCB (Borman et al., 2001; George, 1991; Miles et al., 2002). Happy people are more likely to assist customers and coworkers (George, 1991), donate money to charities (Priller & Schupp, 2011), and devote more time to volunteer service (Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). Additionally, people with greater life satisfaction also engage in more OCBs and are more likely to trust their coworkers and volunteer for extra tasks than their less satisfied peers (Merkin, 2020).

Beyond the benefits happy workers accrue to the organizations that employ them (e.g., better job performance, increased OCB), it appears that happy people are also personally rewarded for their efforts—for example, by earning more money. Workers' optimistic expectations, especially toward themselves, has been found to directly affect their wages (Mohanty, 2009). Research also suggests happiness is correlated with income ($r = .21$), and the magnitude of that association is larger than the link with education ($r = .15$; Pinaut & Sørensen, 2000). Indeed, happiness and earnings appear to rise together (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Pinaut & Sørensen, 2000). One study found that higher levels of positive feelings were associated with larger incomes, even above a previously established plateau of \$75,000 per year (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010; Killingsworth, 2021). However, in such studies it is difficult to determine the direction of causality. For example, happy people may subsequently earn more money or, alternatively, people who earn more money may become happier. The longitudinal research in the next section is better positioned to address the issue of which comes first (income or happiness).

Happy people also enjoy relatively more tangible benefits, such as greater interpersonal rewards. Relative to those with low positive affect, employees with high positive affect receive more social support from their managers and coworkers (Iverson et al., 1998) and cooperate more with their peers (Miles et al., 2002). They are also more likely to use contacts in their social network to gather information (Doucet et al., 2012). Those with relatively high life satisfaction also report superior quality and quantity of social support with family and friends (Pinaut & Sørensen, 2000). Happy and satisfied people may simply be more pleasant to interact with, and their cooperative, flexible personalities might attract others (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Walsh et al., 2018). Indeed, happier people tend to be better liked by their peers (Taylor et al., 2003). One study captured headshots of scholars attending a German business research conference, then asked students to evaluate the photos; attendees who “looked” happy were rated as more attractive, competent, trustworthy, and likeable (Dilger et al., 2015). Again, these associations could be operating primarily via halo effects (i.e., this scholar looks happy, so they also look likeable); nevertheless, these advantageous associations could help one excel in the workplace.

In summary, the cross-sectional evidence suggests that happy employees enjoy better career success outcomes than their less happy counterparts. People high in positive affect tend to find autonomy and meaning in their work, be satisfied with their jobs, receive favorable evaluations, perform well, enjoy high income, and have strong social support systems. Greater life satisfaction is also associated with greater job satisfaction, income, prosocial behavior, and social support, as well as less emotional exhaustion. However, although single-time-point, cross-sectional studies allow investigators to establish a link between well-being and success, they do not allow them to infer which variable came first. To go further, we now turn to the longitudinal evidence to elucidate the temporal order of these variables.

LONGITUDINAL EVIDENCE

Longitudinal studies provide additional evidence for the link between well-being and success but take a further step by demonstrating that happiness often precedes career success on a host of work-related outcomes. Relative to those who are less happy, longitudinal research reveals that people initially high on positive affect are more likely to later find gainful employment (Haase et al., 2012). This effect could be multiply determined—for example, happier people are inclined to avoid procrastination and assume more productive habits, such as planning ahead for a future job search (Turban et al., 2013). Happier people also tend to invest more time, effort, and energy into achieving their goals and overcoming hardships (Haase et al., 2012). For example, people who are happy at an earlier time point are more likely to search for and apply to a higher number of job openings at a later time point (Turban et al., 2013).

Positive affect is also associated with having more clarity about what kind of job one wants, as well as how to find it (Côté et al., 2006). This research suggests a multiple-step mediation process, whereby initial happiness influences greater job clarity, which in turn drives greater job search intensity; accordingly, intensely searching for a job yields more job offers, which in turn leads to subsequent employment. Interestingly, a longitudinal panel study in the United Kingdom observed that people tend to experience greater well-being just before starting a new job, then experience subsequent declines in well-being after becoming employed (Binder & Coad, 2010). This finding shows that achieving success (e.g., finding a job) may not necessarily make a person happier. Another 2-year longitudinal study with the Swiss labor force found that baseline life satisfaction predicted gaining employment (Gander et al., 2019). Positive emotions may also be protective against job loss—an especially unpleasant life event that can be difficult for individuals to hedonically recover from (Anusic et al., 2014; Fritz et al., 2017; Lucas et al., 2004).

Well-being also affects future job satisfaction and career achievement. Longitudinal studies show that happy people are more likely to experience superior job satisfaction, job performance, and financial stability up to a decade later

(Kansky et al., 2016; Roberts et al., 2003). For example, one study found that positive affect at age 14 predicted greater job satisfaction and higher levels of competence at ages 23 to 25 (Kansky et al., 2016). Furthermore, according to a meta-analysis of longitudinal studies, the link between subjective well-being and subsequent job satisfaction was stronger than the link from job satisfaction to subjective well-being (Bowling et al., 2010).

Longitudinal studies also relate well-being to social support. One longitudinal study showed that happy teenagers reported stronger friendships and fewer relationship conflicts later in young adulthood (Kansky et al., 2016). Another study found that employees who were initially happier received more support from colleagues and better evaluations from their supervisors 18 months later (Staw et al., 1994). This finding was later replicated in further studies, bolstering evidence that happy workers often receive stronger evaluations from their supervisors up to several years later (Cropanzano & Wright, 1999; T. A. Wright & Staw, 1999).

In addition to supervisor evaluations, which, as noted earlier, could be operating via halo effects, it is important to consider other measures of employee performance. In an experience sampling method (ESM) study, directors employed in the private sector and the Canadian federal government were asked to report their well-being and productivity over 8 weeks (Zelenski et al., 2008). Positive affect at baseline (collected before the ESM phase), predicted later greater productivity. Happier directors reported more productivity than did less happy directors. However, happy people may merely view themselves positively, without actually producing more work.

As with the cross-sectional evidence, objective measures of job performance (e.g., sales commissions, customer calls taken) can advance the literature by showing that the happy-productive worker theory is not solely a self-report mirage. A few studies provide longitudinal evidence that happy people perform better on objective measures. For example, the study with sales agents described earlier (Seligman & Schulman, 1986) also longitudinally followed another group of newly hired agents at the same company, Metropolitan Life Insurance. Agents who had a more positive, optimistic explanatory style when they entered the company sold 35% more life insurance in the second half of their first year (after training) than their less positive peers; they were also more likely to still be working at the company a year later. Furthermore, an ESM study that tracked call center employees' moods four to five times each day over 3 weeks found that positive mood predicted improved task performance via reduced call times (Miner & Glomb, 2010).

Another, more recent study followed call center sales workers at British Telecom (one of the United Kingdom's largest private employers) and matched administrative data (e.g., work schedules, productivity) with weekly well-being assessments collected over a 6-month period (Bellet et al., 2020). The findings revealed that an increase in worker happiness of one standard deviation led to a subsequent 24.5% increase in weekly sales. The researchers concluded that when workers were happier, they worked faster by making more calls per hour

and converted more of their calls into sales. Taken together, these studies suggest that happy, optimistic people may produce objectively faster and better results in the workplace.

Longitudinal research also supports the notion that happiness might precede and thereby influence future prosocial behavior. A study using German panel data found that people who felt happy in the past 4 weeks donated more money and more blood to others than those who felt less happy (Priller & Schupp, 2011). The ESM study mentioned previously (Miner & Glomb, 2010) tracking call center employees also found that positive mood predicted engaging in more voluntary OCBs (e.g., helping a coworker, performing a task to help the company).

Further longitudinal studies show that people with high positive affect subsequently exhibit fewer withdrawal behaviors (e.g., turnover, absenteeism), indicating that happy people may be more committed to their organizations. In a study following employees at a large electronics company, employees who were happy at baseline were less frequently absent from work than their less happy peers during the next 5 months (Pelled & Xin, 1999). Another study with managers found those who were happy at an initial assessment were less likely to quit within the next 2 years (T. A. Wright & Bonett, 2007).

Indeed, happy people are generally less likely to lose their jobs (Diener et al., 2002; Luhmann et al., 2013). Other longitudinal studies show that life satisfaction is likely to decline just before becoming unemployed (Anusic et al., 2014; Lucas et al., 2004). When happy people do become unemployed, they are more likely to find a new job quickly (Krause, 2013). Interestingly, when it comes to finding a new position after unemployment, there appears to be an ideal level of happiness. Those who are very happy or very unhappy are less likely to find a new job up to several years later than those who are moderately happy.

Finally, longitudinal studies indicate that happiness may pay out financially as well. Those who report higher positive affect at an initial time point receive larger incomes at a later time point (Diener et al., 2002; Staw et al., 1994). In one longitudinal study, people from economically advantaged backgrounds who were more cheerful than their peers as first-year college students subsequently reported greater earnings 17 years later (Diener et al., 2002). However, for those growing up in poor households, cheerfulness did not affect later income. In another longitudinal study, positive affect in adolescence was associated with self-reported income around age 29 (De Neve & Oswald, 2012). British panel data suggests happiness often increases before income (Binder & Coad, 2010). Additional German, British, and Swiss panel data demonstrates that individuals who earn more on average and those who earn more over time report higher levels of life satisfaction (Cheung & Lucas, 2015). Thus, combined various pieces of longitudinal evidence suggest that greater well-being heralds greater income.

In summary, longitudinal evidence supports the idea that well-being precedes career success, rather than the other way around. Initially happy people are more likely to later acquire and keep a job, commit to their organizations,

experience high job satisfaction, receive superior social support and supervisor evaluations, perform well (e.g., by selling more life insurance), engage in pro-social workplace behaviors, and earn high incomes. Now we turn to the experimental evidence to examine potential causality.

EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE

When researchers randomly assign participants to experience greater (vs. same or lower) levels of happiness, do the happier participants show changes in cognition and behavior more conducive to career success than do their less happy peers? The experimental evidence to date suggests the answer is yes. This body of work generally comprises single-session, laboratory studies that involve small, immediate manipulations to elicit particular emotions, such as reading humorous comics or receiving gifts (positive emotion induction; Carnevale & Isen, 1986), evaluating neutral photos (neutral emotion induction; Isen & Shalker, 1982), and recalling sad events (negative emotion induction; Baron, 1993; Hom & Arbuckle, 1988). Such manipulations allow for more precise isolation of third variables and provide stronger evidence that happiness causes success.

To begin, happy states promote greater optimism in one's ability to succeed. When compared with those assigned to neutral emotion inductions, people assigned to positive emotion inductions set more ambitious goals for themselves (Baron, 1990; Hom & Arbuckle, 1988), report greater confidence in their ability to succeed (J. Wright & Mischel, 1982), persist at challenging tasks longer (Sarason et al., 1986), describe themselves with more positive statements (Sarason et al., 1986), and rate themselves as high performing (J. Wright & Mischel, 1982). The expectations of success triggered by happy states also tend to become reality. For example, relative to those assigned to neutral emotion controls, participants induced to feel positive emotions perform better on coding and digit substitution tasks (Baron, 1990; Hom & Arbuckle, 1988) and demonstrate greater productivity without corresponding declines in work quality (Oswald et al., 2015). In other words, their positive self-beliefs become self-fulfilling prophecies (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 2003) that allow them to achieve their goals.

Not only do those experiencing positive emotions rate themselves more positively, they also rate their peers more favorably (Baron, 1993; Baron et al., 1992). For example, in one study, researchers assigned participants to conditions that induced positive affect, negative affect, or no affect change, then asked them to conduct a mock job interview with an applicant who was highly qualified, ambiguously qualified, or unqualified for the job (Baron, 1993). Participants in all the affect conditions rated the highly qualified and unqualified candidates similarly. However, relative to those in the other conditions, participants in the positive affect condition rated the ambiguously qualified candidate higher on several dimensions. This finding suggests that happy people are more

likely to accept highly qualified applicants, eliminate underqualified applicants, and give the ambiguously qualified applicants a chance in the hiring process. This tendency of people experiencing positive emotions to rate their peers more positively and more charitably could partly explain why they receive better social support from colleagues and form happier and more successful teams. Their high expectations for their coworkers may also pay off with improved team performance via Pygmalion effects (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 2003).

Experimental research also supports the relationship between happiness and prosociality. Inducing positive emotions prompts a variety of helping behaviors, such as sharing with others (Rosenhan et al., 1974), donating blood (O'Malley & Andrews, 1983), volunteering time (Baron et al., 1992; Berkowitz, 1987), and making charitable contributions (Cunningham et al., 1980).

Positive emotions may also benefit individuals during career-related negotiations. Participants assigned to positive mood inductions demonstrate less antagonistic behavior, are more cooperative, make more concessions, and find more mutually beneficial solutions while negotiating (Baron, 1990; Baron et al., 1992; Carnevale, 2008; Carnevale & Isen, 1986). They are also more likely to anticipate making and honoring deals (Forgas, 1998).

Experimental evidence also suggests happiness can enhance creativity, flexible thinking, and production of novel ideas (Estrada et al., 1994; Grawitch et al., 2003; Isen, 1993). For example, internists offered a gift of chocolate and candy scored higher on a creativity test than those in the control group who received no such gift (Estrada et al., 1994). However, two meta-analyses have found the effect sizes obtained in this literature are dependent on whether the positive emotion groups are being compared with neutral ($r = .18$, $d = .52$) or negative emotion groups ($r = .05$, $d = .18$; r effect sizes reported in Baas et al., 2008; d effect sizes reported in Davis, 2009). The type of creative task may also matter. Positive moods may boost original idea production but not creative problem-solving abilities.

The evidence regarding emotion and complicated mental tasks is somewhat mixed. Specifically, positive emotions can hinder logical thinking (Melton, 1995) and make it challenging to discern between strong versus weak arguments (Mackie & Worth, 1989). Negative emotions may provide an advantage by promoting systematic (rather than categorical) thinking (Edwards & Weary, 1993), careful execution of steps in structured decision-making protocols (Elsbach & Barr, 1999), and an increased ability to decode persuasive arguments (Bless et al., 1990). However, positive emotions can still help individuals discard irrelevant information to make more efficient decisions (Isen & Means, 1983). Moreover, happy people may overcome these deficits when they are made aware that additional care is necessary for the task at hand (Bless et al., 1990).

In summary, the accumulated experimental evidence shows that inducing happiness promotes cognitions and behaviors conducive to success. Relative to those assigned to neutral or negative emotion manipulations, participants assigned to positive emotion manipulations are more confident in their ability to succeed, perform better on work-related tasks, rate themselves and others

more positively, negotiate more effectively, and are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors and generate creative ideas. Although negative emotions may be more useful than positive emotions in certain contexts when it comes to complex mental tasks, evidence suggests that people in happy states can excel at such tasks as well when informed that attention to detail is needed.

CONSIDERING THE COMBINED EVIDENCE

Taken together, the hundreds of studies we reviewed across cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental investigations demonstrate that well-being positively affects career success on a host of outcomes, including autonomy, meaning, job satisfaction, performance, productivity, engagement, absenteeism, burnout, turnover, coping, supervisor and peer evaluations, social support, prosocial behavior, income, confidence, negotiation skills, and creativity. Although we did not delve into the weeds of bidirectional relationships—and the multiple mechanisms underlying them—in this review, the literature suggests the presence of upward spirals, whereby greater levels of well-being cause greater levels of success, which in turn prompt even more happiness and success, and so on (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). For example, a longitudinal meta-analysis found evidence that initial subjective well-being led to later greater job satisfaction and vice versa (Bowling et al., 2010).

To briefly address how these findings apply to different cultures, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds, a notable limitation of the well-being and success literature is that it oversamples from Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) cultures (Henrich et al., 2010). With few exceptions (e.g., Fauver et al., 2018), the studies reviewed here sample only from Europe and North America. What about Asia, Africa, and Central and Southern America? This is an important gap, as culture may significantly alter findings. For example, employees in Asian collectivistic cultures may benefit more from low arousal positive emotions (e.g., calm) instead of the high arousal positive emotions (e.g., excitement) valued in Western individualist cultures (Tsai et al., 2006). In terms of gender, most studies aim to recruit roughly equal percentages of male and female participants, such that findings likely apply to both genders (at least in Western cultures). Even still, more work is required. For example, one study of blue- and white-collar workers in China found that the relationship between well-being and income was stronger for men than for women (Mishra & Smyth, 2014). Lastly, in terms of socioeconomic status, few of the summarized studies addressed this issue, but one notable meta-analytic study found that higher socioeconomic status was associated with greater well-being (Pinquart and Sörensen, 2000). Overall, future research that further explores the moderating effects of culture, gender, and socioeconomic status would make valuable contributions to the field.

Finally, our review is not meant to imply that unhappy people cannot be successful in the workplace. Over the course of human history, numerous

scholars, writers, leaders, and thinkers have observed that there is a time to be happy and a time to be sad. Indeed, negative emotions (like positive emotions) can be adaptive depending on the context (Oishi et al., 2007). Moreover, a number of eminent and successful people—including Abraham Lincoln, William James, Winston Churchill, and Georgia O’Keefe—reportedly battled severe depression at various points in their lives (Levine, 2015; Walsh et al., 2018). Obviously, many qualities (e.g., intelligence, conscientiousness) can foster success, and happiness appears to be among them.

IMPROVING WORKER WELL-BEING

After reading our review of the literature on well-being and success, organizational leaders may be tempted to start hiring visibly cheerful people and directing employees to act happy. We hope to deter this impulse. First, hiring only cheerful people could be construed as discriminatory, and coercing workers to feign happiness has already been ruled unlawful. Employees of Trader Joe’s and T-Mobile filed complaints with the U.S. National Labor Relations Board after both companies required their employees to overtly smile, act happy, and maintain a positive attitude (Rodriguez, 2016; Schreiber, 2016). Legal ramifications aside, pressuring employees to act happy can lead to counterproductive backfiring effects, such as higher levels of emotional exhaustion and burnout (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2003). Therefore, instead of merely pressuring employees to act happy, companies may be better served by attending to the genuine happiness of their employees and aiming to improve worker well-being indirectly. Next, we propose three strategies to achieve this goal: (a) measure employee well-being, (b) build thriving work cultures, and (c) deploy positive activities in the workplace to enhance well-being.

First, organizations may be able to better manage employee well-being by measuring it. This aim could be accomplished with a few different approaches. For example, organizations could administer longitudinal online surveys using psychological measures of subjective well-being (e.g., positive emotions, life satisfaction) and related constructs (e.g., meaning, stress, job satisfaction). Organizations could also collect naturally generated employee data and analyze it using new methods, such as coding for the presence of Duchenne (genuine) smiles in photos (Dilger et al., 2015), performing text analysis (e.g., on reports, blogs; Eichstaedt et al., 2020), or using algorithmic modeling (e.g., smiling, nodding, auditory convergence) on video conferencing meeting recordings (Reece, 2020). Of course, in the interests of ethics, employee privacy, and analytic accuracy, data collected should be deidentified; aggregated into group-level analyses; and not used to penalize, evaluate, or dismiss employees.

Such measurement initiatives would allow organizations to track the ups and downs of employee well-being against other company metrics (e.g., sales commissions), company-wide events (e.g., layoffs), and workplace improvements (e.g., flexible work options). Collection and analysis of these data could

be delegated to internal human resources personnel, business analysts, and/or data scientists. Alternatively, organizations could outsource measurement initiatives to a growing number of external vendors that offer business-specific well-being solutions. For example, a recent study showed that people using BetterUp (a service that provides well-being assessments, leadership coaching, and experiential learning resources) for at least 3 months reported increases in resilience, emotion regulation, purpose, positive relationships, and stress reduction (Black et al., 2019).

Second, organizations could build thriving cultures by providing optimal workplace conditions and environments. A variety of initiatives could further the goal of making and keeping employees happy, such as offering meaningful work, flexible working hours, paid maternity leave, and green/natural spaces to enjoy (Berman et al., 2012; Mandal, 2018; Wrike, 2019). Notably, one study found that organizations on *Fortune's* "100 Best Companies to Work For" list all highly valued their employees and maintained a strong culture of caring (Hinkin & Tracey, 2010). Moreover, "employee-friendly" companies that treat their employees well also tend to have higher market valuations and perform better, even during challenging economic times like the global financial crisis of 2008 (Fauver et al., 2018). Successful organizations also likely pay attention to their employees' workload and stress levels. Higher workloads are associated with greater stress (Glaser et al., 1999), and work stress predicts poorer well-being and productivity (Donald et al., 2005). Finally, companies could bolster employees' feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci et al., 1989), which have been linked to greater well-being, as well as foster greater "psychological safety"—a sense of interpersonal trust and mutual respect—among teams (Edmondson, 1999).

Third, organizations could deploy positive activities (a.k.a. positive activity interventions [PAIs]) in the workplace to improve employee well-being. PAIs direct individuals to use specific cognitive behavioral strategies that often mirror the thoughts and behaviors of naturally happy people (Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2014). PAIs are easily accessible, can be quickly administered, and involve relatively few costs (if any). Further, PAIs have been shown to improve subjective well-being in hundreds of randomized controlled trials, with meta-analytic r effect sizes ranging from .17 to .29 (Bolier et al., 2013; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009).

Notably, numerous PAIs have been conducted in various workplaces and with a variety of employed adult samples, demonstrating their potential usefulness to organizations. Some key PAIs that have been studied in work-related contexts include the following: gratitude interventions that direct people to count their blessings or write letters of gratitude to kind benefactors (Chan, 2013; Chancellor et al., 2015; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Seligman et al., 2005), prosocial behavior interventions that ask people to do kind acts for others (Chancellor et al., 2018; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), social activity interventions that prompt people to act extraverted or engage in more face-to-face interactions (Epley & Schroeder, 2014; Fritz et al., 2021; Margolis &

Lyubomirsky, 2020), mindfulness interventions that involve practices like mindfulness-based stress reduction and loving-kindness meditation (Aikens et al., 2014; Engel et al., 2020; Fredrickson et al., 2008; Kabat-Zinn, 2003), and strength-based interventions that ask people to identify their top signature strengths (e.g., creativity, zest, humility) and use them in new ways (Forest et al., 2012; Seligman et al., 2005). These studies have demonstrated that PAIs can improve employee well-being and workplace-related outcomes, such as job satisfaction, performance, passion for work, burnout, and self-improvement motivation (Armenta et al., 2022; Chan, 2013; Chancellor et al., 2018; Forest et al., 2012). Well-being experts could help organizations successfully apply positive activities like gratitude, kindness, and mindfulness within their own workplaces.

CONCLUSION

Our review includes a few key takeaways for both workers and employers. Our message to workers: If you wait for success to bring you happiness, you may be waiting indefinitely. Our message to employers: If you ignore the well-being of your employees, you do so at your own peril. Cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental studies persuasively and robustly show that relative to their less happy peers, happy people experience superior success on a host of outcomes, including job satisfaction, performance, productivity, work engagement, burnout, supervisor evaluations, income, negotiations, and creativity. Rather than pressuring employees to act happy—an approach that has previously led to both legal problems and backfiring effects—organizations may foster greater worker well-being by measuring it, building thriving corporate cultures, and deploying positive activities in the workplace.

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