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## Chapter

# Happiness at Work: A Psychological Perspective

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## Abstract

Modern human beings spend their maximum amount of time in the work setting. Hence, how they feel at the workplace has a direct influence on their overall quality of life. Therefore, understanding what makes us happy or unhappy at work is very crucial. Surprisingly, there is an absence of a sound theoretical and conceptual framework for understanding the concept of happiness from the organizational perspective. For developing a conceptual framework for happiness at work, two components are relevant -the external work environment and the internal mental mapping. The concept of happiness in psychology has been equated with pleasure, a mixture of pleasure, engagement and meaning, or with the concept of well-being. A precise definition of happiness is missing. There have been numerous studies on the contributions of positive psychology to happiness and its influence on employees' well-being and productivity. Most researches concentrate on the external happiness of individuals. But in the future, organizations need to focus on the intrinsic happiness of employees as well, to get the best outcome at the workplace. This chapter covers the causes and consequences of happiness in the workplace. Ways of inculcating happiness at the workplace to increase organizational productivity and create happy employees have also been discussed.

**Keywords:** happiness, engagement, productivity, workplace, well-being

## 1. Introduction

*"Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony."  
— Mahatma Gandhi*

In the present age, we have been bestowed with the opportunity to witness many pinnacles of scientific and technological ingenuity, the comforts of life that were once beyond imagination are now an everyday reality. There has been an encouraging increase in the number of unorthodox work opportunities and job avenues, where one can transform not only their hobbies into economic pursuits, but also align their personal goals with their professional ones. People are looking toward being happy at work.

Thomas Edison echoed these sentiments and claimed, "I never did a day's work in my life, it was all fun" [1]. More recently, the late Steve Jobs (2005) put his own spin on it by saying, "The only way to do great work is to love what you do," (p. 3)[1].

The construct of happiness has been the subject of intrigue between scientists and philosophers, alike. The Eastern philosophers equated it with self-realization, while the West spoke of Hedonia and Eudemonia.

Aristotle defined the concepts of Hedonics, where happiness is a result of an individual's degree of experience of pleasure versus pain, pleasant feelings vs judgment. Eudaimonic views of happiness underline doing what is virtuous, morally right, true, and meaningful to one's self and realizing one's potential [2].

The rise of positive psychology in the past decade has lent the abstract concept of happiness to empirical research. Happiness has been equated with emotional well-being. Emotional well-being supports the eudemonism philosophy that consists of one's life having a sense of meaning and purpose, the pursuit of excellence, and intense involvement in activities [3].

Psychological well-being comprises six distinct dimensions of wellness (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance) [4].

It was believed previously that success at the workplace had no connection with the happiness level of employees. People do not expect their jobs as a path to happiness. It was neither necessary to like the people with whom you work nor even share their values. "Work is *not* personal," the thinking went. It was regarded as drudgery that should be avoided if at all possible. Still, people worked because working is a reflection of being a responsible member of society and the money that we earn from doing work allows us to have a comfortable life.

It was believed that happiness came from relationships, family, and friends. In the business environment, major concerns were profits, demand, supply, efficiency, and productivity. Happiness was rarely given any attention.

The situation began to change a few decades ago when economics and management started discussing about happiness. Colleges and Universities introduced Happiness courses in their curriculum such as "What makes employees happy"?, "Foundations of Happiness at Work," or "How to Create an Enjoyable Work Environment." The Happiness Research Institute in Denmark came up and many books on Happiness flooded the market, like *How to Be Happy at Work* [5], *Powered by Happy: How to Get and Stay Happy at Work* [6], *Work Happy: What Great Bosses Know* [7], and others.

Research has shown that 50% of our happiness is genetically predetermined, while 40% is the result of our attitude, and just 10% is based on the circumstances of our lives [8]. Therefore, happiness depends a lot on how we react to situations, and that's something we all can control. As a result, even if an employee is in a comfortable environment, he/she will be unhappy at work if he/she has a bad attitude. Embracing a positive mindset filled with gratitude and compassion will lead to happiness at work.

In sum, it appears that happiness is a function of environmental events and circumstances, stable tendencies in the person, and the fit between the two. The important connection between happiness and production has been emphasized in research [9]. Statistical data revealed that happy employees were 12% more productive on average. Research also demonstrated that because of happiness at the workplace, stock prices grew an average 19%, as opposed to a mere 10% for companies with low morale. A Gallup State of the American Workplace study published in 2012 [10] revealed 41% lower health-related costs in employees with high overall well-being and 62% lower costs compared with employees who were "suffering." Greater productivity and performance were related to employee happiness, which in turn benefitted the employer has been reported [11]. Happy people are more productive; therefore,

organizations can benefit by improving work environments and facilitating unhappy employees to become happier [12].

This made the managers believe that happiness is a way to boost productivity. In the corporate world, happiness gained increased attention. Companies today spend much money on happiness coaches and consultants. Google has a Chief Happiness Officer who is responsible for maintaining high morale among employees.

“We spend more of our lives engaged at work than any other single activity” [13]. This statement reflects the reality of the modern world, especially, during post-pandemic, where the boundary between home and work has diminished. People now find themselves spending more time at their work desk because the time consumed in traveling and getting ready for work has reduced to almost nothing. Now the home has become synonymous with workplace.

With so much of human resource investment, it is now more than ever important to reiterate the importance of employee happiness at workplace. Employee happiness leads to positive emotions, that may be linked to ameliorating physical illness or disease [14].

## 2. Happiness vs well-being

Although the terms are often used interchangeably, there are shades of difference between them. While “hedonism” has been linked with happiness and pleasurable experiences, “eudamonia” corresponds with a holistic sense of well-being. Well-being further forms happiness as it encompasses many positive emotions such as contentment, realizing one’s potential, developing a sense of purpose, and establishing positive relationships in life.

‘Wellbeing’ is a state of contentment whereas “happiness” is a feeling of complete fulfillment, something that is transient and is experienced by all of us at some time or another. There are occasions that make us happy and we tend to cherish the memories of those moments. By contrast, ‘well-being’ can be sustained over a longer period of time. It includes a set of activities that we carry out to keep ourselves well. Well-being is a gestalt concept that emphasizes happiness but also encompasses domains that support a fulfilling life. Well-being at work can be attained by living a complete and fulfilled life.

Deiner et al. [15] linked well-being with psychological flourishing which is an individual’s perceived success. It also includes traits such as optimism, purposeful life, social relationships, engagement in activities, and self-esteem. Davidson [16] speaks of four dimensions of well-being: (i) Differentiation: the ability to distance and break free from negative life patterns and develop one’s own value systems, (ii) Attention: the ability to redirect attention and focus on where one wants; being mindful and receptive, rather than reactive, (iii) Goodness: believing in the basic goodness of our fellow human beings and ourselves (iv) Resilience: An ability to persevere when things become difficult

The concept of happiness has been explained by Kahneman [17] who says that there are two systems that relate to feeling good. The first is the actual feeling of the here and now. The second is the remembering, reflecting, and narrating system that decides how satisfied we are with the experience and what was good for us. He believes that we ought to be focused primarily on the first system. Happiness is a central but only one component of well-being. It is the affective element of the subjective experiential element. Happiness can exist without well-being, but well-being can’t

exist without happiness. It leads us to physical and emotional aspects which every person is trying to blend into a single and harmonious mixture. Happiness, in today's common usage, is more or less synonymous with "subjective wellbeing" – with the psychological experience of living well. Someone can feel happy or experience life satisfaction without really living well. Happiness is an abstract concept that is difficult to define as there are complex meanings associated with what is really good life.

The theory of Authentic Happiness [18] states that happiness could be analyzed into three different elements: positive emotion (what we feel e.g. pleasure, ecstasy, warmth, comfort etc.), engagement or flow (concentrated attention using cognitive and emotional resources), and meaning (serving something bigger than the self). Each of these elements is better defined and more measurable than happiness.

From the viewpoint of evaluation of happiness, there are two different kinds of distinctions: objective and subjective. Do we want to measure health or the experience of being healthy?, Beauty or the sense of looking ok?, achievements or the sense of achievement? These are *evaluative* considerations. Is one interested in measuring subjective happiness or objective happiness?

Happiness is more close to "living well" whereas well-being is used with a narrower reference to being in good shape physically and mentally [19]. Living well means living an active life and fostering social happiness. Happiness denotes a dynamic concept of "living well" than just having a condition of well-being.

### **3. Happiness and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)**

Organizational citizenship behavior is a voluntary behavior that is not a part of a person's job description or is paid for, through the organization but it helps in the betterment of the organization and improves the overall work environment [20].

Happiness at work and organizational learning capability has been considered as the drivers of Organizational Citizenship Behavior [21].

It has been suggested that happiness at the workplace is one of the major mediators toward the development of organizational citizenship behavior because it creates a feeling of job satisfaction among the employees. Employee happiness and positive attitude toward their work have been linked with a greater quality of customer service [22].

Happy employees are more likely to produce long-term organizational success and sustain high performance over time and deliver key results. OCB is closely linked with organizational culture, an environment that promotes appreciation and reinforcement has been linked with greater employee retention [23] Happy employees outperform unhappy employees [24].

### **4. Contributors of happiness at workplace**

The contributors can be categorized into physical factors and psychological factors. Physical factors include earning a high salary, affording a home, a car or nice clothes, job characteristics, and the like.

At the psychological level, factors include learning a skill, getting more exposure, facing a challenge and a sense of expansion of belongingness, organizational pride, authentic relationships, and a sense of meaning are important. Some major factors are discussed as under:

#### **4.1 Wage satisfaction and equity**

Wage satisfaction depends not so much on how people earn, but on how much people earn in comparison with others. Taking from the hedonic perspective employees feel gainfully compensated and happy when they witness pay parity [25].

Another strong contributor to happiness at workplace is a sense of equity, where the workers are treated respectfully irrespective of their position or wage drawn. There is fairness in workload distribution and overall job security [26].

#### **4.2 Job characteristics**

A meta-analytic study has shown that five climate dimensions of role, job, leader, work group, and organization were consistently related to job satisfaction and other job attitudes [27]. The conceptualization of job characteristics has been expanded to include not just the five motivational factors from Hackman and Oldham, but several additional motivational factors, social factors, and work context factors such as those positively related to happiness at work, and collectively explain more than half of the variance in job satisfaction and 87% of the variance in organizational commitment [28].

#### **4.3 Dispositional characteristics**

Dispositional positive affect has been linked to better performance in managerial decision-making and interpersonal tasks [29]. It is also known to predict career success. Happy people earn more, perform superior than their peers, and are more helpful [24]. In general, individuals high on dispositional positive affectivity and core self-evaluations (comprised of internal locus of control, self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, and emotional stability) tend to be happier at work as well as in other areas of life [30–32].

Happy people are less likely to experience periods of unemployment [33] and more likely to succeed in their job search. They are charming interviewers [34]. Their cheerfulness attracts social support from colleagues, thus, enabling them to perform better.

#### **4.4 Connectedness**

Organizations that promote community building; a sense of belongingness in the employees, increase their pride, and help in cultivating social identity [35].

Research in well-being focuses on “social-capital,” which is considered very important for the quality of life and higher levels of happiness. It includes making friends at work, as well as through the community.

#### **4.5 Autonomy and decision making**

Research has found that job autonomy has a positive impact on employees’ mental and physical well-being. It increases employees’ intrinsic motivation, engagement, and work performance [36]. It can also reduce mental burnout and emotional exhaustion in workers, and also reduce the desire to change jobs [37]. More importantly, it has long been considered an effective management tool to increase job satisfaction [38].

## 4.6 Engagement at the workplace

To be fully engaged and happy, three things are needed:

- a. **A meaningful vision of the future:** People learn and change when they have a personal vision that is linked to an organizational vision. People want to be able to see the future and know how they fit in [39].
- b. **A sense of purpose:** Employees want to feel that their work matters, and that their contributions help to achieve something really important. They want to know that they and their organizations are doing something *big* that matters to other people.
- c. **Great relationships:** Leaders, managers, and employees prefer close, trusting, and supportive relationships that are hugely important to their state of mind and their willingness contribute to a team.

Those who are engaged in their jobs work harder and smarter [40]. Disengaged, unhappy people aren't any fun to work with, don't add much value, and impact our organizations (and our economy) in profoundly negative ways. It's even worse when leaders are disengaged because they infect others with their attitude. Their emotions and mindset impact others' moods and performance tremendously.

## 4.7 Work-life balance

The ability of employees to deal with the successful combination of work, family responsibilities, and personal life is crucial for both employers and employees. Work-life balance is established when a person has an equal level of priorities in relation to their career growth and the requirements of personal life. A positive work-life balance reduces employee stress, reduces the risk of burnout, and creates greater well-being. This positively affects not only the employee him/herself but also the employer [41]. Organizations/workplaces should look toward promoting a culture where the employees, enjoy democratic freedom, can achieve subjective well-being, and find meaning in their lives, in other words are able to lead a happy and fulfilling life.

## 4.8 Meaningfulness of work

Meaningful work gives essence to what we do and what brings a sense of fulfillment to our lives [42]. When people have a sense of meaning in their work, they become more committed to the organization. People feel happy when they pursue meaningful activities [43]. If employees perceive the worth and meaning of work, they may be happy to do their work [44, 45]. Meaningful work connects employees with their workplace and experiences a high level of job satisfaction and job security.

## 4.9 Flow in work

When a person finds his/her flow and performs to his/her full potential, he/she is productively engaged and deeply immersed in an activity that is "difficult," but well adapted to his talents and he/she strives to achieve a meaningful objective [6]. Thomas Carlyle [7] wrote, "Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other

blissedness". Concentration is so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant. Self-consciousness disappears and the sense of time becomes distorted [45]. It transforms the self. Such personalities are referred as "autotelic personality". They report positive experiences when in flow, more cheerful, stronger, more active, concentrated, creative, and satisfied.

#### *4.9.1 Leadership*

A correlation of 0.77 between charismatic leadership and subordinate job satisfaction has been reported [46]. Leader-member exchange is also fairly strongly related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment [47]. Trust in the leader is a strong predictor of satisfaction and commitment [48]. Autonomy support displayed by leaders also appears to be important for follower satisfaction, well-being, and engagement [49, 50]. Recognition can be provided in a number of ways. Leaders have to find out what their employees value most and customize recognition accordingly by showing empathy toward them and providing them with succession planning and different opportunities to get high designation [51].

#### *4.9.2 Connectedness*

High-quality connections with others is an important source of happiness and energy for employees [52, 53]. In the book *Vital Friends* [54], it has been reported that individuals who said they had a best friend at work were seven times more likely to report being engaged in their job.

Thus, salary is not an important thing at the workplace. One may get a good salary but still may not be happy. What really makes employees rank their company well is the type of work they do, how well they are managed, and how well they are recognized for their work (The Career Bliss Team).

Happiness at work and having a positive attitude at the workplace is important for maintaining the efficiency of the organization and meeting organizational goals [11]. Happiness at work refers to a situation at work when human resources feel happy working, are resourceful and achieve the targeted goals, both at the individual and organizational level [55].

Researchers see happiness resulting from a combination of three or four basic factors. Annie McKee sees three components essential for happiness: a meaningful vision of the future, a sense of purpose, and great relationships at work. Others go as high as 10 or 15 ingredients, and a few point to an extensive list of dozens of factors contributing to happiness.

## **5. Is workplace happiness real?**

A number of empirical studies have been conducted in the field of happiness but the theory about happiness is very weak. A lot of confusion exists in the way researchers understand happiness and its source. As a result, the knowledge has limited practical applicability.

The definition of happiness remains vague. Some researchers associate it with a good life while others identify happiness with subjective choices that people make and others look to culture as the determining factor of what we regard as happiness.



Authors like André Spicer and Carl Cederström [56] created a corporate storm when they challenged the notion that happiness is good. The authors believe, backed by research, that happiness can do more harm than good at the workplace (Harvard Business Review).

Happiness is personal. Everyone has a particular definition of what being happy means. Consciously pursuing happiness can actually drain the sense of joy we usually get from the really good things we experience.

Not every employee wants to be promoted or receive a title. For many people “personal time” is becoming more important than financial rewards. Thus, for both individuals and organizations, happiness is important at the workplace [11, 57]. The best places to work are those in which people can flourish and be their best selves – instead of pretending to be someone else five days a week. Such a workplace also gives people flexibility and autonomy as to where and how they work, built on a culture of growth and trust [58].

## **6. How leaders can create a happy workplace**

Specific tips can be followed to create a happy workplace by motivating each and every team member to work more efficiently.

### **6.1 Host engaging and interactive team-building events**

Nowadays, more and more offices understand the value of making time to have fun in the office by holding interesting team-building events through which feeling of contentment and fulfillment is nurtured. These activities empower teams to collaborate, boost morale, improve communication, and bond with each other. Employees play together, laugh together, and resolve issues together. This allows them to get to know each other and helps in building trust and connection [59].

### **6.2 Providing wellness programs and challenges**

Wellness programs are focused on bringing positivity and a healthy lifestyle for all employees. Benefits may include yearly health check-ups, unlimited doctor consultations, and access to a one-on-one personalized stress therapy program. Benefits can be offered beyond the basics. The salary of employees can be supplemented by offering an extra level of life insurance or disability insurance to protect their incomes. Other ancillary benefits, such as dental and optical wellness can also be offered. Gym memberships and transit benefits are great perks to keep employees happy and healthy. “It is important to provide higher benefits so that the employees know that they as well as their families are truly cared”– *Bobby Hotaling, president and CEO of The Hotaling Group* [60].

### **6.3 Physical activity interventions**

Employees’ happiness can be targeted by engaging them in physical activity programs such as walking programs, yoga, light resistance training, and others. Other physical exercises can be a combination of muscle relaxation, strengthening, coordination, and flexibility exercises, yoga intervention, aerobics, and weight-training courses. Workplace interventions have been reported to significantly reduce body weight, BMI, and waist circumference [61].

## **6.4 Mental health interventions**

Not only the physical health but **the** mental health of employees is equally important. People are often reluctant to discuss mental health problems, especially at work. Eliminating mental health issues such as depression and anxiety would increase employee happiness. Mental health issues can be dealt in organizations by building a culture that prioritizes psychological well-being. Mindfulness training, as well as cognitive-behavioral training, resiliency training and selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC) training, has been shown to increase employee well-being [62, 63]. It also led to an increase in job satisfaction. The mental health of employees can be evaluated by sending small surveys and getting their feedback on a scale of 1 to 5 as to how they are feeling regularly such as happiness, sadness, gratitude, frustration etc. This way a log of these scores can be maintained for weeks and an overall happiness score can be calculated.

## **6.5 Promote work-life balance**

Work-life balance is beneficial for employees as well as for the organization. If there is a good balance between work and personal life, it leads to improved mental health. A healthy work-life balance is not only important for health and relationships, but it can also improve employee's productivity and ultimately performance. Research [64] has revealed that work-life balance and happiness positively and significantly affect employee performance. Beyond the 8 hours spent at the workplace, employees should practice disconnecting completely from their work and enjoy time for other commitments.

## **6.6 Employee engagement**

Engagement is the wheel and happiness is the power. Engagement gives us direction and happiness creates energy. It's one thing knowing where you want to go, it's another to have the energy to take you there. Engaging employees in an organization helps to achieve job satisfaction and improves communication and team building. Engaged employees are happier, both at work and in their personal lives. This can be achieved by conducting weekly fun activities so that they can have some time off from work and relax. This also helps in building better relationships and bonds among the employees. Organizations with highly engaged employees experience increased customer satisfaction, profits, and employee productivity [65].

## **6.7 Inclusive and fair policy**

Workers know they're worth more than money, so fostering an environment of respect is critical to employees' performance and retention [66]. Emphasis on creating a highly inclusive work culture and having fair and flexible policies for employees is very essential for increasing their happiness. Employees who get fair treatment in their workplace trust their employers and enjoy their work with more dedication. When employees feel that they are treated fairly, the relationship becomes strong, trust increases, and they enjoy their work.

## **6.8 Candid feedback**

Leaders can create a psychologically safe work environment by emphasizing positive, authentic communication [67]. One can be both candid and caring. Candid

feedback is one of the best ways to elevate employee morale and create a more positive and happier work environment. It helps in remaining aligned with the organizational goals and in improving relationships with employees. If employees feel free to share what they think about the organization, management, and other employees, they are more likely to be happy and engaged with the organization.

## **6.9 Promote a positive work environment**

Having a positive culture and workplace environment helps a lot, as it encourages teamwork and communication, which increases engagement and opportunities for teammates to learn from each other. Happiness leads to positivity.

It is essential for leaders to criticize constructively, whether it's a mistake made or goals are not achieved. Being approachable is the foundation of building a good relationship with employees. It helps in breaking down barriers between employer and employee so that an environment of trust can be created. A culture of hierarchy is not encouraged in such a workplace.

Leaders should lead by example by starting the day well, greeting everyone, praising co-workers for their efforts, asking them about their day, and making them feel valued. This can have a significant positive impact on workers' well-being. Even the smallest of team accomplishments can be celebrated. Holding of regular feedback sessions is also a good strategy that can be adopted.

### *6.9.1 Build a sense of fulfillment through a higher purpose*

A clear purpose is essential to keep a team focused. It can also build a sense of fulfillment within colleagues. Leaders should have team members visualize *how* their individual contribution is part of a bigger mission. With everyone being on the same page, leaders can capitalize upon people's innate need to serve. Reminding the team of the purpose behind their responsibilities will help keep everyone's motivation high.

### *6.9.2 Offer more leisure time*

The highest performers can be rewarded with incremental vacation days with family and friends. A team outing can also be arranged which fosters unity and solidarity among the workforce. This will rejuvenate the employees and will help them in experiencing happiness at work. Holidays and festivals can be celebrated with employees to create an enjoyable environment at the workplace, thus, creating a family environment at the workplace.

### *6.9.3 Create a career pathway*

Leaders should arrange for regular career planning discussions and mentoring sessions with their employees. This will help in reducing employees leaving the organization [68]. *Maria Kraimer, business professor at the University of Iowa said that as a part of training and development, employees should be made aware of the different types of career paths or job opportunities available for them.*

### *6.9.4 Recognize and reward employees frequently*

“Reward frequency is more important than size. It has been seen that smaller, frequent positive feedback and rewards will keep people happy longer than a single large,

infrequent happy event. Even the biggest awards or raises “wear out” in less than a year, with most employees responding better to small doses every few days” [69].

#### *6.9.5 Office decor and ergonomics are essential*

According to a study published by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, a direct relationship exists between chronic pain and neurocognitive function like attention, memory, processing speed, and executive functions. This negative cycle can be avoided by providing an ergonomically safe workplace. Doing so lowers the risk of injuries and chronic pain and reduces stress, significantly improving employees’ job satisfaction and performance.

Office decor and workplace ergonomics play an important role in determining employee creativity and productivity. Brightly painted walls, comfortable chairs, inspirational quotes, images on the walls, etc. can all help you to create a sense of motivation and happiness in the workplace.

#### *6.9.6 Provide flexible hours to your employees*

Provide flexible work hours and remote options for the employees. Flexible schedules significantly increase employee productivity and morale. They allow a level of freedom to create their work schedules and achieve work-life balance. It is a perfect solution to offer employees so that they can meet their responsibilities at both work and home. By offering such options, better talent can be attracted and retained at the workplace. It is reported [70] that the ability to change one’s schedule was associated with a reduced reported likelihood of job stress. A strong association was found between being able to take time off and three well-being outcomes, including a reduced reported likelihood of job stress, and an improved reported likelihood of job satisfaction and healthy days.

#### *6.9.7 Cultivating character strengths*

Character strengths-related person-job fit has been found to be associated with job performance and positive experiences at work [71]. Each individual has a unique configuration of personal or character strengths, talents, and preferences. Individuals should discover what their personal strengths are, and then design their job or career to allow them to cultivate these strengths and spend much of each day applying them while minimizing demands to complete activities that do not use strengths.

## **7. Conclusion**

Happiness at the workplace involves the concept of well-being. Besides work that affects our well-being at the workplace, finances, relationships, and health also play an important part. If an individual is happy at work but dissatisfied with other dimensions of his life, his overall level of happiness or well-being will be lower. Likewise, if an individual has health or relationship issues, it will interfere with his productivity and happiness at work.

Workplaces should work toward promoting a good life for their employees. The workers should be able to attain high levels of subjective well-being and find meaning

in their lives, i.e. achieve eudemonic well-being. This will not only improve the employee-employer relationship but also improve the overall organizational culture.

### **Conflict of interest**

“The authors declare no conflict of interest.”

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