

# Survey Data Responses of Employee Happiness: Focusing on Individual Factor Among Staff in Malaysian Higher Education Institution

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## Abstract

This paper presents the descriptive data of organizational factors that contribute to staff happiness. The survey was conducted in one of the Malaysian Higher Education Institutions which was located in the southern region of Peninsular Malaysia. The study involved 15 respondents comprising academic and non-academic staff at Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia. A session of Round Table Discussion (RTD) was organised to discuss the issues that were highlighted in a survey data. The topics included the opinions and suggestions of respondents to propose personal factors that contributed to staff happiness. The RTD session was audio-recorded and transcribed. The respondents were given a copy of the transcripts to review and ensure the accuracy. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. In order to confirm data trustworthiness, the researchers applied both participant and literature review cross-checks. The data analysis showed that personal economy and appreciation dimension were among the highest contributors in determining employee happiness, followed by support system, workstation environment and trust. In conclusion, the data set provided an initial record on how personal factors of employees in the organisation had affected their happiness at workplace.

## Keywords

Employee happiness, Work Environment, Higher Education, Academician Happiness, Round Table Discussion.

## 1. Introduction

Happiness is a personal perception of the state of being happy. The positive human emotion phenomenon has long been related to the success of employers' jobs, wellbeing and efficiency at the workplace (Nasir & Omar, 2006). Most adults typically, spend the whole day at work. There is also no surprise if the effect of employment and workplace have impact on the workers. Happiness can increase the productivity and quality of workers since they tend to perform at their best. In addition, occupation does not only contribute towards the economic level, but also the psychological aspects of the workers, such as career fulfilment, pleasure and social stability in human life. Individuals who are happy at work would be more likely to support others, possess innovation, be social, remain compassionate and have healthy behaviour (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007). Happy individuals in a positive mood may also be able to hinder themselves from being subject to risks of anxiety, depression and hypertension.

In the current world of globalisation, every organisation fights to develop a positive change and good publicity. Regardless of the fields, the academic arena is an organisation that needs to maintain and improve their positive vibes. Higher education institutions have faced significant obstacles in ensuring that students meet the current market demands. In order to face the significant challenge, the academician's emotion at the workplace is something that should be paid attention to. Academicians are responsible for educating students in the decade that is influenced by the growth of digital transformation and globalisation. In order to ensure that students remain marketable, educators need to face frequent difficulties during the teaching and learning process, coping with the difficulty of student attitudes as well as other responsibilities.

As academicians, lecturers not only need to focus on the students' performance but also their career development and organisational achievement. However, academicians still need to maintain their positive vibes and feel happy at workplaces despite the challenges. There are many factors in the organisation that may affect the emotions of the lecturers. The stability or the ability to manage and control their emotions will affect their performance. Thus, the purposes of this study are first, to discuss the issues that were highlighted from the survey data and second, to reconfirm and validate the elements that had contributed in determining the employee's happiness.

## 2. Literature Review

"Happiness" is now agreed as a relevant policy goal for policymakers alongside significant aggregate goals such as economic development or unemployment. There are many references that show that employee happiness has an impact on their productivity (Bellet et al, 2019; Kadoya et al, 2020; Oswald, Proto, & SgROI, 2015). They provided the evidence in their research that there was a causal connection between human well-being and human efficiency. Many researchers studied the happiness factor experienced by the workers and the demographic factors affecting it. Golden et al, (2014) stated that employees' happiness mainly came from having a flexible work schedule. When they have an ability to control their work hours, they are less likely to have work-life conflict, work stress and fatigue. This result was supported by Cotti et al, (2014) who stated that if the duration of work hours did not match the desired scheduling of the worker, the individual health would be lowered.

In the Happiness Index among University Staff research, three domains were found to have contributed to staff happiness which were the personal factor, social factor and organisational factor (Isa et al, 2019). Happiness was always related to personal issues. However, Frey & Stutzer (2010) argued with that particular factor. They believed that individual happiness was related to the society and economic state one lived in. A study by Horvath (2012) showed that the coherent and continuously improving personality with self-identity was the most dominant value in life. Individual characteristics play a significant role in the incidence of pleasure. Meanwhile, personality characteristics have been shown to be strongly correlated with happiness (Gholipour et al, 2016).

Academicians who are unhappy are correlated with depression, associated with poor mood and resistant towards action. It may also influence people's emotions, actions, feelings and quality of life (Medvedev & Landhuis, 2018). Academicians without happiness can feel upset, depressed, lonely, helpless, useless, anxious, furious, or frustrated. In a worse scenario, they can lose confidence in things that they usually like, do over-eating or have lack of appetite, loss focus, have difficulty to recall information or make decisions, and can consider or attempt suicide.

A variety of promising interventions have recently been proposed to improve happiness by therapies, processes, or intentional behaviour aimed at inculcating optimistic emotions, behaviours, or intuitions (Isa & Palpanadan, 2020 and Ellis, 2010). Happiness research is very important, since happiest workers have led to a more engaged and efficient partnership, as well as having a healthier engagement at the workplace (Joo & Lee, 2017). For this reason, the factors that contribute to staff happiness need to be studied. In a study by Isa et al, (2019), a survey was conducted and the issues of social factors (Isa et al, 2019) and organisational factors (Qureshi et al, 2017) were discussed. Therefore, the core intention of this study was to detect the most influencing factors of staff to be happy in terms of personal overview.

## 3. Research Method

This study was conducted at Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia. It involved 15 respondents comprising academic and non-academic staff who had served more than 11 years. An invitation letter was sent to the Registrar's Office to obtain a name list for the potential participants at the Round Table Discussion Session. The staff who held the rotation posts such as the head of department and head of unit were selected to represent their departments. The session at the Round Table Discussion was organised to discuss the issues that were highlighted in the survey data.

Discussion topics covered the opinion and suggestion proposed by the respondents regarding the personal factors that contributed towards staff happiness. This topic was selected as an issue of the discussion as a survey conducted by using quantitative method in June 2018 had showed that personal factors had an impact on individual happiness in the organisation.

Round Table Discussion (RTD) began with the presentation by the moderator regarding the findings from a survey data. The respondents of the survey were informed that personal factors had an impact on employee happiness. Therefore, the RTD session was conducted to discuss in detail about the most important dimension of personal factors that was perceived to contribute towards employee happiness. The session required participation from all the respondents where all the respondents had to share their opinions on the topic discussed. The RTD continued for one and half hour and ended up with the write up prepared by the moderator. The session was audio-recorded and transcribed. Informants were given a copy of the transcripts to review in ensuring accuracy. The data of the study was analysed using thematic analysis.

#### 4. Result and Discussion

The shared data included the demographic data (Table 1) and descriptive raw data based on thematic analysis of personal factors that were proposed to contribute towards staff happiness (Table 2). The moderator started the RTD session by raising up the issues on the personal factors would contribute towards staff happiness. Both the academician and administrative staff took part actively in the discussion. Table 1 shows the demographic of the respondents. This study involved 15 respondents who were all Malay university staff, comprising six men and nine women. They were also the administrative staff (eight) and academicians (seven). Most of the respondents had the service experience of 11 to 20 years and some of them with the service experience of 21 to 24 years.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage (100%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	6	40
Female	9	60
<i>Total</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>100%</i>
<b>Department</b>		
Administration	8	53.3
Faculty	7	46.6
<i>Total</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>100%</i>
<b>Service period</b>		
< - 10 years	-	
11 – 20 years	11	73.3
21 – 24 years	4	26.6
25 – 30 years	-	
31 – years	-	
<i>Total</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>100%</i>

Based on the data from the discussion, the respondents' views were categorised into five sub themes: i) Personal economy, ii) Personal appreciation, iii) Support system, iv) Workstation environment and v) Trust. The findings were then, discussed in accordance with these themes.

Table 3 shows the responses of the 15 university staff. Based on the analysis, personal economy (f=20) had the highest frequency indicating a contributing factor towards staff happiness at the workplace followed by personal appreciation (f=14), support system (f=13), workstation environment (f=10) and trust (f=9). All of the dimensions measured were the respondents' response as a contributing factor to their happiness at work place. This finding was in line with Isa et al., (2020) which found that most of the organisational factors such as support system, salary increase, rewards, being appreciated, staff friendly facilities and conducive working area had the impact on staff happiness at workplace.

Table 2: Descriptive raw data on personal factors that contributed towards staff Happiness

Raw Data	Number of voting	Sub theme	Total number of voting
Minimum salary increase	7	Personal economy	20
Annual bonus	5		
Learning incentive to support staff	1		
Fair and square incentive to all staff	2		
Reward based achievement	3		
Long distance allowance	2		
Being appreciated	9	Personal appreciation	14
Mutual respect for each other	3		
Everybody has a right to make a decision	1		
Appreciation is equal with punishment	1		
Career-enhancement opportunity	7	Support system	13
Opportunity for potential development	2		
Career development fair to all staff	2		
Job and hobby balance	1		
Freedom and comfort zone	1		
Tension release space	2	Workstation environment	10
Friendly staff facilities	3		
Build rapport among staff	2		
Conducive area	2		
Formal and informal interaction	1		
Believe in God	5	Trust	9
Organise more event to strengthen spiritual	2		
Fair	2		
Pray at mosque	1		

Table 3: Details of personal economy that contributed towards staff happiness

Raw Data	Number of voting	Sub theme	Total number of voting
Minimum salary increase	7	Personal economy	20
Annual bonus	5		
Rewards based achievement	4		
Rewards based achievement	4		
Fair and square incentive to all staff	2		
Long distance allowance	2		
Learning incentive to support staff	1		

Table 3 shows a total of 20 views shared by the respondents' which highlighted that personal economy is a main element that contributes towards their happiness at work. Most respondents shared that 'monetary factor' would highly affect employee happiness. This was proven when seven out of 20 responses were related to asking for 'minimum salary increase' followed by an 'annual bonus' (5 responses). In addition, there were responses that expected reward must be given 'based on achievement' (f=4) to ensure the justice of rewards system at the organisation. Next, there were two responses which highlighted about 'fair and square' incentive to all staff. Meanwhile, there were two responses asking to give 'long distance allowance' for those who stayed far from the organisation. These findings were agreed by Neo (2000) who suggested that the performance of individuals is very strongly affected by the wage remuneration provided by the organisation. In addition, Akmal Umar (2014) in his study found that wages, work motivation and employee's job satisfaction had significantly influenced the employee's performance. This study relatively showed that monetary factors influenced employee happiness which encouraged them to perform in their job. However, according to Štreimikienė and Grundey (2009), money does not buy happiness because money itself does not create happiness. Meanwhile, the self-satisfaction event surveys at United States and South Africa found that

money was the main motive at work. This opinion might support the new classical economy theory which stated that some individuals chose to be unemployed because they preferred receiving unemployment benefits and enjoyed the leisure time as compared to a dissatisfying wage and the time spent in working. This study however, was in consistent with Cohn et al., (2009) which stated that happy employees were more financially successful than unhappy employees.

Table 4: Details of personal appreciation that contributed towards staff happiness

Raw Data	Number of voting	Sub theme	Total number of voting
Being appreciated	9	Personal appreciation	14
Mutual respect for each other	3		
Everybody has a right to make a decision	1		
Appreciation is equal with punishment	1		

Table 4 presents a total of 14 responses from employees which stated that personal appreciation would affect their happiness at workplace. A total of nine out of 14 responses mentioned that being appreciated by others was the most important thing that could make employees happy and feel accepted. Meanwhile, a total of three responses highlighted that mutual respect for each other also contributed towards employee happiness. These two items showed how significant it was to feel respected by others to motivate employees to work. Besides, the ‘right to make decisions’ and ‘appreciation must be equal with punishment’ had one response (score) each. This finding was in line with the findings of Ontario (2004), which stated that people extremely prefer to work for an organisation that appreciated their performance because it would help them grow and create a cooperative environment in the organisation. Being appreciated meant that employees felt trusted by the organisation which affected their motivation to work at the workplace. This finding was also in line with Elif Bilginoğlu et al., (2009) where their study found that respect in organisations had a positive effect on trust, meanwhile, both respect and trust had positively affected the employees’ job satisfaction. Even though personal appreciation could be seen as an important part in the psychology to motivate employees perform in their tasks but Eva (2003) stated that the common issue that arose at the organisation was that the employees did not feel appreciated and that would affect their motivation to perform.

Table 5: Details of support system that contributed towards staff happiness

Raw Data	Number of voting	Sub theme	Total number of voting
Career-enhancement opportunity	7	Support system	13
Opportunity for potential development	2		
Career development is fair to all staff	2		
Freedom and comfort zone	2		

Table 5 shows that 13 responses highlighted that the support system is another factor that has contributed to the staff happiness. Some of the responses (f=7) specified that career-enhancement opportunities provided by the organisation could make employees happy. The opportunity, including opportunity for potential development (f=2) would make employees feel that their welfare was taken care of by the organisation. In the meantime, the career development scheme must be fair to all staff (f=2) besides employees must be given their freedom and comfort zone (f=2) during their working hours at the organisation. According to Baek-Kyoo Joo and Insuk Lee (2017), employees were highly engaged in their work and satisfied in their lives when they had support from the organisation. As stated by Ratna Sinha (2020), employees would be more satisfied when they could have a good career development in the organisation and the most important matter was related to how the system was designed by the company to support the employees’ career path.

According to data analysis as shown in Table 6, workstation was identified as a factor that contributes to the staff happiness. A total of three out of 10 responses showed that the friendly staff facility provided by an organisation is an important factor to make employees happy during their working days. In addition, employees also needed places as a tension release space (f=20), to build rapport among staff (f=2), conducive work station space (f=2), and have formal and informal interaction application (f=2) in the organisation that could contribute towards happiness among the staff in the organisation. As stated by Agbozo et al., (2017), workplace environment was an important factor that influenced the level of job satisfaction and increased employee motivation. In line with Agbozo et al., (2017), Zafir and Fazilah

(2010) found that it was important to have ergonomic at workstation because ergonomic workplace had a relationship with employee happiness at workplace (Isa et al., 2020).

Table 6: Details of support system that contributed towards staff happiness

Raw Data	Number of voting	Sub theme	Total number of voting
Friendly staff facilities	3	Workstation environment	10
Tension release space	2		
Build rapport among staff	2		
Conducive area	2		
Formal and informal interaction	1		

Table 7: Details of trust that contributed towards staff happiness

Raw Data	Number of voting	Sub theme	Total number of voting
Believe in God	6	Trust	9
Organize more events to strengthen spirituality	2		
Fair	2		

Table 7 presents the data of the respondents' responses about the trust element which contributes to staff happiness at the workplace. Most of the respondents' responses (f=6 out of f=9) stated that 'believe in God' was an important element that affected the staff's emotion to feel happy. Besides that, employees wished that organisations could organize more events to strengthen the spiritual elements (f=2) and be fair (f=2) all the times in any decision making. According to Anu (2013) employees with spiritual qualities would quest for a higher purpose of life, have personal meaning and create a desire to integrate the self with God. Furthermore, it also can be said that spiritual element can be used to improve organisational performance.

## 5. Conclusion

The data revealed that staff happiness is very much contributed by the personal factors which included personal economy, personal appreciation, support system, workstation environment, and trust. Considering the fact that employees are the significant sources to help achieve the organization's goal, the management should put employee welfare as a priority before hiring them. Personal factors of employees play a significant role in affecting their emotions and behaviour during office hours. In addition, happy emotions will affect their performance and the organisation's effectiveness as well. In future, this study recommends to expend more elements of the organisational factor because there are too many elements that could have influence towards employee happiness and stress as well.

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