

HAPPINESS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL AS RESOURCES FOR WORK AND LIFE

As its title suggests, this book focuses on happiness in the context of work, where "work" is undefined but taken throughout as working for pay, job, or employment context. Happiness at work is defined on p. 4 as follows:

Happiness at work is a mindset which allow you to maximize performance and achieve your potential. You do this by being mindful of the highs and lows when working alone or with others.

Thinking of this definition somewhat formally, if y denotes performance and x is one's mindset, this definition can be written as $y = f(x)$, where f is a nonlinear (e.g., quadratic) function. Then the definition states that one's mindset x can be on the low side (the lows) in which case one is not maximizing one's performance or on the high side (the highs) in which case one's performance also is not at an optimal value x_{max} (the happiness mindset) at which one's performance is maximized and one is achieving one's potential.

Pryce-Jones, Jessica. 2010. *Happiness at Work: Maximizing your Psychological Capital for Success*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

This approach and the subject of the entire book are based on the author's research and experience as a consultant on management and personnel issues. Jessica Pryce-Jones is the Chief Executive Officer and founder of iOpener, a consulting firm based in Oxford, England, that seeks to enable people to improve their performance and organizations to develop sustainability. She is a regular media commentator and teaches and coaches leaders at several major business schools in the UK and the US.

The book is written for a general audience, not for social scientists. Accordingly, its discourse minimizes descriptions of samples, questionnaires and other research instruments used, and the statistical analyses that underlie many of the findings reported. The research conducted by the author also has a substantial qualitative dimension, including focus groups and over 80 in-depth interviews with individuals ranging from sheep farmers and ordinary employees to business leaders and politicians. These interviews are the source of many quotations, stories, and illustrations inter-

spered throughout the text.

Following the definition of happiness at work quoted above, Pryce-Jones argues that psychological capital is as important in the success of an organization as the more familiar financial, human, and social capital. Psychological capital is defined (p. 8) as "... the mental resources that you build when things go well and draw on when things go badly. These resources include resilience, motivation, hope, optimism, self-belief, confidence, self-worth, and energy. All of which are key elements of happiness in a working context." And, this is one of Pryce-Jones' key points, organizations perform better when employees are maximizing performance because they are at their x_{max} happiness mindset points. She then argues that happiness is distinct from job satisfaction and engagement because the focus is on the individual, happiness is strongly connected to productivity, and happiness is a more general concept than job satisfaction and engagement.

In Chapter 2, Pryce-Jones then describes her research journey into the topic of happiness at work. Two surveys of 193 and 403 respondents, respectively, were given a validated general happiness scale (Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999). Respondents then were divided into five groups ranging from low to high happiness levels. Those with higher levels of happiness were found to work more discretionary hours, take less sick leave, and stay longer on their jobs. In further similar research, when compared to the unhappiest group, those in the happiest at work category were found to be:

- 180 percent more energized
- 180 percent happier with life
- 155 percent happier in their job
- 108 percent more engaged at work
- 50 percent more motivated
- 40 percent more confident
- 30 percent more able to achieve their goals and to contribute 25 percent more.

This is the basis for the remainder of the book which consists of advice and guidance for increasing one's psychological capital and achieving the x_{max} cited above, that is, happiness at work. This guidance is based on the author's research and cites

features that play a major role in employees' happiness, such as the 5Cs:

- Contribution-the effort you make and your perception of it,
- Conviction-the motivation you have whatever your circumstances,
- Culture-how well you feel you fit at work,
- Commitment-the extent to which you are engaged with your work, and
- Confidence-the sense of belief you have in yourself and your job.

Wrapping around these is an outer tier of three attributes: Pride and Trust in your organization, and Recognition of your work by the organization.

Comment

This book is a useful addition to the array of books published in recent years the objective of which is to help folks who are not social scientists or clinical therapists understand happiness as a concept and how the research thereon over the past few decades can be used to achieve greater levels of personal happiness and the successes in life that go therewith. Examples of such books reviewed in previous issues of SINET include Michael Frisch's 2006 *Quality of Life Therapy: Applying a Life Satisfaction Approach to Positive Psychology and Cognitive Therapy* reviewed in SINET, Number 85 (Winter, March 2006) and Ed Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener's 2008 *Happiness: Unlocking the Mysterries of Psychological Wealth* reviewed in SINET (Spring & Summer, May-August 2008). As indicated, the particular angle on happiness of Pryce-Jones' book is its functions in a work or job context. The key thesis is that maximizing an individual's psychological capital will lead to more success in the work environment and, with that, in life. She marshals an array of quantitative and qualitative research to make this case. Social scientists will want more systematic research on the concepts and propositions advanced by the author-for example, observational studies that approximate experimental designs by use of propensity scores and matching-on the interaction of work environments with the biological and psychological traits of individuals. But Pryce-

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The chapters by Yama, Abe, and Omura round out the volume: Yama studies the folklore of happiness by looking at the relationship between "faith" and "knowledge." Abe uses a discourse by Habermas to examine the contradictions inherent in the widespread use of surveillance in contemporary society. Omura uses Goffman's dramaturgical approach to dissect the differences between what he calls "agitating culture" corresponding to the active view of happiness and "calming culture" corresponding to the passive view of happiness.

Comment

This volume is a useful contribution to the literature on well-being and the quality of life. It calls sociologists back to the study of happiness, not that attention to the problem of order needs to be abandoned, but rather that happiness merits sociologists' attention as well. Secondly, the theme of the volume on the distinction between the active and passive views of happiness is important. It implies that a focus on the absence of misfortunes, missed opportunities, disadvantage, and ill-being—a focus often downplayed in the rush to create "positive" well-being indicators—is not unimportant. Third, the perspectives of the chapters of the volume on localized knowledge reinforce the use of contextualized methods, methods that capture as much of local reality or perceptions thereof as possible, in the study of happiness.

~ Kenneth C. Land

Call For Papers Applied Research in Quality of Life

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The aim of this journal is to publish conceptual, methodological and empirical papers dealing with quality-of-life studies in the applied areas of the natural and social sciences. As the official journal of ISQOLS, it is designed to attract papers that have some direct implications for or impact on practical applications of research on the quality-of-life. We welcome papers crafted from inter-disciplinary, inter-professional and international perspectives. This research should guide decision making in a variety of professions, industries, nonprofit, and government sectors such as healthcare, travel and tourism, marketing, corporate management, community planning, social work, public administration, human resource management, among others. The goal is to help decision makers apply performance measures and outcome assessment techniques based on concepts such as well-being, human satisfaction, human development, happiness, wellness and quality of life. The Editorial Review Board is divided into specific sections indicating the broad scope of practice covered by the journal, and the section editors are distinguished scholars from many countries across the globe.

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The International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies (ISQOLS) was formed in the mid-1990s. The objectives of ISQOLS are: 1) to stimulate interdisciplinary research in quality-of-life (QOL) studies within the managerial (policy), behavioral, social, medical, and environmental sciences; 2) to provide an organization which all academic, business, nonprofit, and government researchers who are interested in QOL studies can coordinate their efforts to advance the knowledge base and to create positive social change; and 3) to encourage closer cooperation among scholars engaged in QOL research to develop better theory, methods, measures, and intervention programs.

The year 2010 membership fees are US\$75 for regular members and \$50 for students or retired persons. Prof. M. JOSEPH SIRGY (Virginia Tech and State University) is Executive Director of ISQOLS. Anyone interested in knowing more about ISQOLS should contact Prof. Sirgy at the central office.

The ISQOLS central office recently moved to new physical and virtual locations. Please note the new addresses:

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Jones has succeeded pretty well in making her case for the usefulness of the happiness construct as an organizing principle for improving both individual and organizational performance. And, since the proof is in the pudding, the fact that she has found these concepts and propositions useful in organizing her management, organizational, and personnel consulting advances here case.

~ Kenneth C. Land

Reference:

Lyubomirsky, S. and S. H. Lepper 1999 "A Measure of Subjective Happiness: Preliminary Reliability and Construct Validation." *Social Indicators Research* 46: 137-155.