



# Employee Happiness: Why We Should Care

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## Abstract

Albert Schweitzer once stated that “success is not the key to happiness, happiness is the key to success.” Despite this widespread belief, employee happiness is often perceived by organizations as an insubstantial topic, irrelevant to bottom-line outcomes. Equally as problematic, past investigations have primarily utilized other positive emotion variables as a proxy for happiness, thus convoluting the relationships between happiness and work outcomes. As such, taking a scientist-practitioner approach, the present study sought to address the need to: (a) directly measure employees’ happiness, (b) link employee happiness to outcomes of organizational interest, and (c) assess the impact that organizational psychosocial factors have in decreasing employee happiness levels. Therefore, by measuring employee happiness, job demands, and organizational outcomes through a two-wave full panel design, the present study provided evidence for employee happiness’s ability to significantly mediate the relationship between job demands and organizational outcomes. Explicitly, a high level of job demands decreased employee happiness, which subsequently decreased employees’ organizational commitment, task performance, and contextual performance, while increasing turnover intentions and counterproductive work behaviors. These results carry significant theoretical and practical implications. Future QOL (Quality of Life) and organizational research would benefit from building on the present findings and establishing a nomological net of employee happiness. Additionally, practitioners have the opportunity to utilize this evidence to demonstrate the impact that employee happiness has on organizationally-relevant outcomes and the role that organizations can have in fostering employee happiness.

**Keywords** Happy · Happiness · Employees · Job performance · Job demands

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Everyone seeks to be happy. When interviewed on the street, happiness is named over and over again as the number one thing that people want in life (Belic 2018). Thus, it comes as no surprise that a recent publication by Time Magazine focused solely on the topic of happiness (Time 2018). Interestingly, a third of this special issue featured articles dedicated to happiness at work. However, although each article provided individualized tips for employees to increase their own personal levels of happiness, there were no articles that provided guidance on organizational-level changes that could be implemented to increase happiness for all. This is likely a reflection of the present level of research in this area and an indicator of organizations' present orientations towards employee happiness. Indeed, there is a paucity of research linking employee happiness to outcomes of interest to organizations. Consequently, there is a pervasive lack of top-down prioritization, with regard to establishing high levels of employee happiness within organizations. As such, the present study seeks to investigate the benefits of high levels of employee happiness in relation to organizational outcomes, the impact of high levels of job demands on employee happiness levels, and whether employee happiness mediates the relationship between job demands and organizational outcomes.

## Past Issues in the Measurement of Employee Happiness

Employee happiness has been operationalized and measured in a variety of ways, including through self-reported measures of well-being, life satisfaction, positive affect, positivity, job satisfaction, work engagement, and affective organizational commitment (Boehm and Lyubomirsky 2008; Fisher 2010; Hoxsey 2010; Rodríguez-Muñoz et al. 2014; Tadić et al. 2013). While these variables may be highly correlated with happiness, happiness is, in actuality, a distinct construct. Therefore, while using these terms interchangeably with happiness in past systematic reviews has been valuable for understanding the benefits of positive emotions at work, there is presently a need to critically examine the construct of happiness itself and to better understand happiness' role in the workplace.

Happiness can be defined as “the property of feeling happy at a time” (i.e., episodic happiness; Raibley 2012, p. 1108) and is considered an emotional experience. Happiness diverges from overall measures of well-being and life satisfaction, as measuring happiness seeks to infer the consistency of an individual's experiences of happiness, rather than describing a global measure of health or contentment (Raibley 2012). The argument for happiness as a reoccurring emotion, rather than an approximation of life quality, is supported by research demonstrating that happiness is one of seven emotions that can be universally expressed and identified via facial expressions (Russell 1994). Thus, happiness is a perceptible, universal emotion. While frequent experiences of the emotion of happiness will often contribute to high scores on well being, happiness will only be directly beneficial when it is an emotion that is valued by the individual and, therefore, factors into his/her own assessments of personal, global well being (Raibley 2012).

Additionally, the distinction between happiness and the constructs of positivity and positive affect can be understood through an examination of the unique contributors of each. This is demonstrated by the fact that it is possible to score highly on these scales, but low on happiness at the same time. For instance, a highly positive individual, who

consistently faces a high level of demands at work and/or at home may not report experiencing a high level of happiness, despite generally scoring high on positive affect. Inversely, as happiness is a universal, innate emotion, it will be felt (at varying frequencies) by all individuals, even those who tend to score low on positivity and positive affect. Therefore, while past research suggests that positive affect may be positively related to happiness levels (Singh and Jha 2008), the two constructs are still fundamentally distinct.

Lastly, employee happiness is also distinguishable from job satisfaction, work engagement, and affective organizational commitment. An employee can experience job satisfaction for a wide variety of reasons, as satisfaction with a job can stem from high pay, opportunity for career advancement, flexibility over scheduling one's time, among other factors (Spector 1997). Similarly, employees can experience work engagement and affective organizational commitment due to a wide array of factors, such as having high job control and organization-based self-esteem (Mauno et al. 2007; Meyer et al. 2002; Saks 2006). These various factors and/or subscales can increase overall job satisfaction, work engagement, and affective organizational commitment scale scores while remaining unrelated to the emotional experience of happiness (e.g. not increasing happiness scale scores). For instance, an employee may perceive that they have ample opportunity for advancement, and hence, rate their job satisfaction as high. However, this does not definitively imply that they frequently experience the emotion of happiness. Therefore, high scores on job satisfaction, work engagement, or affective organizational commitment are insufficient to conclude that employees are happy (Fisher 2010).

It is noteworthy to mention that, while these positive constructs are likely highly related, the inferences made on the basis of each will vary. For instance, high scores on the variable of work engagement holds a significantly different meaning than high scores on life satisfaction. Correspondingly, these various positive emotion variables will have unique antecedents, correlates, and consequences. As such, each variable will maintain distinct implications for practice in organizational functioning. For example, correlating employee levels of optimism with job performance may inform personnel selection, while measurements of affective organizational commitment may inform organizational development initiatives. Similarly, measurements of happiness will carry different theoretical and practical implications for research and practice. As such, there is value in treating happiness as its own construct. Consequently, the present study assesses happiness directly through an empirically validated measure of happiness, avoiding the measurement issues commonly seen in both occupational health and even positive psychology studies. To address the measurement issues described above, Abdel-Khalek (2006) developed and tested the accuracy of a self-report, single-item happiness measure. This scale development study demonstrated that, while there is indeed overlap between happiness and positive emotions variables, happiness is a unique construct (Abdel-Khalek 2006).

Another methodological shortcoming of past literature on employee happiness is the emphasis on measuring employees' positive emotions exclusively while at work. Instructing employees to self-report positive emotions solely in relation to work has presented a number of measurement issues for researchers, putting into question whether these estimates capture an individual's momentary moods, recurrent emotions, or stable personality traits (Zelenski et al. 2008). Again, all of which are said to carry

diverse practical and theoretical implications. Thus, it is likely that attempting to constrain employees' happiness solely to the workplace has convoluted the field's understanding of workplace happiness. While employees' positive emotions may vary from hour to hour or task to task, measures of happiness are likely more stable and pervade across various areas of life. For instance, experiences of happiness at work influence and are influenced by life outside of work as well (Rodríguez-Muñoz et al. 2014). Therefore, restricting measures of employee happiness to only include happiness during work hours, rather than appraising happiness holistically, is likely in opposition to happiness literature. As such, the present study will assess global employee happiness, with the expectation that this estimate will demonstrate consistency over time and contexts.

**Hypothesis 1:** Employee happiness will demonstrate temporal stability.

## **Happiness and Outcomes of Organizational Interest**

While there is inherent value in being happy, cultivating employee happiness may also be extremely beneficial to the workplace. Happy individuals will foster closer social relationships (Diener and Seligman 2002; Ford et al. 2016) and will be more agreeable and less neurotic (Diener and Seligman 2002). Additionally, happy people will be more optimistic, have higher self-esteem, and use more positive humor (while also using less negative humor; Ford et al. 2016). Lastly, longitudinal evidence demonstrates that happy individuals spread happiness to those around them (Fowler and Christakis 2008).

However, the benefits of promoting employee happiness may extend beyond the aforementioned advantages. As positive emotion variables have served as a proxy for employee happiness in past literature, there are few studies that examine the distinct construct of happiness in relation to workplace outcomes. Nevertheless, there is a copious amount of research linking many of these positive emotion variables to outcomes of interest to organizations. Thus, the present study will extend previous literature and investigate the relationships between employee happiness and the organizational outcomes of organizational commitment, task performance, contextual performance, turnover intentions, and counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs).

### **Increasing Positive Organizational Outcomes**

Fostering happy employees is likely to result in many favorable organizational outcomes. For instance, employee happiness will likely be highly related to organizational commitment. Employees that experience happiness frequently in and outside of work will likely be content to stay in their situation long-term. Job satisfaction and organizational support are established past predictors of organizational commitment (Lok and Crawford 2001; Meyer et al. 2002; Riggle et al. 2009); as such, it is likely that happiness will predict organizational commitment as well. Additionally, as previously mentioned, past researchers have even conceptualized employee happiness as including subscales of organizational commitment (Fisher 2010), indicating that the two constructs are viewed as highly related.

Task performance is another outcome that has garnered ample attention in the happiness and positive emotions literature. There have been numerous studies linking well-being, positive affect, and life satisfaction to increased productivity (see Fisher 2003; Wright et al. 2002; Zelenski et al. 2008). Interestingly, several of these same studies (Fisher 2003; Wright and Cropanzano 2004), and many others (Judge et al. 2001), have failed to demonstrate a significant relationship between the variables of job satisfaction and task performance. Consequently, there has been much discourse in regard to the relationship between happiness and productivity (also known as the Happy – Productive Worker Hypothesis), leading many researchers to call out for more studies in this area (Cropanzano and Wright 2001; Taris and Schreurs 2009; Zelenski et al. 2008). Nevertheless, recent findings indicate that happy individuals do demonstrate increased productivity in non-work contexts (Oswald et al. 2015). This suggests that there *is* likely a positive relationship between employee happiness and task performance and that previous null findings are likely attributable to issues in previous happiness operationalizations.

As happy employees are more agreeable and social (Diener and Seligman 2002), it is likely that these employees will score highly on contextual performance. Contextual performance refers to employees' helping and productive behaviors, which are unrelated to task performance (Viswesvaran and Ones 2000). Researchers argue that contextual performance can be used nearly synonymously with organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs; Werner 2000); thus, this study will draw on literature that examines both contextual performance and OCBs in relation to positive emotions. Like task performance, other constructs such as well-being, positive affect, and job satisfaction, have also been linked to increased contextual performance across many studies (Christian et al. 2011; Hosie et al. 2012; Lee and Allen 2002; Van Scotter and Motowidlo 1996; Williams and Shiaw 1999). Further, the happiness literature demonstrates that happy individuals are more altruistic and volunteer with a higher frequency, compared to unhappy individuals (Borgonovi 2008; Post 2005). Additionally, this is likely a positive feedback loop, as helping others has also been shown to increase individuals' own happiness levels (Post 2005).

**Hypothesis 2:** Employee happiness will be positively related to employee levels of (a) organizational commitment, (b) task performance, and (c) contextual performance.

### **Decreasing Negative Organizational Outcomes**

While companies with happy employees are expected to benefit from increased positive organizational outcomes, it is also likely that happy employees will display fewer behaviors that derail organizational success. It is well-established that employee turnover is one organizational outcome that comes at a high cost to organizations, as employee turnover can slow productivity, have high costs related to employee replacement, and lead to poor organizational cultures (Staw 1980). Thus, maintaining happy employees may be highly advantageous in regard to reducing turnover intentions. A recent publication, which employed a happiness scale, found that happiness levels were indeed negatively related to turnover intentions in a Taiwanese sample (Wang and Yang 2016). Therefore, the present study seeks to extend these findings to the United States.

In addition to reduced turnover, happy employees may be less likely to engage in CWBs. Spector and Fox's (2002) emotion-centered model of CWBs, theorizes that if an event occurs and is perceived neutrally or positively, then CWBs are less likely to occur. Therefore, in most workplace situations, it is probable that employees who experience frequent happiness will be more likely to respond positively, thus decreasing CWBs. This is in line with recent a recent publication that demonstrated that individuals high in optimism, resiliency, self-efficacy, and hope engaged in fewer CWBs (Avey et al. 2010). Thus, the following is hypothesized:

**Hypothesis 3:** Employee happiness will be negatively related to employee levels of (a) turnover intentions and (b) CWBs.

### **Taxing Work Environments: An Antecedent of Unhappiness**

The modern work environment can take an extreme toll on employees when they are exposed to a variety of job demands. Job demands are "physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological costs" (Bakker and Demerouti 2007, p. 310). Examples of job demands are high work pressure, emotionally taxing tasks, and high role ambiguity. The Job Demands-Resource (JD-R) model describes how job demands can often act as stressors and result in many adverse organizational outcomes (Bakker and Demerouti 2016). It is well established that a high level of job demands results in decreased employee organizational commitment and performance, and increased turnover and CWBs, especially under conditions of low job resources (Bakker and Demerouti 2007, 2016; Bakker et al. 2004; Hakanen et al. 2008; Janssen 2001; Mauno et al. 2007; Mayerl et al. 2017; Spector et al. 2007). The present study expects to replicate these findings.

**Hypothesis 4:** Job demands will be negatively related to employee levels of (a) organizational commitment, (b) task performance, and (c) contextual performance.

**Hypothesis 5:** Job demands will be positively related to employee levels of (a) turnover intentions and (b) CWBs.

Further, if employees are exposed to consistently high levels of job demands, it is unlikely that they will be able to maintain a high level of happiness. This relationship is supported by past reviews that point to the significant, positive relationship between employees' Quality-of-Work-Life (QWL) and Quality-of-Life (QOL) outcomes (Md-Sidin et al. 2010). Specifically, job demands predict significantly lower levels of employee wellbeing; for instance, studies demonstrate that employees report decreased job satisfaction, engagement, and overall life satisfaction (Bakker and Demerouti 2007, 2016), as well as lower QOL outcomes, when job demands are high (Narehan et al. 2014). Further, a systematic review of QWL programs demonstrates that a reduction of work demands is an integral component of maintaining or increasing QOL outcomes (Sirgy et al. 2008). Therefore, under conditions of high job demands, it is hypothesized that employees will report decreased levels of happiness.

**Hypothesis 6:** Job demands will be negatively related to employee happiness.

### **The Mediating Role of Employee Happiness**

A great deal of the previous JD-R literature has conceptualized employee characteristics as either moderators of the demand – strain relationship, or as negative outcomes that result following regular exposure to high job demands (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007, 2016; Mayerl et al. 2017). Despite this theoretical precedent, the present study does not aim to assess how the relationship between job demands and organizational outcomes will vary as a function of employee happiness. Instead, the present study aims to investigate how a high level of demands directly diminishes employee happiness and, thus, indirectly, leads to the negative organizational outcomes mentioned above. This will allow data to inform the role that organizations have in perpetuating work environments that lead to decreased happiness, and how these levels of decreased happiness may factor into bottom-line outcomes.

Given this objective, the present study will examine the indirect effect of job demands on organizational outcomes through employee happiness. As previously mentioned, the negative impact of demands on organizational outcomes of interest is well established (Bakker and Demerouti 2007, 2016; Bakker et al. 2004; Hakanen et al. 2008; Janssen 2001; Mauno et al. 2007; Mayerl et al. 2017; Spector et al. 2007). Additionally, when employees endure chronic job demands, employees are hypothesized to report significantly decreased levels of happiness, which, in turn, will result in the negative organizational outcomes hypothesized above. As such, employee happiness is expected to have a significant, mediating role in the demands – strain relationship.

**Hypothesis 7:** Employee happiness will mediate the relationship between job demands and (a) organizational commitment, (b) task performance, (c) contextual performance, (d) turnover intentions, and (e) CWBs.

## **Methods**

### **Sample and Procedure**

The study consisted of a two-wave panel design, with a time lag of 3 to 4 weeks between survey 1 and survey 2. To be included in the study, participants were required to be over the age of 18, work in the USA, and spend at least 90% of their working hours in an office space. Additionally, to maintain data quality, only participants who successfully passed at least 4 of 5 total attention checks (i.e., “Please select ‘Strongly agree’”) were included in the study. While 279 participants met eligibility requirements at Time 1, due to attrition, data from only 222 participants was captured at Time 2. For both surveys, data were collected online via Qualtrics survey, and participants received a \$10 e-gift card for successful survey completion at each time point. Individuals were recruited for participation through convenience and snowball sampling methodologies.

The sample ( $N=222$  matched pairs) was composed of predominately female (80.2%) employees, with a mean age of 31.7 ( $SD=8.4$ ). The majority of the sampled employees held at least a bachelor's degree (84.2%) and worked an average of 43.9 h a week ( $SD=6.3$ ), with an average company tenure of 3.6 years ( $SD=4.3$ ). Additionally, participants reported a wide range of ethnic/racial backgrounds (45.5% Caucasian, 32.4% Hispanic/Latino, 9.9% African American, 5.5% Asian, 1.4% Arab, and .5% Native American) and industries (7.2% Medical, 2.3% Insurance, 4.1% Banking, 1.8% Legal Services, 9.0% Government, 40.5% Education, 1.4% Entertainment, 1.4% Hospitality, 10.4% Business (*not previously mentioned*), and 22.1% Other). T-tests were conducted for focal study variables to identify if there were any significant differences between the individuals who completed a survey at only Time 1 ( $N=279$ ) and the individuals who completed both surveys (i.e., participated in surveys at Time 1 and Time 2;  $N=222$ ). None of the t-tests reached significance, indicating that there were no differences across groups.

## Measures

*Happiness* was measured with a one-item measure that asked: "Do you feel happy in general?" (Abdel-Khalek 2006). This happiness scale has demonstrated high levels of reliability, concurrent validity (with other happiness scales), convergent validity (with positive emotions variables), and divergent validity (with negative emotions variables), even in cross-cultural contexts (Abdel-Khalek 2006). Participants were instructed to consider their overall estimate and general feelings and then to select the number that best described their feelings on a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 indicated the maximum.

*Job Demands* were assessed through items drawn from Bakker's (2014) Job Demands-Resources Questionnaire; these measures assessed cognitive demands, work pressure, and emotional demands. For example, an item would ask: "How often do you have to work extra hard in order to reach a deadline?" Participant responses were measured on a 5-point scale from 1 = never to 5 = very often. Mean scores from all three job demands scales were used to create an overall job demands composite score.

*Organizational Commitment* was measured with an 8-item affective commitment scale (Allen and Meyer 1990). An example item was: "I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own". Participant responses were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

*Job Performance* was captured through the Koopmans et al. (2012) Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ). This questionnaire consisted of three subscales measuring task performance (6 items), contextual performance (8 items), and CWBs (5 items). Sample items for task performance, contextual performance and CWBs, respectively, are as follows: "I managed to plan my work so that it was done on time", "I took on extra responsibilities", and "I complained about unimportant matters at work". Individuals' responses were rated on a 5-point scale from 1 = seldom to 5 = always for task and contextual performance, and from 1 = seldom to 5 = often for CWBs.

*Turnover Intentions* were measured through a subscale of the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann et al. 1979). A sample item was: "I often think of leaving this organization or job." Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert type scale with higher scores representing higher levels of turnover intent.

*Demographic Variables* captured participants' gender, age, ethnicity, and education level. Additionally, demographics included variables related to the individuals' industry, occupational tenure, and number of hours worked per week.

## Results

Table 1 displays scale reliabilities, means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among variables at both Time 1 and 2. Hypothesis 1 was supported, indicating that participants reported fairly stable levels of happiness over the T1-T2 time period ( $r = .70, p < .05$ ). Correlations among happiness and outcome variables were examined using Time 1 (happiness) and Time 2 (criteria) data. When examining the relationship between happiness and organizational outcomes, Hypothesis 2(a-c) and 3(a-b) were supported in all cases. Specifically, happiness was positively related to organizational commitment, task performance, and contextual performance, ( $r = .35, .36, \text{ and } .29$ , respectively,  $p < .05$ ). Inversely, happiness was significantly and negatively related to turnover intention and CWBs ( $r = -.39 \text{ and } -.26$ , respectively,  $p < .05$ ). When the cross-sectional correlations between variables at Time 1 and Time 2 were examined, the same patterns were found (see Table 1).

Next, relationships between Time 1 job demands and Time 2 outcomes were examined. In relation to Hypothesis 4(a-c), job demands were negatively related to employees' organizational commitment and task performance ( $r = -.22 \text{ and } -.21$  respectively,  $p < .05$ ), but not to employees' contextual performance ( $r = -.01, p > .05$ ). Further, hypothesis 5(a-b) was fully supported as indicated by significant positive correlations between job demands and turnover intentions ( $r = .21, p < .05$ ), as well as CWBs ( $r = .22, p < .05$ ). Lastly, job demands were significantly and negatively related to employee happiness ( $r = -.15, p < .05$ ), as predicted by hypothesis 6.

Next, the PROCESS Macro (version 3.1) on SPSS (Hayes 2015) was used to test the direct and indirect relationships between job demands, happiness, and the organizational outcomes of interest. Specifically, employee happiness was tested as a potential mediator of the association between job demands and the organizational outcomes of organizational commitment, task performance, contextual performance, turnover intentions, and CWBs. The PROCESS macro was used to assess the presence of significant differences between the  $c$  path (job demands – organizational outcomes) and  $c'$  path (job demands – organizational outcomes, while controlling for happiness). This difference (denoted by “ $ab$ ”) was considered statistically significant when confidence intervals did not include zero. Standard errors and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were calculated using 5000 bootstrapped samples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Table 2 provides the mediation model output for all five organizational outcomes.

Significant indirect effects were supported across all five outcomes, demonstrating full support of hypothesis 7(a-e). Specifically, the results indicated that, through employee happiness, job demands had a significant indirect effect on (a) organizational commitment (indirect  $ab$  effect =  $-.06$ ,  $CI_{95} = -.13 \text{ to } -.01$ ,  $R^2 = .15$ ,  $c'$  effect =  $-.20$ ,  $p = .01$ ), (b) task performance (indirect  $ab$  effect =  $-.06$ ,  $CI_{95} = -.11 \text{ to } -.01$ ,  $R^2 = .15$ ,  $c'$  effect =  $-.16$ ,  $p = .02$ ), and (c) contextual performance (indirect  $ab$  effect =  $-.06$ ,  $CI_{95} = -.12 \text{ to } -.01$ ,  $R^2 = .08$ ,  $c'$  effect =  $.05$ ,  $p = .53$ ), (d) turnover intentions (indirect  $ab$

**Table 1** Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Happiness <sup>1</sup>	7.28	1.73	**													
2. Job demands <sup>1</sup>	3.31	0.78	-.16*	**												
3. Organizational commitment <sup>1</sup>	3.18	0.92	.42*	-.11	(.89)											
4. Task performance <sup>1</sup>	3.67	0.79	.33*	-.19*	.30*	(.85)										
5. Contextual performance <sup>1</sup>	3.54	0.90	.24*	.14*	.30*	.59*	(.90)									
6. Turnover <sup>1</sup>	3.06	1.41	-.40*	.16*	-.64*	-.19*	-.13	(.95)								
7. CWBs <sup>1</sup>	2.23	.78	-.38*	.26*	-.28*	-.29*	-.08	.40*	(.83)							
8. Happiness <sup>2</sup>	7.18	1.87	.70*	-.15*	.37*	.33*	.31*	-.33*	-.35*	**						
9. Job demands <sup>2</sup>	3.26	0.81	-.16*	.79*	-.05	-.14*	.16*	.08	.25*	-.15*	**					
10. Organizational commitment <sup>2</sup>	3.17	0.92	.35*	-.22*	.80*	.24*	.23*	-.58*	-.23*	.38*	-.10	(.91)				
11. Task performance <sup>2</sup>	3.65	0.80	.36*	-.21*	.33*	.64*	.41*	-.24*	-.26*	.40*	-.10	.36*	(.87)			
12. Contextual performance <sup>2</sup>	3.48	0.93	.29*	-.01	.32*	.44*	.69*	-.22*	-.17*	.33*	.10	.35*	.61*	(.92)		
13. Turnover <sup>2</sup>	3.19	1.35	-.39*	.21*	-.57*	-.20*	-.09	.80*	.35*	-.38*	.13	-.69*	-.25*	-.19*	(.95)	
14. CWBs <sup>2</sup>	2.33	0.88	-.26*	.22*	-.22*	-.24*	-.10	.28*	.70*	-.42*	.26*	-.29*	-.29*	-.16*	.39*	(.89)

*N* = 222. \**p* < .05, two-tailed. \*\*Indicates casual indicator or single-item scale. Variables with a <sup>1</sup> superscript indicates Time 1 variable, variables with a <sup>2</sup> superscript indicates Time 2 variable. Alpha coefficients displayed on the diagonal

**Table 2** Happiness mediating job demands and organizational outcomes

	Organizational Commitment				Task Performance				Contextual Performance				Turnover Intentions				CWBs				
	C	SE	t	p	C	SE	t	p	C	SE	t	p	C	SE	t	p	C	SE	t	p	
Direct Effects																					
Constant	8.47*	.50	16.91	.00	8.47*	.50	16.91	.00	8.47*	.50	16.91	.00	8.47*	.50	16.91	.00	8.47*	.50	16.91	.00	
Job Demands → Happiness ( <i>a</i> <sub>1</sub> )	-.36*	.15	-2.45	.02	-.36*	.15	-2.45	.02	-.36*	.15	-2.45	.02	-.36*	.15	-2.45	.02	-.36*	.15	-2.45	.02	
Model R <sup>2</sup>	.03*				.03*				.03*				.03*				.03*				
Constant	2.59*	.38	6.87	.00	3.05*	.33	9.28	.00	2.16*	.40	5.41	.00	4.41*	.55	8.08	.00	2.50*	.37	6.75	.00	
Happiness → Org. Outcome ( <i>b</i> <sub>1</sub> )	0.17*	.03	5.08	.00	0.15*	.03	5.24	.00	0.16*	.04	4.50	.00	-0.28*	.05	-5.86	.00	-0.12*	.03	-3.58	.00	
Job Demands → Org. Outcome ( <i>c</i> <sup>'</sup> )	-0.20*	.07	-2.70	.01	-0.16	.06	-2.41	.02	0.05	.08	0.63	.53	0.26*	.11	2.39	.02	0.21*	.07	2.85	.00	
Model R <sup>2</sup>	.15*				.15*				.08*				.17*				.10*				
Indirect Effect	Effect	SE	95% CI		Effect	SE	95% CI		Effect	SE	95% CI		Effect	SE	95% CI		Effect	SE	95% CI	Effect	SE
Job Demands → Happiness → Org. Outcome ( <i>ab</i> )	-0.06	.03	[-.13 to -.01]		-0.06	.03	[-.11 to -.01]		-0.06	.03	[-.12 to -.01]		.10	.05	[.02 to .20]		.02	.02	[.01 to .09]	.10	.05

*N* = 222, \* *p* < .05. C = Coefficient. SE = Standard error. CI = confidence interval. R<sup>2</sup> = percentage of variance accounted for in organizational outcomes by predictors. All analyses used 5000 bootstrapped samples

effect = .10,  $CI_{95} = .02$  to  $.20$ ,  $R^2 = .17$ ,  $c'$  effect =  $.26$ ,  $p = .02$ ) and (e) CWBs (indirect  $ab$  effect =  $.04$ ,  $CI_{95} = .01$  to  $.09$ ,  $R^2 = .10$ ,  $c'$  effect =  $.21$ ,  $p = .00$ ).

## Discussion

Noteworthy conclusions about employee happiness can be drawn from this study, as all but one of the hypothesized relationships were significant. The first significant finding was that employees' happiness demonstrated consistency over time. These results suggest that this measure of happiness accurately assessed employees' levels of happiness, rather than transient moods. Additionally, this finding suggests that our participants' assessments of their general happiness levels were stable across contexts as the happiness measure did not make reference to any one specific context (i.e., work).

The next significant finding was that employee happiness was significantly related to all five organizational outcomes (organizational commitment, task performance, contextual performance, turnover intentions, and CWBs) with measurements of each taken approximately 3–4 weeks apart. Not only were all five relationships significant, but at moderate effect sizes (as the absolute value of correlations ranged from  $.26$  to  $.39$ , see Table 1). These results indicate that employee happiness can explain up to 15% of the variability in whether or not a company can achieve crucial organizational objectives, ranging from maintaining high employee performance to reducing turnover. Fostering a high level of employee happiness can have a significant impact, not only directly on task performance, but on the five other critical organizational outcomes as well.

Lastly, this study examined the role that job demands have in preceding the happiness – organizational outcome relationship. In line with previous findings, job demands predicted all organizational outcomes, with the exception of contextual performance. Therefore, previous JD-R theoretical relationships were largely replicated, indicating that as job demands increase, positive organizational outcomes will decline, while negative organizational outcomes will be exacerbated. Additionally, this study provides novel data on the relationship between job demands and happiness, as results indicated that a high level of job demands in the work environment will reduce employee happiness. Further, the results revealed that employee happiness significantly mediated the relationship between job demands and the five organizational outcomes. Therefore, results indicate that when job demands are high, employee happiness will decrease, and, consequently, important organizational outcomes will be negatively impacted as well (e.g., positive outcomes will decrease and negative outcomes will increase).

## Theoretical Implications and Future Research

Establishing employee happiness as a stable construct, which mediates the relationship between job demands and organizational outcomes, has important implications for organizational theory. While numerous positive emotion variables (e.g., engagement) have been extensively researched in relation to the workplace (Alessandri et al. 2015; Fisher 2010), happiness as a distinct construct has not. Therefore, this study provides a

foundation for future workplace happiness studies. Namely, this study will not only enable future researchers to measure the distinct construct of employee happiness but also be confident that they are capturing a stable measure, rather than assessing transient employee moods. Given that this is one of the first studies to examine employee happiness with a stable, distinct measure of happiness, novel insights can be drawn in regard to happiness's role in the workplace.

Unlike these positive emotion variables, which have established predictors, mediators, and consequences in the JD-R model (Bakker and Demerouti 2016), the work-related antecedents and products of happiness have been scarcely examined. Thus, this study may serve as a basis for developing a nomological network of employee happiness. Previously, there were no data in relation to the negative impact of job demands on employee happiness, nor the influence of reduced happiness on organizational outcomes of interest. Accordingly, this study can act as a base-model from which researchers can begin to outline the unique predictors and consequences of employee happiness. Explicitly, future investigations could examine other organizational factors that may enhance or diminish employee happiness, moderators of these relationships, and other organizational consequences of employee happiness, which were not captured in this study. For instance, future research could examine whether a high level of workplace relationship conflict may predict employee happiness. Conversely, researchers could assess the role that employee happiness plays in predicting workplace innovation.

Establishing the nomological network of employee happiness would enable the field of primary stress prevention to be augmented. Expanding the model of employee happiness would allow for increased specificity in regard to which environmental factors may be targeted by organizations, to prevent employee strain and increase happiness. As another advantage, establishing a nomological network of employee happiness would provide organizations with data to demonstrate the utility of engaging in primary prevention. Specifically, data could demonstrate the positive impact that improved employee happiness has on a wide array of outcomes that are of significance to organizations (such as increased job performance or innovation).

Finally, this study provides evidence in support of the Happy – Productive Worker Hypothesis, previously mentioned. Previously, nearly all of the research investigations in this area utilized positive emotions variables as a proxy for employee happiness. Consequently, conclusions drawn, when other positive emotions variables were utilized, may have muddled the true relationship between employee happiness and productivity. Given this uncertainty, future research should replicate and expand on this study, using a distinct measure of happiness, to cross-validate the present findings, which demonstrate that there is indeed a significant, positive relationship between employee happiness and self-reported job performance.

## Practical Implications

In addition to numerous theoretical implications, the present study also carries several important practical implications. In practice, employees and upper management often regard the topic of employee happiness as a “fluffy” topic, viewing happiness as abstract, un-measurable, and having little bearing on the workplace (Schein 2018; Cooper and Theobald 2011). Therefore, while occupational health researchers have

extensive knowledge and understanding of how positive emotions benefit the workplace, it is often a challenge to market these advantages to organizations. This is due to the reality that upper-management may not recognize or acknowledge the importance of investing in worker well being. Additionally, due to the convoluted nature of the job satisfaction – job performance relationship (Judge et al. 2001), it has been difficult for practitioners to point to a body of literature, in order to demonstrate to organizations why employee happiness matters.

Thus, this study seeks to bridge this scientist-practitioner gap by providing comprehensive findings to link the distinct construct of employee happiness measured at one point in time to five outcomes of organizational consequence captured an average of 3 weeks later. In other words, this study provides substantial evidence to demonstrate the benefits that fostering employee happiness can have in bolstering organizational commitment, task performance, and contextual performance while reducing turnover intentions and CWBs. These findings have significant implications for practice, as they provide a strong rationale for why organizations should care about employee happiness.

Not only do the findings validate the relationship between employee happiness and outcomes, but they also indicate that organizations play a crucial role in informing employee happiness levels. More specifically, if the psychosocial work environment has a high level of job demands, these will significantly contribute to decreased levels of happiness and organizational outcomes. For this reason, employee happiness should be a top-down organizational objective. Specifically, organizations should carefully design their own work environment to foster increased levels of employee happiness, which will, in turn, improve rates of organizational commitment, task performance, contextual performance, turnover intentions, and CWBs.

There are two main ways in which organizations can improve their employees' psychosocial work environment. The first is through an examination and proper management of current job demands. As increased levels of job demands were directly related to decreased levels of employee happiness, organizations should take steps to reduce the level of job demands that employees face on a day-to-day basis. Organizations could first assess the presence and level of job demands present in their work environment, explicitly measuring their job demands' strength and frequency. Among the most pervasive job demands that would benefit from evaluation include work pressure, cognitive demands, emotional demands, qualitative workload, quantitative workload, organizational constraints, perceived organizational injustice, and more (Bakker and Demerouti 2007; Mayerl et al. 2017; Spector and Jex 1998). This evaluation would enable organizations to then design and implement a targeted approach for redesigning their work environment by reducing the job demands that detract from employee wellbeing.

Secondly, when minimizing job demands is insufficient or not possible, organizations can increase employees' access to workplace resources. The JD-R model describes how job resources buffer against the negative organizational outcomes caused by high job demands. Job resources are "physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands, and/or stimulate personal growth, learning, and development" (Bakker and Demerouti 2007, p. 311). Therefore, increasing job resources will aid in buffering the relationship between job demands and employee happiness in the workplace (Oerlemans and Bakker 2018). Specifically, organizations have the opportunity to

design their psychosocial work environments to include increased autonomy, stress management training, work-life balance policies, social support, skill variety, and more (Bakker and Demerouti 2016; Bond and Bunce 2000; Zheng et al. 2015).

Lastly, employee happiness should be measured and evaluated. Prior to any redesign or intervention, it is vital that organizations assess their employees' level of happiness. This will allow organizations to establish the initial baseline for their employees' levels of happiness. Happiness measurement, prior to any organizational changes, allows for subsequent evaluations to be conducted. In particular, organizations can assess how changes in job demands and resources impacted employee happiness levels. Additionally, the pre-post measurement of employee happiness would allow organizations to assess how changes in employee happiness impacted their bottom-line outcomes.

## Limitations

The present study would have benefited from data collection at additional time-points. Although utilizing a two-time point, full panel design enabled researchers to capture the lagged effect of workplace demands on employee outcomes (Taris and Kompier 2003), collection of participant data at additional time-points would have allowed for a longitudinal analysis of relationships of interest. Therefore, whilst this study diverges from an estimated 90% of occupational health studies, which are solely cross-sectional in design (Zapf et al. 1996), added data-points would have provided increased evidence for the causality of each relationship presented in this study (i.e., demands to happiness to outcomes). Future studies should extend findings with longitudinal research designs to increase the internal validity of findings.

The present study measured employee happiness by assessing, "do you feel happy in general?" As this measure was not workplace-specific, the impact of workplace factors on the happiness variable cannot be differentiated from other life circumstance variables, such as demographic, environmental, health, and socioeconomic factors. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, restricting measures of employee happiness to only include happiness during work hours, rather than appraising happiness holistically, is likely lead to range restriction and introduce error when attempting to measure true scores of happiness. Additionally, the test-retest reliability evidence, demonstrated by Hypothesis 1, suggests that global measures of employee happiness are stable and may indeed be suitable for assessing the frequency of the emotional experiences of happiness, despite the inability to constrain the measurement of these emotions to employees' work hours.

Further, the present study may be limited by the sample's demographics. The participants in this study were primarily female (80%), well-educated (84% obtaining at least bachelor's degree), and relatively young ( $M = 31$  years), which may challenge the generalizability of results to other populations. Furthermore, socioeconomic data (i.e., annual household income) were not captured in this study. Given the fact that the participants in this study were highly educated and office-based employees, the average participant income may be higher than the average USA employee and, thus, the findings may not generalize to other demographic strata. Despite this proposed limitation, the impact of workplace demands on employee happiness is also evident in "blue-collar" jobs (perhaps even more so than in "white-collar" samples). This is due to the reality that blue-collar employees often face more workplace demands than white-collar

employees, such as high physical workload and limited job control (Schreurs et al. 2011), and therefore have a significant opportunity for increased happiness levels, if reduced. Therefore, the present sample may be considered to be conservative in nature, with the potential for greater effect sizes when examining the whole population of USA workers.

Finally, it would have been advantageous to obtain participants' self-reported levels of life satisfaction, well-being, positive affect, positivity, job satisfaction, and work engagement. While there is abundant evidence for the distinctness of happiness as a construct (Abdel-Khalek 2006), correlational evidence of constructs' convergence would have been beneficial exclusively in regard to employees. This would have allowed data to assess the magnitude of the relationships between employee happiness and other positive emotions variables. As such, future research should comprehensively assess employee happiness's relationship with positive and negative emotion variables.

## Conclusion

The present study contributes to QOL and organizational literature by providing a two time-point examination of the role of employee happiness in the workplace. As such, the contributions of this study were three-fold. The present study: (a) assessed employee happiness with a distinct happiness measure, (b) provided evidence of employee happiness's direct impact on important organizational outcomes (i.e., job performance), and (c) demonstrated that the effects of job demands on organizational outcomes can be explained via happiness levels. Each one of these findings carries meaningful implications for theory and practice. However, overall, this study demonstrates that reducing job demands and providing ample job resources is essential, not only for increasing employees' happiness for its own inherent value, but also for improving QOL and organizational outcomes of interest, including organizational commitment, task performance, contextual performance, turnover intentions, and CWBs.

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