# Factors Contribute to Happiness among the Higher Learning Institutions' Employees

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**Abstract**
This article covers the main indicators that affect employees' happiness in higher learning institutions. Scientific research has demonstrated that employees' happiness significantly contributes to the productivity and success of an organization. Motivated by the importance of strengthening positive emotions among employees through better culture, policy, standard operating procedure (SOP), and infrastructure in an organization, this study examined the factors that influence employees' happiness in Malaysian institutions of higher learning (IHL). The study adopted the PERMAIg model of happiness as it is the most suitable framework to be used in the Malaysian context. Data were obtained from respondents from private and public IHLs in Malaysia using a quantitative survey method (n = 291) throughout a cross-sectional period of time, i.e., from January to March 2021. The result shows all five (5) of the key domains positively influenced employees' happiness. They are employees' emotion management, engagement, achievement, infrastructure, and gratitude. The findings show that the key factors affecting employees' happiness in Malaysian IHLs include their relationships with family members, support from colleagues, student achievement, health, a safe work environment, and a sense of gratitude towards their job. Meanwhile, the causes of unhappiness are mainly related to the work process, a lack of recognition, and superiors' dishonest behaviour. Subsequent qualitative analysis has enabled the study to produce three (3) recommendations to enhance employees' happiness in the Malaysian IHLs, which are: (i) every work process and procedure, such as the claim process, teaching and learning process, and administrative procedures, must be helping the employees and not burdening them; (ii) it is imperative to implement a clear understanding of each process and procedure's purpose; and (iii) improve infrastructure, particularly the cafeteria, recreational facility, computer maintenance, and toilets. This gives stakeholders the information they may use to plan for future advancements and comprehend the current situation affecting the employees' happiness. For comparative analysis purposes and to determine best practises for boosting

workers' happiness, more research to identify cause and effect in the context of employees' happiness among various institutions is recommended.

**Keywords**: Factors, Happiness, Employees, Higher Learning Institutions

## Introduction

Studies related to happiness and well-being started in the 1960s when Ruut Veenhoven published a paper on happiness in a sociology journal. Since early 2000, studies on employees' happiness have received substantial attention from the public and private sectors (Frisch, 2013). In dealing with human behaviors and emotions, every public and private sector employer needs to consider employees' level of happiness as it directly correlates with employees' productivity and performance (Hwa & Amin, 2016). As an asset of an organization, employees are one of the determinant factors of an organization's performance and achievement. A good employee will help the organization towards achieving goals and increase organizational performance. Various studies indicated that organizations can increase employees' productivity by providing a happy environment and culture. When discussing happiness and higher learning institutions, the main focus of happiness will be on the institution's students, the institution's largest group (Elwick & Cannizzaro, 2017).

As an organization that provides an educational service to its customers, mainly students, the higher education institution's employees' happiness must be prioritized. A happy employee will create a positive environment in the organization to indirectly attract more customers to the company's service. In the education sector, the happiness and well-being of the academic and management staff are essential. For academic staff, they need positive vibes and happiness when dealing with students, especially in teaching. It will provide joy, excitement, and motivation to the students in the learning experience; meanwhile, happy management staff will provide friendly and efficient service to the customer.

## Background of The Study

The positive feeling created by being happy in the workplace has been key to success and enables people to love what they do. From Steve Job's point of view, "the only way to do great work is to love what you do". That is how happiness correlates to productivity, work culture, and satisfaction. According to Krapivin (2018), Google has spent large amounts of money to create a positive environment and comfortable workplaces such as a free beverage, conducive work culture, and diverse co-workers. In return, it helps to increase their employees' mood and productivity. As a result, Google rose 37% higher in productivity than before. It is proven that a happier employee will increase the productivity and performance of the organization. Many factors can affect happiness in the workplace. That is why some of the largest and famous companies spent more money to make their employees happy (Krapivin, 2018).

According to Yao et al (2021), leadership has a significant impact on happiness, and well-being, which refers to matters related to happiness. Happiness is well-being, but the meaning of well-being is more than that. In his article, Bronson (2018) stated that people can be happy without having well-being in life, but people will not achieve well-being without getting happy. It means happiness is one of the considerable contributors to well-being. It is a state where people feel pleasant, enjoyable, healthy, and satisfied with their life. In other words, well-being is how good and how satisfied you are with your experience. Therefore, this study hopes to determine the main factors that can affect employees' happiness and know the extent to which all these factors affect employees' happiness.

## Problem Statement

The happiness index is an important indicator to determine a country's development. Happiness is related to economic growth, the effectiveness of policy enforcement by the government, the nation's physical health, and the corporate image of the country itself.  In 2019, the World happiness index ranked Malaysia at 80th in the world (Hellwell et al., 2019). It showed Malaysia dropping drastically compared to the previous year at the rank of 35th. The massive drop of Malaysia in the world happiness ranking made Malaysia the fourth rank among ASEAN countries, leaving behind Singapore on the first rank, followed by Thailand and the Philippines. Six factors contribute to the Happiness index: Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, healthy life expectancy, social support, freedom to make life choices, generosity, and perceptions of corruption.

World Values Survey Association 2018 identified that one of the reasons behind the massive drop was the increase in distrust rate towards the government and financial insecurity among Malaysians. These factors have a significant effect on Malaysians' happiness. Happiness also affects the same way in the employment sector. By measuring the organizations' happiness level, we can predict the organization's prospects, their employees' physical health, the environment and culture of their workplace, and the effectiveness of the organization's management. In 2018, Malaysia ranked 4th among seven counties in Southeast Asia with the happiest employees (Sinar, 2018). Fifty-eight percent of the respondents said they were happy at the workplace. However, Malaysia's Healthiest Workplace survey by AIA Vitality in 2019 found that Malaysian employees have faced overload, sleeplessness, and mental health problems in the workplace.

According to Suresh Ram (2020), 51% of the employees in Malaysia were going through at least one of these problems at work. Unhealthy lifestyle, low engagement, and lack of organizational support are factors that contributed to this problem and affect employee happiness. Recently, many issues related to happiness in the workplace. In 2019, Malaysian employees were reported to be the most unhappy with the compensation or wages in Asia (Hussain, 2020). The study showed that 46% of the 900 respondents feel 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied' regarding their salaries.  Most of the employees think that the salary is not suitable compared to the workload given by the employer. In addition, Malaysian respondents were also the highest in searching for a new job in Asia due to the lack of work-life balance in their current work.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was reported to give the United States an increase in the Happiness index in terms of employees' happiness and well-being (Geller, 2020). Most of the employees feel happier that they can work remotely and manage the time with family effectively, but they admit they must work harder than before. Even though they must work harder; the employees feel happier to work because they have support from their family and are less worried about their family condition. Other indicators such as compensation, career development, relationship, and meaning in work are also reported being increased. Meanwhile, in Malaysia, COVID-19 is reported to have an effect on 9 out of 10 employees (Choong, 2020). According to Malay Mail (2020), 66% of employees, particularly from a large company, faced increased work scope, and 48% of the respondents said pandemic affects their wage and compensation. In happiness, small and medium enterprises (SME) reported having lower job happiness. Due to the Movement Control Order (MCO) that the Malaysian

government enforces, almost all the companies in Malaysia, including the SME companies, must shut down their business during the MCO. This affected SMEs even worse in the financial aspect. They have to cut off their employees' wages and this causes lower job happiness among employees.

Hence, it is intriguing to explore the level of happiness among higher learning institutions employees, particularly during this era. The happiness of the employees is vital because happiness can increase job performance and productivity. In higher learning institutions, the academicians' happiness is important because it will shape the learning environment by giving a positive learning experience to the students in the future. For the administration staff, happiness and well-being will enhance the administration process' efficiency and provide a positive environment to the customer. Besides, the researchers hope that this study will highlight the happiness and unhappiness elements in the higher learning institution and suggest ways to improve the unhappiness factors in the organization.

**Literature Review**

Studies on happiness and well-being started in the 1960s with the first paper on this issue was published by Ruut Veenhiven in 1969 in a sociological journal (Frisch, 2013). Happiness is one of the main indicators for some organisations to strengthen their positive organisational culture. According to Tsuciya et al (2018), positive and negative emotions affect people's well-being and happiness. The more individuals have a positive emotion, the more they will feel happy and vice versa. Therefore, people's positive emotions and well-being at work are essential. People's emotions can be affected by stress, environment, facilities, commitment to work, time, and daily life (Lokman et al., 2018). Additionally, happiness and well-being are always connected with positive life and positive emotions such as better health, satisfactory work performance, and satisfaction with life (Lokman et al., 2018; Tsuchiya, 2020).

Stanford Business (2012) reported that most business organisations focused on operational, sales, and marketing as a key to increasing their income and fitting in the global environment of business. When it comes to employees' satisfaction, employees' happiness, and employees' benefit, most business leaders failed to invest in these aspects. Research showed a significant relationship between workplace happiness and productivity (Salas et al., 2021). Another research done by Arora (2020) proved that the key to the high productivity of an employee is happiness. Happiness greatly influences business processes such as customer service management, strategic marketing, and the most important is in human resource marketing. A positive customer experience will lead to customer loyalty (Raida et al., 2018). To provide the best experience to the customer, the organisation needs to have a happy employee. A happy employee can provide a positive vibe or positive environment to the customer or client and indirectly it will attract more customers. In terms of human resources, a happy employee will provide their best performance toward the organisation. When employees feel unhappy with their work, it can lead to many problems, including absenteeism, employee turnover, and poor job performance.

There is growing research conducted on happiness. Many research techniques and methods have been used and introduced by the researcher to find the best way in measuring people's happiness and well-being. The most popular framework used to measure happiness is the Seligman theoretical model of happiness (PERMA) which was introduced by Martin Seligman in 2011. PERMA is a happiness model consisting of five elements: Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning, and Achievement. All these elements are believed to

have influenced the employees' happiness (Kun & Gadanecz, 2019; Setiyowati & Irtaji, 2017; Tsuchiya et al., 2018; Lokman et al., 2018).

The employee relationship is one of the happiness factors that have been proved in several studies. A study conducted by Lokman et al (2019) about the happiness and well-being of employees and student learning institutions, using Lokman's Emotion and Importance Quadrant (LEIQ$^{TM}$) found that the factors that contributed to the most negative emotion of the employees in the workplace are collegiality and congeniality; meanwhile, positive emotion can be gain from the good facilities and infrastructure provided by the organisation. Tsuchiya et al. (2018) indicated that employee engagement has a significant influence on employee happiness. A study conducted on hospital employees in Egypt also demonstrated that employee relationships can influence employees to be happier at work (Mousa et al., 2020). Friendly working place and satisfaction with colleagues are some of the factors that contribute to the happiness of garment factory workers in Sri Lanka and Portugal teachers (Kodithuwakku et al., 2017; Satuf et al., 2016).

For the leadership factor, several studies agreed that leadership of the organisation could influence employee happiness (Yao et al., 2021; Tsuchiya et al., 2018; Satuf et al., 2016). In higher learning institutions, leadership style is the factor that led to adverse effects on the employees in the organisation (Tsuchiya et al., 2018). On the other hand, the study conducted on teachers in Portugal showed a high satisfaction rate for leadership with 55% of the respondents being satisfied with their leaders (Satuf et al., 2016). The study of happiness of higher education institution leaders pointed out that there is less positive emotion among the leaders in higher education towards their work (Setiyowati & Irtaji, 2017). This is because the leaders feel they carry many burdens and the need to sacrifice their time for work. Ngang and Raja Hussin (2015) indicated that lecturers in polytechnics were less satisfied with the support provided by the management, especially in fulfilling their socio-emotional needs, such as giving recognition and rewards for the employees' achievements.

Kun & Gadanecz (2019); Salas et al (2021) discovered that the factor of meaning in work is significant for academicians. Research reported that the factors affecting the happiness of Hungarian teachers were the meaning of work and the relationship between teachers and students (Kun & Gadanecz, 2019). Teachers will be happier when their students show any improvement in terms of studies, attitude, and behaviour. A study done by Zakaria et al. (2021) demonstrated that teachers' happiness is greatly influenced by comfortable, healthy, and happy conditions. In another study, happiness and well-being are proved to be the indicators that can increase the employees' job performance (Jalali & Heidari, 2016).

Differences in gender, age, job status, and income also provide a different level of happiness. According to the study of the level of happiness among higher education academics, working environment, fringe benefits, personal growth, job security, income, work-life balance, and social endeavours affect the employees' happiness (Arora, 2020). In addition, the research findings showed that there is a significant relationship between happiness with age, educational level, monthly income, and volunteer activity that the respondents participated in. Another research argued that employees with a better income would have better health and happiness (Maidonado et al., 2018). Previous research on income and subjective well-being indicated that happiness and satisfaction decreased when the gap between their expected and real salary is bigger (Chin et al., 2020). Job status also contributes to the

employees' happiness and emotion. Izharuddin (2018) revealed that freelance academics (temporary and short-term contracts) were paid with minimal salaries with poor working conditions. Hashim and Zaharim (2020) found that gender, ethnicity, religion, and location have no significant relationship to the level of happiness, nonetheless happiness showed a significant relationship with household income, income of father, education of father, education of mother, and academic performance. In the same research, the findings did not find any significant difference across ethnic groups in Malaysia with regards to happiness. In terms of gender, the association between a lack of self-compassion and subjective happiness was more remarkable for women (De Zoysa et al., 2021).

**Research Methodology**

This research explores the element of happiness among higher learning institutions by using quantitative research. The target population of this study is the employees of Higher Learning Institutions, including public and private universities and institutions. The population involves all employees working in the higher learning institutions in Malaysia including the top management staff, academic staff, administration staff, and support staff. The sample size also includes permanent and contract employees, and higher-level management to lower-level management. A cross-sectional survey consists of three (3) main sections: the respondents' background, general questions about happiness and the happiness components distributed to more than 400 respondents through email, WhatsApp and Facebook using convenient sampling among employees in the Malaysian higher learning institutions, both private and public sectors. A total of 291 respondents were successfully collected. Due to the time constraint and Movement Control Order (MCO), only 291 respondents were successfully collected although the initial target was more than 380 respondents. According to Minsel (2021), less than 300 respondents is acceptable for universal size sampling, especially between 290-299 respondents. This is equal to 95% respondents with a margin of error of +/-5. This article highlights the descriptive analysis to identify the main factors of happiness among employees in Malaysian higher learning institutions.

The independent variables for this study are constructed based on the PERMA model by Seligman (2011), PERMAI by (Lokman et al., 2018), and PERMAIg by (Othman et al., 2018). The PERMAIg framework consists of the following - Positive emotion (P): the feeling of joy, excitement, and pleasure; Engagement (E): the relationship or connection of the employer toward the organisation; Relationship (R): the feeling of togetherness, teamwork, and support; Meaning (M): the feeling of connection and value towards their job; Accomplishment (A): the motivation to work and achieve goals; Infrastructure (I): the tangible facilities provided by the organisation; and Gratitude (g): the acceptance feeling by the employee for the facilities and responsibilities provided by the organisation (Tshuchiya et al., 2020; Lokman et al.,2018; Othman et al., 2018). In this study, five elements were selected due to higher relationship results in the past research which are Emotion management, Engagement, Achievement, Infrastructure, and Gratitude. The dependent variable was the Higher Learning Institutions' Employees General Happiness.

The reliability level of the instrument used in this study is represented by Alpha Cronbach (Creswell, 2010). The reliability test conducted on the dataset shows the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the construct's variable as 0.843 to 0.932.

Table 1
*Reliability Test*

| Constructs | α | Internal Consistency |
|---|---|---|
| **Dependent Variable** | | |
| Happiness | .843 | |
| | | Good |
| **Independent Variables** | | |
| Emotion Management | .890 | Good |
| Engagement | .932 | Excellent |
| Achievement | .890 | Good |
| Infrastructure | .901 | Excellent |
| Gratitude | .891 | Good |

As can be seen from Table 1, the dependent variable, which is Happiness (14 items), resulted in **α** = 0.843, indicating good internal consistency and reliability level of the instrument. For the independent variables, the Emotion Management subscale consisted of 14 items (**α** = 0.890), Engagement subscale consisted of 14 items (**α** = 0.932), Achievement subscale consisted of 11 items (**α** = 0.890), Infrastructure subscale consisted of 15 items (**α** = 0.901) and the Gratitude subscale consisted of 10 items (**α** = 0.891). The resulting Cronbach's Alpha shows value above 0.8, indicating good and excellent internal consistencies, and therefore the instrument is considered highly reliable.

**Research Findings and Analysis**
This subtopic consists of demographics and the five main components that influence employees' happiness at higher learning institutions. Demographic analysis is a technique that is used to identify and understand the profile of the respondent in the big picture.

Table 2
*Respondents' Demographic Information*

| | Items | N=291 | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Frequency | Valid (%) |
| Age | 20-29 years old | 37 | 12.7 |
| | 30-39 years old | 130 | 44.7 |
| | 40-49 years old | 89 | 30.6 |
| | 50 and above | 35 | 12 |
| Gender | Male | 87 | 29.9 |
| | Female | 204 | 70.1 |
| Race | Malay | 260 | 89.3 |
| | Chinese/ Indian | 16 | 5.4 |
| | Bumiputera Sabah/Sarawak/Others | 15 | 5.1 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Level of education | SPM | 13 | 4.4 |
| | STPM/Foundation/Diploma | 33 | 11.3 |
| | Bachelor's Degree | 52 | 17.9 |
| | Master's Degree | 119 | 40.9 |
| | PhD Degree | 74 | 25.4 |
| Marital status | Single | 66 | 22.7 |
| | Married | 218 | 74.9 |
| | Other | 7 | 2.4 |
| Total family & dependent | None | 49 | 16.8 |
| | 1-4 | 173 | 59.5 |

Source: Survey (2021)

Table 2 presents the respondents that participated in answering the questionnaire. Respondents of this survey are employees of higher learning institutions from public and private institutions. The demographic section consists of 6 items which are age, gender, race, level of education, marital status, total family and dependent for demographic question. 44.7% of the respondents are from the age of 30-39 years old with 44.7% (130), followed by 40-49 years old 30.6% (89). In terms of gender, most of the respondents are female 70.1% (204) while male respondents are 29.9% (87). Most of the respondents are Malays 89.3% (260), followed by Chinese/Indian 5.4% and Bumiputera Sabah/Sarawak 5.1% [1]

The main reason Malays are the majority of the respondents who answered the questionnaire is that most of the respondents are from the higher education institutions that have majority Malays as staff. For the education level of respondents, it shows master's degree is the highest, followed by Ph.D. degree and bachelor's degree which 49.9% (119), 25.4% (74), and 17.9% (52) respectively. In terms of marital status, most of the respondents are married with 74.9% (218), single 22.7% (66), and other status is 2.4% (7). For the total family and dependent, 59.5% (173) are with 1-4 children, meanwhile 16.8% (49) do not have kids. Based on this information, most of the respondents are married with children and family members that they must take care of.

Table 3
*Respondents' Occupation Background*

| Category of position | Management & Professional Academic (PhD) | 73 | 25.1 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Management & Professional Academic (Bachelor/Master) | 133 | 45.7 |
| | Administrative Support | 85 | 29.2 |
| Holds Management position | Yes | 111 | 38.1 |
| | No | 180 | 61.9 |
| Position status | Permanent | 224 | 83.8 |
| | Contract | 34 | 11.7 |
| | Temporary/Part-time | 13 | 4.5 |
| Year of service | < 1 year | 27 | 9.3 |
| | 2-5 years | 51 | 17.5 |
| | 6-15 years | 138 | 47.4 |
| | 16 years - above | 75 | 25.8 |
| Distance from home to workplace | <10 KM | 111 | 38.1 |
| | 11-30 KM | 107 | 36.8 |
| | ~31-70 KM | 60 | 20.7 |
| | 71 KM and above | 13 | 4.5 |
| Income | <RM 1199 and below | 5 | 1.7 |
| | RM1200-RM4200 | 130 | 44.7 |
| | RM4201-RM8000 | 108 | 37.1 |
| | RM8201 and above | 48 | 16.5 |

Source: Survey (2021)

Table 3 indicates the respondents' occupation background. It consists of position, management post, position status, year of service, distance from home to workplace, and income of the respondents. Since the master's degree and the Ph.D. is the highest level of education, in terms of category position, the management and professional academics with master's degree is the highest with 45.7% (133) followed by management and professional academics with Ph.D. 25.1% (73). Based on these two sections, it shows that most of the respondents are young lecturers with master's degrees. In terms of holding management posts, 61.9% (180) of the respondents did not hold any management post and only 38.1% (111) hold the management post. For the year of service, 6-15 years are the highest years of service with 47.4% (138). Since most of the respondents work more than 5 years in the institution, the position status of the respondents is mostly permanent with 83.8% (224), followed by 11.7% (34) contract and 4.5% (13) is temporary and part-time. For the distance

from home to workplace, the respondents who live near to their workplace are 38.1% (111) in which they live less than 10 kilometers from the workplace. 36.8% (107) of the respondents live around 11 to 30 kilometers away from their workplace. In terms of income, most of the respondents are earning between RM1200 to RM4200 with 44.7% (130) followed by RM4200 to RM8000 with 37.1% (108). Only 1.5% (7) of the respondents earn a lower range of income below RM1199 per month. This contradicts the minimum wage of RM1200, and these findings show that there are some employees still earning below the minimum wage.

**The Five Domains of Employees' Happiness**
This article focuses on the five main domains of happiness which are emotion management, engagement, achievement, infrastructure, and gratitude. There are fourteen (14) items for engagement as stated in Table 4.

Table 4
*Emotion Management Domain of Employees' Happiness*

| Item | Question | Mean | Item | Question | Mean |
|------|----------|------|------|----------|------|
| EM 1 | Emotion | 3.64 | EM 8 | Income | 3.46 |
| EM 2 | Lifestyle | 3.86 | EM 9 | Financial commitment | 3.37 |
| EM 3 | Time management | 3.55 | EM 10 | Family support toward career | 4.33 |
| EM 4 | Relationship with family | 4.43 | EM 11 | Health | 3.90 |
| EM 5 | Workplace | 3.74 | EM 12 | Time spent for personal activity | 3.61 |
| EM 6 | Head of Department/Faculty | 3.69 | EM 13 | The way idea is accepted | 3.62 |
| EM 7 | Colleague | 4.03 | EM 14 | work process and procedure | 3.32 |
| Overall mean value | | | 3.75 | | |

Source: Survey (2021)

The mean value indicates the level of happiness whereby a mean of 0 to 2 is considered as unhappy, 3-3.9 is indicated moderately happy, and 4 to 5 is depicted as happy. Table 3 presents the highest mean score of 4.43 is a relationship with the family as the main factor of happiness in the emotion management domain whereby 53.6% (156) respondents are happy, and 52.7% (135) respondents feel moderately happy with their relationship with the family. It shows that the relationship between the family members is the main indicator that affects respondents' happiness. This finding is parallel with research conducted by (Lokman et al., 2019; Kun and Gadanecz, 2019). Meanwhile, the second-highest mean is the employees' happiness derived from their family support towards their careers. 42.3% (123) respondents are happy with the family support given towards their career with a mean score of 4.33 which indicates that most respondents are 'happy with the support from their family. From the emotion management domain, the source of unhappiness among higher learning institutions employees is work process and procedure, as well as a financial commitment. Most of the respondents feel moderately happy and slightly unhappy (M=3.32) with the work process and procedure that they must do. 55.3% of the respondents (161) feel that the work process is too complicated and has a negative effect on their emotions. Some of the respondents complained about too much administrative work that must be done. This finding is parallel with Othman et al. (2018) research, which indicated one of the main sources of unhappiness

among employees is a complicated and vague administrative procedure. Therefore, the work processes and procedures need to be clear and easily understood by all employees. Employers need to avoid vague and complex standard operating procedures (SOPs) and instructions. The overall mean score for Emotion management is M=3.75 which indicates that there are many indicators that need to be approved to increase employees' happiness in the Malaysian higher learning institutions.

For the second domain of employees' happiness which is engagement, Table 5 portrays those respondents are moderately happy with the mean score of 3.43. It shows there is a lack of engagement in the higher learning institutions that cause unhappiness among employees.

Table 5
*Engagement Domain of Employees' Happiness*

| Item | Question | Mean | Item | Question | Mean |
|------|----------|------|------|----------|------|
| E1 | Financial claim process in institution | 3.46 | E8 | File system | 3.22 |
| E2 | Support from colleagues | 3.90 | E9 | Complain process and procedure | 3.20 |
| E3 | Management system in the organization | 3.16 | E10 | Opportunity to further study | 3.61 |
| E4 | Task divided between staff | 3.24 | E11 | Two-way communication with superior | 3.39 |
| E5 | Time given to complete tasks | 3.46 | E12 | Way superior motivate staff to work efficiently/effectively | 3.32 |
| E6 | Work instruction | 3.39 | E13 | Way superior encourage creativity in workplace | 3.38 |
| E7 | Flexible working hour | 3.92 | E14 | Superior professionalism | 3.37 |
| Overall mean value | | 3.43 | | | |

Source: Survey (2021)

The overall mean value of this domain is M=3.43 which suggests that respondents are moderately happy with the engagement in the workplace.The highest mean score for this domain is flexible working hours (M = 3.92). This illustrated that the majority of the respondents agreed with the flexible working hour arrangements in their workplace contributes to their happiness. Past research showed that employees' attitude towards flexible working hours were positive as this increased their work-life balance between their work and personal life (Sofiani & Supriatna, 2021). The second highest mean score is support from colleagues with 3.90. Some respondents claimed that supportive colleagues improves their productivity and happiness. This finding is in line with the previous research which

indicated that support from colleagues in the workplace positively correlated with job satisfaction and happiness (Merida-Lopez et al., 2018).

The items with lowest mean score is the respondents' feedback on the management system in the organization (3.16) followed by complaint process and procedure (3.20). It shows that the management of the organisations has to communicate more with the employee about the action that has been taken and be more transparent with the employee. There is also dissatisfaction with superiors' ways to motivate subordinates, instructions, communication, and professionalism. Table 5 indicates some of the respondents' narratives related to their dissatisfaction with their superiors.

Table 6
*Respondents' Narratives Against Their Superiors.*

| | |
|---|---|
| R1 | *Leader is not professional.* |
| | *Actions will be taken to those who lodged complaints on leader. Also threats.* |
| | *Leader is the source of the problem. The institution is okay.* |
| R17 | *The leader is not the superior but the head of department, thank you.* |
| R18 | *Leader did not listen to the opinions and views given by the subordinates.* |
| R21 | *Leader is selective and not professional.* |
| | *Leader is not supportive and professional.* |
| R30 | *Head of department only wants to listen to their own opinion and instruction. But when problem occurs, subordinates will be blamed. Always forgot the instructions that they gave and irresponsible towards the employees. As only want to save themselves.)* |
| | *Head of department should be more open in listening to others' opinion and not based on their emotion.* |
| R115 | *Leader should be more open-minded and not holding grudge to others.* |
| R143 | *Majority of the top management did not participate in the activities that they were asked to join. Superior always change their mind in regards to making decision. It is difficult to change the job status to permanent status. Those who have been working for a long time have difficulties in following the opinion of the new employee even though that young people is their leader.* |
| R170 | *Leader (management) only moves in one direction and does not bother to involve the other staff.* |
| R188 | *As leader, they should focus to all staf,f not only some of them; with the excuse of to maintain their KPI. Please remember that the achievement of the unit will not achieve if leader is bias and practice double standard in all units.* |
| | *KPI measures the work; formal or informal, it is a document that prove the works that have been done which has to be followed and obeyed. Remember both play their own role in their task; status and followers are not the guide that will make the leader to move forward with their best friends.* |

| | |
|---|---|
| R214 | *Stress with the clerical and course management workload (must follow MQA and MyRA standard) that is never ending. Each month and semester, we need to submit the progress to the leader of the responsibility centre (PTJ) and in the end all the documents will only be kept in the cabinet file. Not enough time for research and journal publication. At the end of the year, KPI performance allocated a lot of points for academic publication (journals, books etc) and the amount of research grant that we get. On the other words, all the times we are burdened with other tasks (clerical and others) but we are measured based on other criteria (publication, securing research grants and others) in which that we do not have enough time to focus on. This system is unfair and makes me not happy.)* |
| R233 | *Hope the leader can respect the staff's time by not giving ad hoc tasks and demand it to be completed in the limited time. Also not to give tasks during weekend as that weekends are the time for staff to rest and spend quality time with family.* |
| R235 | *Demand the leader to be more professional in communication and executing the tasks.)* |
| R263 | *When making a decision, leaders should see its importance to the organisation and staff.* |

Source: Employee's Happiness of Higher Institution Questionnaire (2021)

These narratives describe the employees' dissatisfaction against their superiors such as unprofessional superiors' behavior, superiors' biased decision making, discrimination in work delegation, and superiors' weakness in managing their negative emotions. According to Khairunesa et al (2019), employees expected their leaders to have a good character, adopt a transformative leadership style, be considerate, be unselfish, and be sensitive about the welfare of the employees. A leader who likes to show off, seeks fame, and yells to subordinates found to affect their employees' happiness. The study also shows the respondents want their leaders to be good listeners. The item with the highest mean score in this domain is the support from a colleague in the workplace (M=3.9) whereby (76%) 221 respondents are happy with the support that they have received from their colleague. Most of the past research also agreed that the relationship among colleagues gives the highest impact to the employee's happiness (Kodithuwakku et al., 2017; Mousa et al., 2020; Tsuchiya, 2020; Pangarso, 2019; Setiyowati & Irtaji, 2017).

The third domain of employees' happiness has eleven (11) items such as career achievement, recognition, and career development as stated in Table 7.

Table 7
*Achievement Domain of the Employees' Happiness*

| Item | Question | Mean | Item | Question | Mean |
|------|----------|------|------|----------|------|
| A1 | Career achievement | 3.75 | A7 | Opportunity to get the research grant | 4.03 |
| A2 | Recognition toward work achievement | 3.38 | A8 | Opportunity to do a publication | 4.04 |
| A3 | Career development in organization | 3.37 | A9 | Opportunity to attend a conference | 3.97 |
| A4 | KPI (Key Performance Index) | 3.48 | A10 | Ability to work in time given | 3.73 |
| A5 | Promotion opportunity | 3.18 | A11 | Student's academic achievement | 4.09 |
| A6 | Implementation of job performance appraisal | 3.22 | Overall mean value | | 3.66 |

Source: Employee's Happiness of Higher Institution Questionnaire (2021)

Table 7 indicates the lowest mean which is related to promotion opportunity (mean value = 3.18) portrays dissatisfaction among the employees on the promotion process. There is also dissatisfaction related to job performance appraisal (mean value = 3.22), career development (mean value = 3.37) and word recognition (mean value = 3.38). The 56.3% (164) respondents moderately happy and slightly unhappy show that there is less opportunity in terms of promotion provided by the organization. The highest item that gives a positive impact on the respondents' happiness is the student's academic achievement with a mean M=4.09, 67.7% (197). Most of the respondents are lecturers; therefore, the student's achievement is one of the factors that brings satisfaction and happiness to them. This finding is parallel with a study on teachers in Ramhormoz city and Hungarian teachers (Arora, 2020; Jalali & Heidari, 2016; Kun & Gadanecz, 2019; Zakaria et al., 2021).

> English translation
> *Lack of recognition in teamwork. Self-centeredness among academics is becoming worse every day. Sometimes, the top management did not show appreciation to the ideas given by the subordinates. The truth is, without the subordinates, the superior will fail to complete the task. The boss should put away the feeling of being ashamed to 'pretend that they did not know' so that they will not take the subordinates' ideas and 'forget' to show appreciation to them. Therefore, those who hold the top management positions in the higher education organisations are supposed to attend leadership courses to learn the importance of implementation of teamwork in the workplace (R95).*

From narratives received at the open-ended questions section, Respondent 95 felt that there is a lack of recognition in group work. R95 believed most academicians are self-centered and the top management usually fails to recognize subordinates' ideas and contributions. R95 suggested that all leaders in higher learning institutions need to attend leadership courses in order to learn about the importance of teamwork.

English translation:

*KPI that has been set to the branch campus is not reasonable because there are some lecturers in the branch campus who only teach servicing subjects. The chance to teach undergraduate and postgraduate students compared to the main campus or other branches is slim or there is no chance at all. Budget for conference/publication of the research paper also has been reduced. For years, the lecturers have had to use their own money to fulfil the university's KPI. Furthermore, the tough competition with other branch campuses makes the lecturers have difficulties securing research grants. The chance to get promoted is also unfair for the lecturers who teach servicing subjects in branch campus. These injustices are ignored by the superior (R108).*

Meanwhile, Respondent 108 felt that the current KPI is unreasonable and biased against certain lecturers who teach serving subjects. There is a lack of opportunity for general studies and servicing subject lecturers to surprise undergraduate and postgraduate students' research. These will jeopardize the opportunity to get a promotion.

In terms of the fourth domain that affects employees' happiness, fifteen (15) items have been identified such as health and safe environment and teaching and learning facilities as depicted in Table 8.

Table 8
*Workplace Infrastructure Domain of the Employees' Happiness*

| Item | Question | Mean | Item | Question | Mean |
|------|----------|------|------|----------|------|
| I1 | Health and safety environment | 3.64 | I9 | Attendance monitoring system | 3.51 |
| I2 | Teaching and learning facilities | 3.56 | I10 | Computer maintenance | 3.42 |
| 13 | Parking space | 3.53 | I11 | Vehicle service for official work | 3.58 |
| 14 | Working space | 3.55 | I12 | Communication system (internet and telephone line) | 3.56 |
| 15 | Recreation space and facilities | 3.30 | I13 | Online integration System. E.g., OLES, CMS, EP2P, HRMS and etc. | 3.60 |
| I6 | Café | 3.26 | I14 | Disable facility | 3.72 |
| I7 | Toilet facilities | 3.48 | I15 | Childcare facility prepared | 4.30 |
| 18 | Printing services | 3.58 | Overall mean value | | 3.57 |

Source: Employee's Happiness of Higher Institution Questionnaire (2021)

The overall mean value of this domain is M=3.57 which shows that respondents are moderately happy with the workplace infrastructure. The highest mean is related to childcare facilities provided by the organisation with 4.30 which indicates high level of happiness. This follows by facilities for disables with mean score of 3.72. Item related to the health and safety

environment in the workplace (M=3.64), reports that 61.5% (179) respondents are happy with the workplace environment and safety. This finding is parallel with research done by Salas et al (2021) that concluded a positive work environment is good for emotion. Employees' safety in the workplace is one of the aspects in the Model for Action introduced by the World Health Organisation (WHO) for workers (Weziak-bialowolska et al., 2020). In addition, the level of happiness among employees on recreation space and facilities (M=3.30), computer maintenance (M=3.42), and toilet facilities (M=3.48) are at moderate levels. These facilities are important as it correlates with employees' productivity and boost their morale and emotion when sufficiently provided (Mbazor, 2021). The lowest item is about the cafeteria in the university or institute (M=3.26), whereby 61.2 % (137) respondents are not happy with the cafeteria in their workplace.

The last main domain of employees' happiness is gratitude. The overall mean for component gratitude is M=4.27 which indicates most of the respondents agree with all ten (10) items. Most employees believe that their work is an act of worship. The higher gratitude toward their job, the more employees feel happy. The lowest mean score in this domain is employees' gratitude towards their superior's support (M = 3.9). This is due to the employees' dissatisfaction in the engagement domain as discussed earlier.

Table 9
*Gratitude Domain of the Employees' Happiness*

| Item | Question | Mean | Item | Question | Mean |
|------|----------|------|------|----------|------|
| G1 | Opportunity to work | 4.41 | G6 | Consider work as an act of worship. | 4.55 |
| G2 | Ability contribute | 4.29 | G7 | Sincere in perform work. | 4.39 |
| G3 | Good relationship with a colleague | 4.22 | G8 | Support from colleagues when needed. | 4.29 |
| G4 | Ability to motivate a colleague | 4.14 | G9 | Strength and health are given to work. | 4.37 |
| G5 | Ability to perform work as a sign of love toward the organization. | 4.15 | G10 | Support from superior. | 3.91 |
| Overall mean value | | | 4.27 | | |

Source: Employee's Happiness of Higher Institution Questionnaire (2021)

The findings in Table 9 are similar to studies conducted by Tsuchiya et al. (2018) whereby the main factor of employees' happiness in Malaysia is their gratitude. Here, it showcases a strong spiritual intelligence that belief in God and to be thankful will gain blessing from God. Some of the narratives in the open-ended questions stated;

> English translation:
> *Work is about trust and act of worship. Hopefully Allah will reward us with kindness for all the good deeds that we do in this job (R90).*
> English translation:
> *I am grateful because I still have a permanent job in this pandemic era (R16).*

Respondent 90 believed daily work is an act of worship and hoped that God will bless and repay all the good deeds while performing the tasks given. Similar to Respondent 16 that felt thankful for still being able to work during this COVID-19 pandemic. To date, the unemployment rate in Malaysia has increased from 3.31% in the year 2019 to 4.55% in the year 2020.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**
The study showed that the factors that contribute to the happiness of higher learning institution employees are the relationship with a family member, the support from colleagues, students' achievement, health, safe work environment, and gratitude feeling toward the job. The sources of unhappiness are mainly related to the work process, lack of recognition, and superiors' misconduct. Therefore, there are three recommendations to enhance the employees' happiness in the Malaysian higher learning institutions.

The first recommendation is that the organization has to ensure, every work process and procedure such as the claim process, teaching and learning process, and administrative procedures are helping the employees and not burdening them. The organization has to ensure that all employees have a clear understanding of the purpose of each process and procedure that they have to do. The employees will feel happy and willing to do it if they know the importance of the tasks given. The second recommendation is that the superiors need to put effort into building a positive culture and environment for the employees. Superiors have to ensure the employees feel valued in the organization and are always sensitive to employees' needs and challenges. It is important to strengthen the superior-subordinates relationships and be able to professionally motivate the employees to perform well in their tasks. Increased engagement between the employees and organization goals only can be accomplished by good communication and leadership.

The third recommendation is to improve infrastructure particularly the cafeteria, recreational facility, computer maintenance as well as toilets. It is also employees' hope that each organization will ensure a childcare center available at all higher learning institutes. By providing a childcare center in the workplace can give many benefits to the organization such as increasing morale, reducing stress, reducing employee turnover, and increasing the happiness level of employees, etc. In conclusion, the happiness level of the higher learning institution is at a moderate level of happiness whereby the sources of happiness are the relationship with family members, the support from colleagues, students' achievement, health, and gratitude. However, the main sources of the employees' unhappiness are the organization's engagement especially due to superiors' bias, self-centric and unprofessional leadership.

Therefore, it is pertinent to conduct further studies on this subject matter, especially comparative analysis between few institutions to identify the best practices in enhancing employees' happiness. It is also helpful to specifically analyse which category is having better happiness level and identify the factors behind it.

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