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From fragment to framework: An integrative literature review of workplace happiness

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper aims to explore the conceptualization of workplace happiness using an integrative literature review. Despite the surge in scientific publications on workplace happiness, there has been no consensus in defining and conceptualizing the construct due to the diversity of terms used to describe it. This gap has resulted in a fragmented approach to understanding and developing strategies around workplace happiness within organizations.

Methodology: A comprehensive search of the Scopus and Web of Science databases was conducted to identify articles published in English between 2000 and 2024. The PRISMA framework was employed for data retrieval, screening, and organization to ensure a systematic and rigorous selection of relevant studies. An integrative literature review methodology was utilized to analyze and synthesize findings across various disciplines and fields of study. Seminal works on workplace happiness were identified and examined to develop a comprehensive understanding of workplace happiness and its key dimensions.

Findings: The study identified a diversity of terms and perspectives used to describe workplace happiness, reflecting its multifaceted nature. Consequently, the paper proposes a comprehensive definition of workplace happiness and introduces a multidimensional conceptual framework integrating key dimensions: job satisfaction, employee engagement, affective commitment, and subjective well-being. The findings emphasize the importance of a unified framework guiding research and practice in workplace happiness.

Implications: The proposed definition and conceptual framework in this review have significant implications for theory, research, and organizational practice. By addressing conceptual ambiguities, the framework establishes a foundation for future research while providing valuable theoretical and practical insights for organizations aiming to enhance employee well-being.

Keywords: Workplace, happiness, workplace happiness, employee engagement, job satisfaction, subjective wellbeing, integrative literature review

Introduction

The study of happiness, particularly in the context of work, gained momentum in the late 1990s and early 2000s with the rise of Positive Psychology which emphasizes the promotion of positive experiences, personal well-being, and institutions that enhance happiness [1]. This shift has profoundly influenced the concept of workplace happiness, which has become a strategic priority for organizations, as research shows that happy workers are more dynamic, proactive, engaged, and resilient, leading to higher performance and productivity [2, 3]. This direct impact on employee effectiveness strengthens the alignment between workplace happiness and organizational success, reinforcing its importance as a key driver of business growth and sustainability [4, 5].

However, as organizations integrate workplace happiness into their strategies, two key challenges have emerged. The first involves defining workplace happiness, which despite growing research interest, remains fragmented and lacks a unified theoretical framework due to diverse interpretations and conceptualizations [6]. This challenge is further compounded by the varied terminologies used to describe workplace happiness, leading to inconsistencies in measurement and interpretation [7, 8]. Another challenge is the identification of key dimensions that constitute workplace happiness. Scholars often conceptualize workplace happiness as a multidimensional construct encompassing job satisfaction, employee engagement, and affective commitment [9, 10].

These interrelated dimensions add to the complexity of workplace happiness, making it difficult to establish a standardized measurement framework ^[11].

To effectively address these challenges and achieve a clear understanding of the concept of workplace happiness, this study employs an integrative literature review. This approach is particularly suited for synthesizing knowledge on emerging topics, as it allows for the integration of diverse perspectives and the generation of new insights ^[12]. Given that the field of workplace happiness within business management is relatively young and rapidly evolving ^[13], an integrative literature review provides a comprehensive framework to consolidate existing research and offer a coherent conceptualization of workplace happiness ^[14].

Despite numerous systematic and bibliometric reviews analyzing various facets of workplace happiness, the field remains conceptually fragmented ^[15]. For instance, while ^[16] focused exclusively on the impact of happiness on productivity, they neglected other important dimensions such as employee well-being and job satisfaction. Similarly, ^[6, 17] conducted bibliometric analyses to determine the current status of workplace happiness, but their studies were limited to quantitative aspects and relied on a single database ^[7, 18]. Both conducted comprehensive systematic literature reviews that explored the current status of workplace happiness, including major themes, theoretical frameworks, antecedents, and consequences. However, their data were also constrained to specific databases, limiting the breadth of their analyses and integration of the diverse perspectives necessary for developing a new conceptual framework.

To address these gaps, this study synthesizes diverse perspectives through an integrative literature review, consolidating fragmented research into a comprehensive conceptual framework. By integrating insights from existing literature, this study offers a structured understanding of the construct, serving as a foundation for future theoretical foundations.

Research Methodology

The literature review method was chosen as it is an accepted strategy for summarizing literature around a concept or phenomenon, and it demonstrates the growth of knowledge and provides thorough clarity of concepts, variables, and related situations within a particular domain ^[19, 20]. For this study, the methodology of an integrative literature review, as outlined by ^[12] is followed. The integrative literature review is a distinctive form of research that generates new knowledge about the topic reviewed. It reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated ^[21].

To ensure a comprehensive and reliable literature review, this study adhered to the PRISMA guidelines ^[22], as shown in Figure 1 for retrieval, screening, and organization of data. To minimize bias in data retrieval two different databases Web of Science and Scopus were chosen. Web of Science is recognized for its extensive coverage of high-quality research, while Scopus is the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature ^[16, 23].

The initial search was conducted using the query terms “Workplace Happiness” and “Happiness at Work,” with a

timeframe from 2000 to 2024 retrieved items containing the string in the document title, keywords, or abstract. This search yielded 106 results from Web of Science and 343 results from Scopus. To refine the search, specific inclusion criteria were applied: only journal articles published in English, categorized as either empirical studies or literature reviews, and within the field of business management were selected. This refinement reduced the number of relevant articles to 87 from Web of Science and 109 from Scopus.

Subsequently, an initial pruning analysis was performed by reviewing the titles and abstracts of the selected articles. Initial efforts were made to identify all empirical and significant theoretical articles within the dataset. Only those studies that specifically focused on the conceptualization of workplace happiness or on the origin and development of the concept, or empirical papers that discussed the dimensions or constructs used to measure workplace happiness, were included, resulting in 18 documents from Web of Science and 37 from Scopus. After removing duplicate entries, the final set of articles for in-depth analysis comprised 45 documents.

The next section outlines the methodology, detailing the search strategy, data extraction, and analysis processes. This is followed by the findings section, where definitions and key dimensions proposed by various scholars are critically analyzed and synthesized. The discussion section introduces a comprehensive definition and a conceptual framework to enhance understanding. Finally, the study synthesizes these insights, presents a refined model, and discusses its theoretical contributions, practical implications, and future research directions.

Findings

In this section, the 45 documents identified after the final analysis are used to explore the conceptualization of workplace happiness. This exploration begins with a summary of the historical context of the concept, followed by a critical analysis of its definitions and dimensionality.

Evolution of Workplace Happiness

The concept of workplace happiness has evolved from early discussions on psychological well-being in motivation to a multidimensional construct influencing both individual and organizational outcomes. Early research, including the Hawthorne Studies conducted by ^[24] and the Hierarchy of Needs pyramid introduced by ^[25], acknowledged the role of psychological factors in work but did not explicitly define workplace happiness. The emergence of positive psychology shifted the focus to subjective well-being, with scholars like ^[1, 26] emphasizing happiness as a key factor in engagement and motivation. Later, workplace happiness became strategically linked to performance, as ^[9] defined it through job satisfaction, employee engagement, and affective commitment, while ^[27] demonstrated its impact on productivity. More recently, workplace happiness has been recognized beyond performance metrics, integrating dimensions such as Organizational Citizenship Behavior ^[10], Corporate Social Responsibility ^[28], and sustainability-driven well-being initiatives. This shift reflects a growing emphasis on ethical leadership, employee well-being, and pro-social behaviors, positioning workplace happiness as a socially responsible and holistic construct.

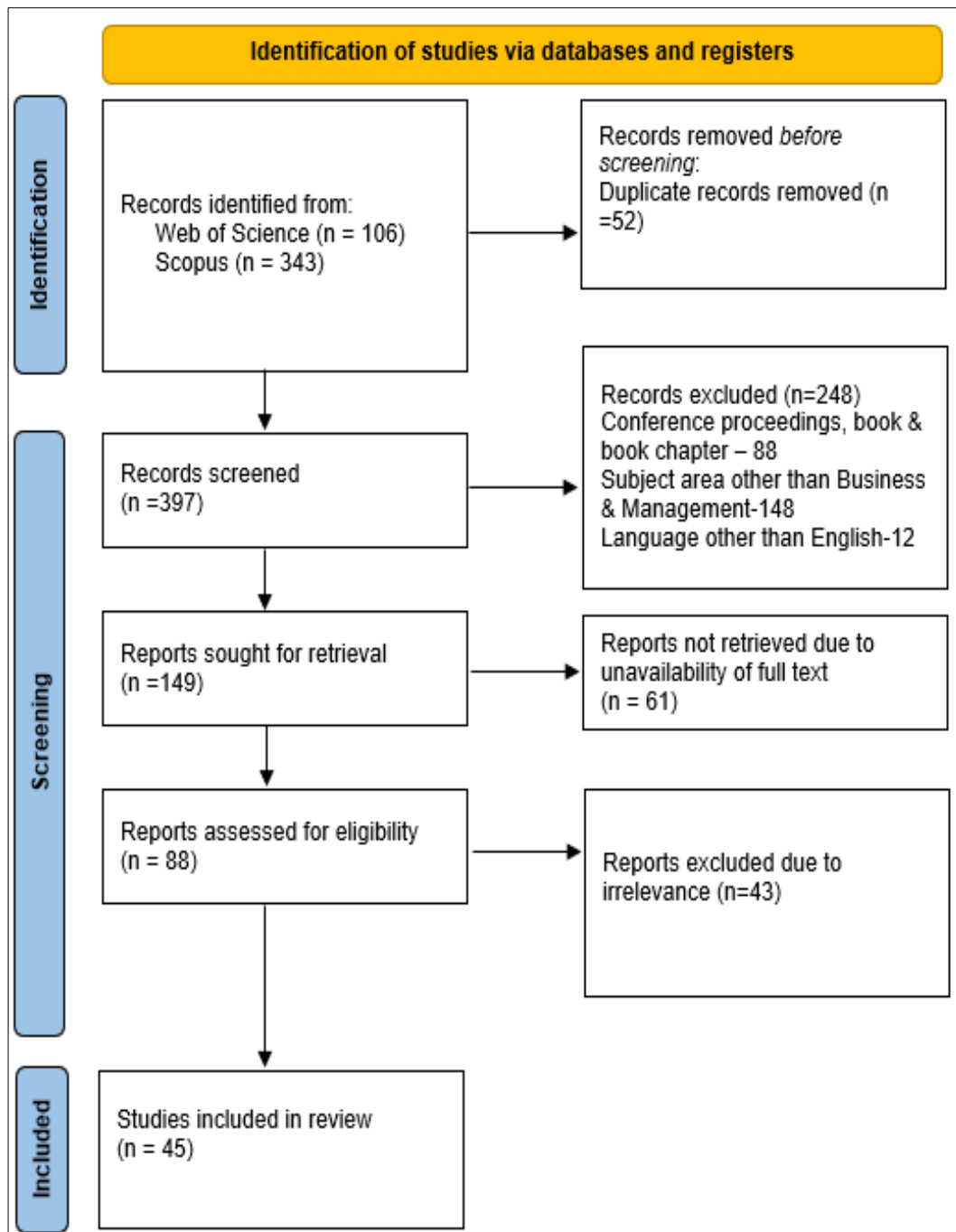


Fig 1: Data search and retrieval process using PRISMA Framework

Concept of Workplace Happiness

As workplace happiness has evolved, scholars have attempted to define it from various perspectives, leading to a diversity of conceptualizations. While increasingly recognized as a critical factor in organizational success (29), workplace happiness remains a concept that is both widely discussed and variably defined. In this section, we will examine key definitions of workplace happiness proposed by various scholars in the identified work of workplace happiness, as presented in Table 1.

Scholars like [30, 31] emphasize subjective well-being, focusing on individual satisfaction with work and life. While this captures the personal nature of happiness, it tends to overlook the dynamic and social dimensions of the

workplace [32]. Attempt to bridge this gap by considering both positive and negative experiences, but their approach still largely situates happiness within the realm of subjective well-being. On the other hand, [9] and [10] offer definitions that incorporate emotional and cognitive attitudes towards the job and organization, with Fisher's work being particularly influential for its comprehensive framework. However, these definitions risk oversimplifying the complex nature of workplace happiness by focusing primarily on feelings or attitudes [27]. Introduce the idea of happiness as a mindset or state of mind to enhance the potential and performance of the employees. Yet, these definitions can be too narrow or even caution against an overemphasis on positivity.

Table 1: Definition of Workplace Happiness

S. No.	Citation	Definition of Workplace Happiness	Critical Evaluation
	(Bhattacharjee & Bhattacharjee, 2010) ^[30]	“Happiness at the workplace refers to an individual’s work and life satisfaction, or subjective well-being at the workplace”	This definition highlights both work and life satisfaction with an emphasis on subjective well-being but lacks a clear consideration of the specific factors that contribute to workplace happiness.
	(Fisher, 2010) ^[9]	“Happiness at the workplace is happy feelings towards the job itself, the job characteristics, and the organization as a whole.”	This definition offers a comprehensive workplace-centric view of happiness; however, it focuses solely on workplace factors, neglecting individual subjective well-being and emotional aspects.
	(Wesarat <i>et al.</i> , 2014) ^[31]	“Happiness at the workplace refers to how satisfied people are with their work and lives. The idea of happiness is related to an individual’s subjective well-being.”	The definition emphasizes satisfaction and individual subjective well-being at work but overlaps with previous definitions, and lacks a unique perspective.
	(Jessica Pryce-Jones <i>et al.</i> , 2014) ^[27]	“It is a mindset which enables action to maximize performance and achieve potential	It focuses on performance and maximizing potential but overlooks workplace factors and the individual's well-being aspect.
	(Salas-Vallina, Alegre, <i>et al.</i> , 2017) ^[10]	“Happiness at work can be considered as an attitude, as it is a way of feeling about something that precedes a behavior.”	Explores the attitudinal aspects of workplace happiness but does not clarify the specific organizational and individual constituents of workplace happiness.
	(S. Singh & Aggarwal, 2018) ^[32]	“Happiness is an experience of subjective well-being at work reflected through a high amount of positive individual (e.g., highly valuing one’s work, feeling engaged to work) and organizational (e.g., providing supportive work environment) experiences and low amount of negative individual and organizational experiences.”	The definition offers a holistic view by incorporating both individual and organizational aspects of subjective well-being but lacks clarity on negative experiences and overlooks the dynamic and evolving nature of workplace happiness.

Source (s): Author's creation

Dimensionality of Workplace Happiness

Workplace happiness is widely acknowledged as a multifaceted concept (Fisher, 2010). Its subjective nature presents significant challenges in developing standardized measurement instruments. Due to the complexity of the construct, scholars have adopted various approaches to assess happiness within the workplace context, often employing different scales to capture its dimensions. Among the 45 articles reviewed, 33 are empirical studies that utilize either unidimensional or multidimensional scales to measure workplace happiness, as summarized in Table 2.

A critical review of all the empirical studies reveals that some scholars have examined workplace happiness without identifying specific dimensions, focusing instead on conceptualizing happiness as a whole. They often measure workplace happiness using single-item questions. For instance ^[33], in their empirical study "Motivating Job Characteristics and Happiness at Work: A Multilevel Perspective," used the question, "How happy did you feel during this activity or task?" to assess happiness. While this approach captures real-time emotional states, it overlooks long-term and multidimensional aspects of workplace happiness, increasing the risk of response bias. As a result, it is unsuitable for guiding long-term organizational strategies, which require comprehensive, multi-dimensional assessments for a more stable and holistic understanding of workplace happiness.

Some studies have adapted scales traditionally used to measure general happiness for application in an organizational context to assess workplace happiness. For instance ^[34, 35], employed the Subjective Happiness Scale by ^[36] while ^[37] utilized the Oxford Happiness Inventory developed by ^[38] to measure workplace happiness. These scales measure the overall life happiness of individuals instead of measuring the happiness of individuals in the context of work and workplace. As a result, they may not

fully capture the nuanced experiences, job-related emotions, and organizational dynamics that contribute to workplace happiness.

Recognizing the multidimensional nature of workplace happiness ^[9], proposed a framework that conceptualizes happiness at work as a dynamic construct that cannot be measured using a single dimension. Her model incorporates three work-specific constructs: Job Satisfaction, Affective Commitment, and Work Engagement. These constructs capture the emotional impact of work, workplace sentiments, and evaluative assessments of job factors. Following ^[9] conceptualization, several scholars have adopted multidimensional models to measure workplace happiness, as evidenced in Table 2. The key dimensions of workplace happiness identified in these studies are discussed in the subsequent section.

Subjective wellbeing

Subjective well-being refers to individuals' evaluation of their own lives, encompassing pleasant emotions ^[2, 26]. As a multidimensional construct that integrates both optimal functioning and subjective experiences, subjective well-being plays a crucial role in shaping employees' overall happiness within workplace contexts ^[17]. It is often regarded as the scientific study of happiness and serves as a key measure of hedonic well-being, assessing individuals' perceptions of wellness through cognitive and affective dimensions. In organizational behavior research, the concept of happiness is frequently used interchangeably with SWB, highlighting their shared emphasis on positive experiences and overall life satisfaction ^[39].

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is one of the most frequently examined constructs in relation to workplace happiness, often studied as either an independent or dependent variable in

organizational research [9]. It is generally understood as the pleasurable emotional state individuals experience when they positively evaluate their work [40]. Increasingly, job satisfaction is recognized as a critical factor in organizational settings, as it enhances employee productivity and commitment and contributes to overall life satisfaction. Research suggests that employees who experience greater job satisfaction are more likely to exhibit higher levels of happiness, adaptability, competence, and openness—qualities that benefit both their professional growth and the organization as a whole [41-43].

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is the complete dedication of employees toward their work. It is characterized as a dynamic and positive mental state in which individuals actively strive toward their goals and aspirations, exhibiting work-related energy, commitment, and deep involvement [44]. Engaged employees, characterized by their dedication

and commitment, promote happiness and well-being at work, ultimately fostering a positive work environment and driving favorable outcomes [45, 46].

Affective Commitment

Affective commitment is the dimension of organizational commitment most closely associated with workplace happiness, as it reflects an employee’s emotional attachment to and identification with the organization [9, 47]. This form of commitment is particularly strong when employees feel a deep sense of belonging and consider themselves an integral part of the organizational community [48]. Describes affective commitment as "the essence of organizational commitment," highlighting its significance in fostering positive workplace experiences. Furthermore, research indicates that affective commitment serves as a protective factor, buffering the negative effects of work-related stress, mitigating health issues, and enhancing overall happiness and well-being in the workplace [49].

Table 2: Dimensions of Workplace Happiness

S. No.	Dimensions	References
1.	Job Satisfaction	Al-Taie 2023, Cardon & Wong 2024, Fitriana <i>et al</i> 2022, Mousa <i>et al</i> 2020, Salas-Vallina, Alegre, <i>et al</i> 2017, Salas-Vallina, López-Cabrales, <i>et al</i> 2017, S. Singh & Aggarwal 2018, Wulandari <i>et al</i> 2024, Hosie <i>et al</i> 2012
2.	Engagement	Al-Taie 2023, Cardon & Wong 2024, Fitriana <i>et al</i> 2022, Mousa <i>et al</i> 2020, Salas-Vallina, Alegre, <i>et al</i> 2017, Salas-Vallina, López-Cabrales, <i>et al</i> 2017, S. Singh & Aggarwal 2018, Wulandari <i>et al</i> 2024, Tandler <i>et al</i> 2020, Mathias <i>et al</i> 2019, Joo & Lee, 2017
3.	Affective Commitment	Al-Taie 2023, Cardon & Wong 2024, Fitriana <i>et al</i> 2022, Mousa <i>et al</i> 2020, Salas-Vallina, Alegre, <i>et al</i> 2017, Salas-Vallina, López-Cabrales, <i>et al</i> 2017, S. Singh & Aggarwal 2018
4.	Job-related affective wellbeing	Yap & Badri, 2020, Hosie <i>et al</i> 2012
5.	Subjective wellbeing	Joo & Lee, 2017
6.	Organizational Commitment	Harrison <i>et al.</i> , 2006
7.	Meaningful work	Tandler <i>et al</i> 2020
8.	Subjective Happiness	Kun & Gadanez, 2022
9.	Pleasure	Tandler <i>et al</i> 2020,
10.	Social Relationship	Kun & Gadanez, 2022

Source: Author’s Creation

Discussion

The literature review (Table 1) highlights the diverse definitions of workplace happiness, each emphasizing different aspects of the concept. This variation reinforces that workplace happiness is a multifaceted construct [6, 9], conceptualized from multiple perspectives. Some scholars focus on subjective well-being, others on the emotional experiences of individuals at work, while some emphasize intrinsic motivation. These differing viewpoints, shaped by disciplinary and temporal contexts, contribute to conceptual fragmentation, potentially leading to misinterpretations of the construct. To address this gap, a critical evaluation and synthesis of existing definitions, alongside an analysis of the evolution of workplace happiness, provide a foundation for a more comprehensive perspective. Accordingly, this study proposes the following definition of workplace happiness: "Workplace happiness is a state of subjective well-being marked by a positive attitude toward work and the workplace, encompassing job satisfaction, emotional attachment to the organization, active engagement, and a sense of fulfillment and thriving."

This definition reflects the multidimensional nature of workplace happiness by integrating emotional well-being,

engagement, job satisfaction, and affective commitment. It also positions subjective well-being as a core component, recognizing the influence of positive emotions and life satisfaction on workplace happiness. This perspective signifies the crucial role of employees’ personal experiences and perceptions in shaping their overall well-being at work.



Fig 2: Conceptual model of Workplace happiness

Based on a critical synthesis of existing literature, this study develops a conceptual model of workplace happiness shown in Figure 2, integrating key dimensions to provide a more holistic perspective. The model integrates key dimensions identified through a comprehensive literature review, offering a holistic understanding of workplace happiness. Expanding on Fisher's (2010) framework, it incorporates subjective well-being alongside job satisfaction, employee engagement, and affective commitment, providing a more comprehensive perspective. The inclusion of subjective well-being extends workplace happiness beyond task-related aspects, capturing the broader emotional and psychological dimensions that bridge personal and professional experiences. Unlike job satisfaction and engagement, which focus on specific work-related factors, subjective well-being encompasses overall mental health and emotional fulfillment, highlighting its growing significance in contemporary organizations as a critical component of employee well-being.

Conclusion

Workplace happiness is a complex and multifaceted construct with overlapping dimensions, making it challenging to define and measure. To address this conceptual ambiguity, this study employs an integrative literature review to systematically analyze and conceptualize workplace happiness. Through an extensive review of existing literature retrieved from the Scopus database, this study identifies key dimensions of workplace happiness and proposes a comprehensive working definition. Additionally, it extends (9) model by incorporating subjective well-being alongside job satisfaction, employee engagement, and affective commitment. This extension provides a more holistic framework that captures both individual and organizational aspects of workplace happiness.

However, this research also carries some limitations. Due to the inclusion criteria, numerous studies were excluded from the review, resulting in a relatively small sample size of 45 articles. Additionally, our review was confined to studies published between 2000 and 2023, which may have led to the exclusion of significant research outside of this time frame. Another limitation is the reliance on Scopus and Web of Science databases, which, while comprehensive, may have led to the omission of relevant studies from other academic sources.

Implications for Future Research

This study proposes an emergent working definition and dimensions for measuring workplace happiness, offering key theoretical and practical insights by integrating multiple perspectives. Given its multidimensional nature, future studies should focus on empirically validating the framework across diverse organizational and cultural contexts to establish its generalizability. Furthermore, based on the proposed conceptual model, a standardized measurement scale should be developed to incorporate both work-related and personal well-being factors, ensuring a comprehensive assessment of workplace happiness. Additionally, future research should explore the causal relationships between workplace happiness and key organizational outcomes such as productivity, employee retention, and innovation to enhance theoretical understanding and inform organizational strategies.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research paper. No financial, professional, or personal relationships have influenced the findings, interpretations, or conclusions presented in this study.

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