Events Causing Happiness among Thai Factory Workers: A Case Study of Thai Toray Textile Mills Company

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research investigated the actual causes of happiness in the workplace via interviews. Eleven workers, of Thai Toray Textile Mills Company volunteered with permission of their supervisors, were key informants of this study. The results showed that four areas of events caused workers to feel happy: 1) events experienced with colleagues, good relationships with colleagues, being generous to colleagues, and creating humor at work; 2) events related to supervisors, concern for subordinates, and helping subordinates; 3) events related to the work environment; and 4) events related to subordinates, not exploiting others, optimism, attaining achievements, receiving more benefits than others, supporting others, participating in amusing activities, having good children, having good partnerships, concern for the family, having the chance to own a house, saving money for retirement, earning money to pay for the higher education of their children, and taking a rest after retirement.

Keywords: factory workers, happiness
INTRODUCTION

Emotion in organizations is a fascinating field to study. In recent years it has captured the imagination of a remarkable range of thinkers and scientists, from psychologists, sociologists, and management theories, to neuroscientists, biologists, philosophers, anthropologists, and historians (Fineman, 2003). It has become accepted that human emotions are an important factor within organizations. However, organizations recognizing the potential power of emotions, attempt to suppress, hide, or manage feelings (Bolton, 2005).

Emotions affect decision-making. For example, angry individuals looked earlier toward heuristic cues, whereas sad individuals did not show such bias (Xing, 2009), and emotion was a determining factor in the assessment of value when participants were involved in decision making (Sokol-Hessner, 2010).

Emotions relate to motivation in two ways. First, emotions serve as an ongoing ‘readout’ system for indicating how well or how poorly things are going. Joy, for instance, signals progress toward goals and social inclusion, whereas distress signals failure and loss. Secondly, emotions are a type of motive. Like all motives (for example, needs and cognitions), emotions energize and direct behavior. Anger, for example, mobilizes physiological, hormonal, and muscular resources (that is, it energizes behavior) to achieve a particular goal or purpose, such as overcoming an obstacle (that is, it directs behavior) (Reeve, 2001).

The organizational perspective of emotion is twofold. First, it places people at the very centre of the organization—they constitute the organization, what it is and what it can achieve. Secondly, it reveals emotion as the prime medium through which people act and interact. Organizational procedures and processes are shaped, negotiated, rejected, reformed, fought over, or celebrated, because of feelings. Careers blossom or crash as a result of feelings. Offices and departments grow, mature, and change around the feelings that frame preferences, policies, and ambitions. Those who work hard, seem not to care, or rarely take the initiative, do so based on emotions. Organizations change or stagnate because of the emotions that energize or freeze people. All organizations are emotional arenas where feelings shape events, and events shape feelings (Fineman, 2003). Emotions arise in response to events that are important to individual’s concerns (Frijda, 2007). Stein and Trabasso (1992) stressed the four emotions of happiness, sadness, anger, and fear, which reflected reactions to the four goals of attainment, loss, obstruction, and fear, respectively. This qualitative research aimed to investigate the actual causes of happiness of Thai workers in the workplace.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Events causing a happy response in people

Happiness is linked to the goals or sub-goals being achieved (Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 1987). Happiness involves making reasonable progress toward the realization of a goal (Lazarus, 1991). Happy people have more satisfying social relationships (Diener & Seligman, 2002). Individuals who are sociable, optimistic, altruistic, curious, and open to new experiences report higher levels of happiness (Larsen & Buss, 2002). Having a sense of meaning in life (for example, spiritual beliefs, or helping others as a volunteer) is correlated with happiness (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Snyder, Clary, & Stukas, 2000). Ballas and Dorling (2007) found that major life events such as starting a new relationship, employment-related gains, becoming pregnant, starting a new course, graduating from university, passing exams, or buying a new house all have an effect on happiness. Brickman, Coates and Janoff-Bulman (1978) found that recent lottery winners are often no happier than control participants and are no happier than they were before they won. Some lottery winners spend their prize money responsibly in order to project
moderate, non-luxury consumption, and they are ‘rewarded’ by feelings of fortune, security, and happiness (Hedenus, 2011). The emotional reactions of the Norwegian lottery winners to actually winning were few, aside from moderate happiness and relief (Eckblad, & von der Lippe, 1994).

In organizations, successes that people can attribute to their own skill and effort contribute to happiness (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). Accomplishments achieved as part of a group effort make people happier (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000).

Results from research in Thailand revealed income, size, location of industries (Intadod, 2007), and the perception of safety in working (Jittavikul, 2011) affected happiness at work. There were positive relationships between family relationships (Promprasert, 2011), employee-supervisor relationship (Jittavikul, 2011), work-motivation, social support, organizational commitment (Suddee, 2007), healthy work environments, work characteristics (Hansomsakul, 2007), income sufficiency, perceived physical health status, quality of work life (Kamnil, 2008), organizational citizenship behavior, organizational participation needs (Intadod, 2007), and happiness or joy at work.

**Theoretical background**

The cognitive-appraisal theory of emotion links to the cognitive processes of evaluation of meaning, causal attribution, and the assessment of coping capabilities. Appraisals are “psychological representations of emotional significance” for the person experiencing the emotion (Clore & Ortony, 2000). Cognitive appraisals are the interpretations and meanings that we attach to sensory stimuli (Passer & Smith, 2007). Cognitive appraisal is based on many factors, including our perception of external events and the ways in which other people seem to respond to those events (Rathus, 2008). This theory also explains that different individuals can experience different emotions in response to the same event or stimulus (Roseman, 1984). Discrete emotions arise from the processes of evaluation of significant events and of attributions to the causes of those events (Parkinson & Manstead, 1992; Roseman, 1984; Scherer, 1999; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). For example, individuals varied in their emotions to the same experience of losing luggage. Moreover, research results revealed that the more the event was perceived, the more the individuals experienced emotions (Scherer & Ceschi, 1997). In particular, whether the process of evaluation is performed consciously or unconsciously, individuals assess the degree to which events are positive or negative, whether they impede or facilitate their goals, whether they are controllable or not, whether they are novel or familiar, and whether reactions to the event will be completely overwhelming or manageable (Niedenthal, Krauth-Gruber, & Ric, 2006).

Looking forward and reflecting back can also affect emotions. For example, workers may imagine themselves in a new event and might have certain expectations of what might occur from such an event. They might feel happiness and appraise it or, in contrast, feel fear and sadness (Fineman, 2003). The image of an upcoming vacation might make them feel happier whilst the memory of an unpleasant encounter might arouse feelings of anger (Passer & Smith, 2007).

The events that caused the emotional response of workers might be related to people who were workers, colleagues, supervisors, or customers. The events might be related to the work environment including factors such as machines, temperature, light, sound, music, color, and air flow, or to the environment outside the workplace such as a water pool and flowers, among others. Events may also be related to the conditions of the organization such as any organizational downsizing, the organization’s profit, and activities held by the organization. Moreover, the workers might recall events that had occurred in the past or perceive events expected to occur in the future. The events might be related to work, family, or other deciding
factors. The workers would make evaluations from events and emotional responses in the workplace.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study was a qualitative research and data were collected through interviews. The study was conducted in Thai Toray Textile Mills (Public) Co., Ltd which employed 699 workers of whom 42 worked in Bangkok, Thailand whereas the remaining 657 worked in Nakhon Pathom province which is approximately 50 kilometers south of Bangkok. The company operates a textile business involved with spinning, weaving, knitting, dyeing, and finishing. Products are divided into three categories: woven fabrics for uniforms using the 'Golden Eagle' and 'TETREX' trademarks, knitted fabrics for sportswear with the 'BONNY' trademark, and seat fabrics for cars.

The key informants for this study were 11 workers of the company who worked in Nakhon Pathom province, all of whom were happy in the workplace as revealed in the results of previous research (Chunin, 2011). They volunteered to be interviewed and were permitted by their supervisors to provide data. Their personal details were: 7 women and 4 men with an age range from 18 to 54 years, with 3 being the first child in the family, 4 were the second child, and 4 were the fourth to eighth child of the family. Of the sample, 4 of the employees were single and 7 were married. Among the married workers, 3 had a single child and 4 had two children. Among the 11 workers who provided significant data, 4 earned an income between 7,800 and 16,625 baht and had secondary education. 3 had graduated from high school, 1 had achieved a vocational certificate, 2 had achieved vocational diplomas and 1 had a bachelor’s degree. Of the 11 workers sampled, 8 did not have congenital diseases but 3 did, while 5 had worked for less than 5 years, 1 had worked for 8 years, and 5 had worked for more than 10 years. Six worked in the throwing department, 2 worked in the weaving department, 2 worked in the human resources (HR) department, and 1 worked in the technical department.

The questionnaire, piloted with three workers outside the sample, consisted of 12 open-ended questions.

Having identified the participants, the researcher sent their names to the HR department to secure consent for participation from the workers and supervisors. Upon receiving consent, the interviews were undertaken in June, 2012.

The researcher first familiarized the participants with the research and objectives of the study and participants were allowed to raise any doubts. They could also stop the interview at any time. The interview was conducted in a private room to ensure confidentiality and was recorded using a tape player.

Consent was obtained from all participants in the research project. For example, the objectives of the study were explained to key informants, who were debriefed thereafter. Participants were told that upon completion of the interview, the recorded compact disk would be erased for confidentiality. Content and thematic analyses were applied to data collected in this study.

**RESULTS**

The informants worked in an industrial factory and were acquainted with their colleagues and supervisors. These people were considered to be involved in the happiness of employees at the workplace as follows.

**Good relationship with the colleagues**

The workers and their colleagues could communicate by talking to one another. Sometimes they exchanged opinions. The subjects they talked about were related to both work and private matters. They might talk when they worked hard. The conversation might be in the form of brotherhood. The reactions between them were not argumentative and after the conversation, they understood one
another. The participants used the phrases “understand one another well”, “talk to one another well”, and “finish the conversation happily”. The mentioned events resulted in happiness among the employees in the workplace as proved by the interviews with Wat and Sorn:

“My colleagues make me happy. During hard work, we can talk to one another and understand one another well.” (Wat)

“Everyone has their own thoughts. But everything ends well. That’s OK. In the event of accidents, we don’t react aggressively. We work like brothers and sisters. We share everything. Our success makes us happy.” (Sorn)

**Being generous to the colleagues**

The workers shared things with colleagues such as food and pens. They might share some opinions or help with performing tasks, for example, help fixing broken machines and help pushing the tanks. The assistance happened automatically without request. When their colleagues needed help, the employees gave help immediately. These give-and-take actions showed the generosity among colleagues and resulted in the workers being happy in the workplace as shown in the interviews with Aom, Rat, Sarm, and Sorn:

“Sometimes the colleagues give me good advice and sometimes I give it in return.” (Aom)

“We share our snacks. We can borrow each other’s pens. We can help one another. When I don’t understand something at work, I can ask my colleagues. They can answer and help me complete the work.” (Rat)

“I ask for some help and they help me to complete the tasks. My colleagues always help me to do something. Like when I have to push the tanks, they often help me to push them. They help me to keep things neat. When they have a lot of work to do, I give them help as well.” (Sarm)

“When someone’s birthday comes, I pay for their birthday party. When it’s my turn, they do the same for me. Normally I buy some food to share with my colleagues. When the colleagues help me to do some hard tasks like watering or sweeping the road, I buy them some energy drinks, coffee or something in return for their generosity.” (Sorn)

**Creating some humor at work**

During work, the informants and their colleagues (4–5 people) talked humorously about the things they had experienced, especially the previous night when they had dinner together. They told stories and jokes to make each other laugh. This created humor among colleagues causing the workers to be happy in the workplace as shown in the interviews with Karn, Sart, and Sorn:

“Four colleagues share some amusing stories about their fashion sense, travel, and delicious food. Some stories relate to families or dirty jokes and make us laugh and we are all happy. During New Year festival, our boss buys us a meal. We eat a lot. We enjoy the time. We are 4-5 persons in all. When we come to work, we talk to one another about the meal and the songs we sang the night before” (Karn)

“We tease one another like touching the waist or surprising our colleagues. It's funny.” (Sart)

“We mostly talk about funny stories. Sometimes when a colleague tells me that he has been to a karaoke shop, I tease him and ask him whether he had some pretty girls to sit beside him or ask him if he has done any secret things. That’s funny.” (Sorn)

**Concern for subordinates**

The supervisors would dedicate their time to visit sick workers. Sometimes the supervisors were not able to visit, but when the workers came back to
work, the supervisors would ask about their illness. This made the workers know that the supervisors had concern for them. This would make the workers happy in the workplace as shown in the interviews with Soi and Sorn:

“When I was sick and had to undergo an operation for my tumor, my supervisor visited me. I was happy to know that he had concern for me. Although he was very busy, he dedicated his time to visit me. It was proof of his concern.” (Soi)

“He asks me when I am sick. I’m happy to know this. He asks about my symptoms and asks whether I have seen a doctor or not. I’m happy to know he is concerned.” (Sorn)

Helping subordinates
The supervisor might give advice, teach, or give money to help subordinates. This would make the workers happy at the workplace as shown in the interview with Aom:

“Sometimes when we are in trouble, our supervisor will protect us. He will give us advice. When we have family problems, he will help us solve the problems. He asks us what the problems are and suggests what to do. He sometimes gives us money when we need it.” (Aom)

Creating a good work environment
During work in the company buildings, the workers would have to interact with the internal and external environment of the buildings. The employees noticed that the air ventilation was good. For example, the fresh air could ventilate the buildings even though there were no air-conditioners except for electric fans in the buildings. Regarding the external environment, the workers suggested having a wastewater treatment system, birds, trees, and flowers. The company could develop clean and beautiful recreational gardens with fresh air for workers. These were good for general health and made the workers feel relaxed. Such a work environment made the workers happy in the workplace as shown in the interviews with Aoi and Aom:

“The wastewater is well-treated. The atmosphere is full of shady trees. The residence is also good. They are good for my body because they did not make me ill or toxicant. They also make me feel relaxed. I am happy to work here.” (Aoi)

“There are a lot of trees around the factory area. The view is very good. We can eat fruit from the trees. We can enjoy watching the trees and flowers with freshness.” (Aom)

Did not exploit others
The employees did not exploit others. Not eating meat and eating only vegetarian food made the workers happy in the workplace as shown in the interview with Aom:

“I try to pray, not to eat meat, and eat vegetarian food. It feels like making merit to animals. This makes me happy and forget suffering.” (Aom)

Optimism
The workers thought of good things only. They did not care for things that had not yet occurred. They focused only on today. This showed that the workers were optimistic. This made the workers happy in the workplace as shown in the interviews with Aom and Sart:

“I try to think of good things only. If we think negatively, we shall suffer. Something which hasn’t occurred yet should not be dwelt upon. We should think of good things only so that we can be happy.” (Aom)

“I try to be optimistic and try to think positively. I try to hope that no machine will break today. I come to work happily.” (Sart)

Attaining achievements
The events which made the workers feel they had succeeded, both related to work, like
repairing broken machines to function well again or completing the work assigned by the supervisors, and non-related to work, like playing games successfully. These events caused the workers to be happy in the workplace as shown in the interviews with Sarm:

“When the supervisor gives orders, I always do as he assigns. I complete the assignments before sending them to other departments. There are no mistakes. The assignments are finished successfully and I’m always happy.” (Sarm)

**Receiving more benefits than others**

The workers were happy when they received more salary than others or received bonuses after their performance had been assessed by their supervisors. Receiving a salary and bonuses higher than others caused the workers to be happy in the workplace as shown in the interview with Sorn:

“This year when the company sees that my performance is good and I always work hard, I’ll receive bonuses at the end of the year. My salary is a little higher than the others and my bonus is also a little higher. This makes me happy. The more I receive, the happier I am.” (Sorn)

**Supporting others**

The workers thought of the money they sent to their parents for necessary expenses, taking care of their parents or children. They might regularly send the money or send it only on special occasions. Thinking about the money they sent or the expenses they paid for taking care of their special persons as mentioned above made the workers know that they could be relied upon by the others. Thinking of such events made the workers happy in the workplace as shown in the interviews with Aom:

“When I’m working, I’m thinking of my child and my dad. I’m very proud that I can take care of their lives. I’m separated from my husband. I’m responsible for my child and my dad only. I’m happy thinking that I can make my child and my dad feel fulfilled.” (Aom)

**Participating in amusing activities**

Amusing activities held by the company were fun for the workers, for example, participating in the sports competition. After the competition, rewards were given to the employees or the company provided some songs for the workers to listen to during their lunch break. This made the workers happy in the workplace as shown in the interviews with Wat and Rat:

“There are welfare shops, clean canteens, and a sports stadium for the workers to exercise in. When there is a sports competition, we can play football, takraw, and basketball. I love playing football. The players are given snacks and t-shirts. The winning team gets the trophy. However we play to create friendship and happiness rather than to win.” (Wat)

“We play music together. We play at noon. I like to listen to the music. Another favorite hobby of ours is reading newspapers and TV Pool magazine. We read star gossip, mysterious things, and ghost stories. There are a lot of books provided for us to read. We read them at noon and borrow them to read at home in the evening. We return them after we have finished reading.” (Rat)

**Having good children**

The workers who had families and children always thought of the education, habits, and works of their children. If their children did not fail in their studies, were not aggressive, and were industrious at their work, then the employees will be happy as well. This was shown in the interview with Sarm:

“My son does not behave aggressively. He studies quite well. When he sees me, he hugs and kisses my cheeks even though he is already grown up. He always goes with his dad. His dad takes him to school every morning before rushing to work. We earn money to take care of our son. We use only my husband’s wage for living while I’m responsible for the education fees, the expenses of stationery, and
student uniforms for my son. As he does not behave aggressively, I’m very happy.” (Sarm)

Having good partnerships

The workers were happy because they had a good partnership with their spouse. For example, the female workers who were married and their husbands helped to do house work such as washing clothes, ironing, cooking, picking up and taking family members to their place of work. Thinking of having a good relationship with their spouse caused the workers to be happy in the workplace as shown in the interviews with Aum:

“My husband helps me to do the house work and washes the clothes. As I have someone to help me, I can concentrate more on my work. My husband feels that I’m uncomfortable when he is comfortable. So he decided to help me. I always tell him everything, for example, I might say “today I’m comfortable” or “today I’m very tired”, etc. He always takes me to and picks me up from work. My husband is a policeman. He always pleases me. Sometimes he cooks food for me such as instant noodle stir-fry.” (Aum)

Concern for the family

There was a lot of love and care evident in the families. When workers had to leave their families to work in some distant place and seldom returned home, they were happy when they talked to their children or husbands during their break time. Thinking of their children and their husband during work and perceiving that there was love and care in their families caused the workers to be happy in the workplace as shown in the interview with Sarm:

“When my husband is free, he always calls me to ask whether I work hard or if I’m sick or not. My child also asks which day I shall return home. He says he will wait for me and we shall eat out together. They call me nearly every day. They know what time I leave the shifts so they call me in my free time.” (Sarm)

Having the chance to own a house

The workers dreamed of owning their own house. They thought that after retiring at the age of 55 years, they would have the chance to own a house. When they did not have to work, they would stay with their family members. This was a part of their good future. Such expectations during work caused the employees to be happy in the workplace as shown in the interview with Soi:

“I think that I’ll retire by the age of 55. Only 2 years left. I think of constructing my own house. We currently rent a house. We shall live together as parents and children in the house built on our own piece of land.” (Soi)

Saving money for old age

The workers would like to save a sum of money for their old age. They thought that in the future they would earn a lot of money. They saved money each month. The money in their savings accounts increased every month. The company also gave them some contributions. After retirement, they would receive a lot of their savings which they could spend on living. Thinking of the savings stimulated the workers to be happy in the workplace as shown in the interviews with Aom and Rat:

“In the future we shall have some savings as the company deducts our salary for the savings and also gives us some contributions. We shall have money for our elderly lives. As we nearly forget about the deduction, we also nearly forget that we can save tens of thousands a year.” (Aom)

“I save money in the savings accounts. Some save in fixed deposit accounts. I save 1 baht each day. Each month I’ll save in the fund. When I make the deposit, I am happy to save a lot of money for taking care of our families. When I look at the bank book and see the increasing money, I am very happy.” (Rat)
Earning money to pay higher education expenses of children

The workers were happy to be able to earn money to pay for the higher education of their children. The workers thought that in the future they would gain a lot of income. They would pay for the education of their children so that they would have a chance to study at as high a level as they could. This stimulated the workers to feel happy in the workplace as shown in the interviews with Aom and Wat:

“I think that in the future, if I work hard, I may be able to pay for the higher education of my children.” (Aom)

“I’m happy to earn a lot of money and can pay for the higher education of my children. If they can study, I’ll support them to the level as high as I can.” (Wat)

Taking a rest after retirement

The workers wanted to take a rest after retirement. They would like to spend their free time traveling to several places and visiting their relatives. They did not have such chance while working due to having very little free time. Thinking that they could take a rest after retirement caused the workers to feel happy in the workplace according to the interview of Sorn as follows:

“I plan to take a rest in Chiang Rai for a period. My wife owns a house there, but no one stays there. It’s like a weekend house taken care of by her relatives. I would like to stay with my relatives as well. I’ll travel around Chiangsaen, Chiangtung, and nearby areas for a period before coming back here.” (Sorn)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Events causing happiness among Thai workers could be classified into four categories: experienced with colleagues included good relationships with colleagues, being generous to colleagues, and creating humor at work; related to supervisors included concern for subordinates and helping the subordinates; events related to the work environment; and events related to subordinates such as not exploiting others, optimism, attaining achievements, receiving more benefits than others, supporting others, participating in amusing activities, having good children, having good partnerships, concern for the family, having the chance to own a house, saving money for elderly life, earning money to pay for the higher education of their children, and taking a rest after retirement.

It was found that success in both work-related and non-work-related areas made the workers happy in the workplace. The results are in accordance with the concept of Stein and Trabasso (1992) who concluded that attainment was the reason for happiness.

Perceiving that they had good children and spouse relationships were examples of events occurring in the past and continuing until now. The events expected to occur in the future included, for example, having time to take a rest after retirement. These caused the workers to be happy in the workplace which was in agreement with Passer and Smith (2007) who observed that looking forward and looking back affected emotions.

SUGGESTIONS

Examining the details of happiness with interviewees highlights reasons for the happiness of the workers. Such reasons were related to their colleagues, supervisors, work environment, and themselves. The findings would be beneficial to the executives of organizations enabling such people to create events which could cause their workers to be happy in the workplace. If the workers were happy in the workplace, they might be able to make correct decisions and have more motivation to work.

The research can assist in the creation of happiness among Thai workers as the results indicated the company can play important roles in
contributing to such an emotion. The company could organize activities, gatherings, fieldtrips, or parties and create chances for workers to talk with one another about work and private matters and to exchange opinions. They may express brotherhood but not be argumentative. The activities would make workers happy at the workplace. Other contributions by the company include: promoting workers to share some opinions or to help with performing tasks for being generous to colleagues, enhancing activities where workers will have chances to share some amusing stories for creating some humor at work, promoting supervisors to visit their sick subordinates and to express concern, and to give advice or money to help their subordinates would all make workers happy in the workplace.

The company should have a policy of creating a good work environment; for example, eliminating toxic substances or polluted air or water and increasing the natural beauty through planting beautiful flowers and trees. The workers will feel relaxed and perceive these things as good for their health. Such an environment will cause workers to be happy in the workplace.

The company should have plans to promote workers to eat vegetarian food and to not exploit others, to promote pleasant thoughts of good things as a means of enhancing their optimism, to help workers to complete assignments and to attain their achievements, and to save money for their old age, for the higher education of their children, and for owning a house as examples that would cause workers to be happy in the workplace.

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