Jobs and Job-Holders: Two Sources of Happiness and Unhappiness

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Perspectives on the sources of happiness (sometimes viewed as “well-being”) may be distinguished in terms of their primary emphasis – either on features in the environment or on people’s thoughts and feelings. Much research in industrial-organizational psychology and occupational health psychology has been based on the first of those, examining the impact of job or organizational features (e.g., Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), and relatively few publications have instead focused on workers and their cognitive and affective processes (e.g., Warr, 2006). Associated intervention studies have concentrated mainly on the environment (redesigning jobs and organizations) and less on the worker (e.g., managing negative thoughts and establishing positive routines).

Each approach has its value, but happiness and unhappiness clearly derive from both sources. Increased understanding in this area thus requires a combination of environment-centered and person-centered frameworks. This chapter will illustrate some possible ways to bring together research of the two kinds. Sections will separately cover environmental features and within-person mental processes, and a third section will examine the combined operation of those two kinds of variable. The emphasis will be on happiness with a medium conceptual focus, at the level of “domain-specific” (here job-related) happiness rather than broader (“context-free”) happiness (e.g., life satisfaction) or narrower “facet-specific” forms such as satisfaction with one’s boss or pay.

An Environment-Centered Perspective: Job Characteristics and Happiness

Within the environment-centered approach to worker happiness, there is a core need for appropriate classification of influential job features. The framework set out in Table 1 identifies the 12 principal characteristics of a job that have been widely shown to be associated with employee happiness or unhappiness. Items are preceded by “E” to indicate their environmental reference, and sub-components of each are illustrated in the second column.

A job that is psychologically “good” scores well on at least some of those features. The fact that the environmental sources of happiness or unhappiness are broadly the same in any domain gave rise to Warr’s (1987, 2007) framework to account for experiences associated with employment, unemployment and retirement in the same terms. For example, the opportunity for personal control (E1 in the table) is essential in any setting for meeting personal goals, for sustaining a sense of personal agency, and for reducing feelings of helplessness. Environmental clarity (E5) is generally desired both to reduce anxiety about the future and to make it possible to
plan and regulate actions. Nine of the characteristics in Table 1 are important in roles of all kinds (including unemployment, retirement, and home-making), and three of them (E10, E11, and E12) specifically concern jobs. See also Warr and Clapperton (2010).

Non-Linear Associations and the Vitamin Analogy

The importance of these 12 environmental features has been demonstrated by research in many countries, but the precise nature of particular processes requires further examination. For example, it seems likely that the level of an environmental feature is associated with happiness in a non-linear fashion, specifically in a pattern analogous to the effect of vitamins on bodily condition. Vitamins are important for physical health up to but not beyond a certain level. At low levels of intake, vitamin deficiency gives rise to physiological impairment and ill-health (sometimes referred to in a medical context as “deficiency disease”), but after a moderate level has been reached (the “recommended, or guideline, daily allowance”) there is no benefit from additional quantities. In a similar manner, it may be that the absence of a primary environmental characteristic leads to certain forms of unhappiness, but that its presence beyond a certain level does not further increase happiness.

In addition, some vitamins become toxic in very large quantities, so that the association between increased vitamin intake and physical health becomes negative beyond moderate amounts. This relationship may also occur for certain aspects of the environment, particularly with respect to context-free (rather than more restricted forms of) happiness. The possibility is summarized in Figure 1, where low (“deficiency”) values of an environmental feature are depicted as particularly harmful and those in the middle range are shown as having a constant beneficial effect on happiness. A second, smaller decrement is proposed at particularly high (“toxic”) values for certain environmental features (labeled as “AD”) but not for others (“CE”).

(Figure 1 about here)

Those two labels are also based on abbreviations in the vitamin analogy. There are no toxic consequences from very high intakes of certain vitamins: deficiency causes ill-health, but additional doses beyond a moderate amount have a constant effect. Vitamins C and E are of that kind. The abbreviation “CE” in Figure 1 reflects this pattern, and can also stand for “constant effect”. On the other hand, vitamins A and D are toxic at very high levels, and “AD” in the figure may be read as an “additional decrement”.

The “vitamin model” suggests that six of the primary environmental features considered so far may be viewed as analogues of vitamins A and D, and that the other six instead parallel vitamins C and E. Suggested AD vitamins are E1 to E6 in Table 1: opportunity for personal control, opportunity for skill use and acquisition, externally-generated goals, variety, environmental clarity, and contact with others. The CE features thought to have a constant effect beyond moderate levels are E7 to E12: availability of money, physical security, valued social position, supportive supervision, career outlook, and equity (Warr, 2007; Warr & Clapperton, 2010).
Why should certain features of the environment (E1 to E6), desirable at moderate levels, become harmful when extremely high? The “too much of a good thing” pattern seems likely for both intrinsic reasons and because of associated effects from other features. Very high levels of some environmental characteristics can become punishing in themselves, and they are likely also to be accompanied by extremely high levels of other features that themselves yield an additional decrement.

Thus features identified as “opportunities” (for control and for skill use; E1 and E2) are expected to yield happiness decrements at the right-hand side of Figure 1 as the “opportunity” becomes an “unavoidable requirement” at very high levels; behavior is then coerced rather than being encouraged or facilitated. For example, environments that call for unremitting control (a very high level of feature E1) through extremely difficult decision-making and sustained personal responsibility, or which demand continuous use of extremely complex skills (E2), can give rise to overload problems as very high demands exceed personal capabilities (e.g., Burger, 1989). In part, those problems of excess arise from an associated shift to a particularly high level of externally-generated goals (E3). As those goals become extremely difficult and/or numerous, demands may become complex and internally contradictory, beyond a person’s ability to cope (e.g., Warr, 2007, Chapter 6).

Extremely high variety in the environment (E4) requires constant switching of attention and activity, with resulting low concentration and limited attainment of single goals; conflict between contradictory goals may then be present (an aspect of E3), and extreme diversity may prohibit the development and use of skills (E2). E5 (environmental clarity) appears also to be of this “additional decrement” (AD) kind. At extremely high levels, there is no uncertainty about the future, events are entirely predictable and never novel, and a fixed set of role requirements permits no new experiences. Such settings prevent risk-taking, contain little potential for skill development, and provide no opportunity to expand one’s control over the environment.

A similar down-turn of the happiness curve is expected at very high levels of contact with other people (E6). Very large social inputs can impair well-being through overcrowding and lack of privacy in high-density situations, or through a lack of personal control, frequent interruptions, and the prohibited initiation of valued activities because of other people’s continuing demands. Behavioral procedures and physical structures to prevent excessive social contact have been created in cultures of all kinds (e.g., Altman and Chemers, 1980).

Several environmental features in the vitamin model are thus assumed to be of the “additional decrement” kind, with their positive association with happiness not only leveling off across the moderate to high range but also becoming reversed at very high levels; research evidence about jobs will be illustrated below. Harmful effects at very high “toxic” levels are likely to be less severe than at very low levels, since deficiencies in a feature (at the left of Figure 1) carry particularly negative implications for the person; and even excessively high levels retain some of the benefits provided in the moderate range. The additional decrement (AD) assumption about context-free happiness as a function of certain environmental features thus takes the form of an asymmetrical, flattened, inverse U-shaped association.
This average pattern for context-free happiness is likely to be slightly different for narrower forms – domain-specific or facet-specific happiness. At the context-free level, additional features from multiple domains (e.g., family or social life as well as merely from a job) cumulatively bear upon happiness, in different ways for different people and with potentially inconsistent or conflicting impacts; the relationship between context-free happiness and a single environmental feature is also determined by other aspects of life. However, more focused forms of happiness are less subject to a wide range of different influences, and happiness of those kinds is less likely to level off and then decline as an environmental feature becomes increasingly positive. The general possibility in Figure 1 is thus likely to vary slightly between different levels of happiness scope. Specifically, the mid-range plateau shown in the figure is expected to be progressively shorter as one moves from context-free to facet-specific experiences, with environment-happiness associations at the facet-specific level tending to be most linear; see Warr (2007, Chapter 4).

The vitamin model also proposes that, beyond medium levels, differences in the other six features in Table 1 (E7 to E12) are on average unrelated to (especially context-free) happiness, exhibiting a “constant effect” (CE) across all the higher range. Although extremely high levels of these features can create unhappiness in particular cases, increases within the high range are on average unlikely to have an incrementally negative effect for people as a whole. The high-range negative impact proposed for “additional decrement” features (above) was suggested to arise from two sources: each one’s inherent harmful impact, and associated harm from other variables. Neither of those impacts is expected on average for high levels of the identified “constant effect” features. Instead, it is assumed that high to very high values of those characteristics are on average accompanied by similar levels of context-free happiness.

In all cases, a non-linear association between the level of an environmental feature and people’s happiness is thus proposed. Environmental increments of a certain size at lower values (to the left of Figure 1) are suggested to give rise to greater increases in happiness than do increments of the same magnitude at moderate to high values. Some non-linearity of this kind appears to be logically necessary, since affects are inherently limited in their intensity; it is not possible for them to continue to increase at the same rate without limit.

To what extent have research findings in occupational settings been consistent with these proposals? Only a tiny proportion of studies in this area have examined possible departures from linearity, and many of those are unsuitable for the task since their environmental scores are restricted in range and do not extend fully from very low to very high levels. Linked to that, research into several job characteristics has intentionally examined only a limited section of scores, for example covering only low or only high levels of skill use, variety or demands. In addition, the common statistical practice in this area of including a variety of non-linear functions within the same multiple regression is inappropriate. That simultaneous analysis tests a multivariate hypothesis that is different from the primary one discussed here. To learn about a single variable’s non-linearity, we should not previously have extracted the variance linked to other variables’ non-linearity.

Empirical evidence about Figure-1 relationships is thus both scarce and often inadequate. However, “additional decrements”, as proposed for the first six “vitamins”, have been observed
in several studies of job-related well-being. In respect of E1 (opportunity for personal control), Baltes, Bauer, Bajdo, and Parker (2002) recorded an AD pattern for job satisfaction, and a leveling-off beyond medium levels was found in studies described by Warr (2007). (An absence of extremely high levels of personal control in typical research samples may be relevant here.) Findings across a wide range of scores are not available for E2 (opportunity for skill use and acquisition), but overlaps of that feature with E1 and E3 suggest that a similar pattern is present.

In respect of externally-generated goals (E3), research restricted to either low or high scores (sometimes referred to as “underload” and “overload” respectively) has shown that well-being is associated in opposite directions at the two extremes of the horizontal axis in Figure 1. “Additional decrement” patterns across a wider range of E3 have been demonstrated by, for instance, Karasek (1979) and Warr (1990). Other studies have observed an AD pattern for particular forms of happiness or in specific sub-samples (e.g., De Jonge, Reuvers, Houtman, Bongers, & Kompier, 2000).

For role clarity (an aspect of E5), significant non-linearity with a decrement at highest levels was observed by Baltes et al. (2002). In respect of E6, research has examined both the quantity and the quality of social contact. In terms of quantity, very low social density can of course yield feelings of loneliness and personal isolation; and very high levels of input from other people have been shown to be undesirable in work settings through studies of open-plan offices (e.g., Brennan, Chugh, & Kline, 2002). The importance of quality of interaction (rather than merely its quantity) has been confirmed by research into bullying (e.g., Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel, & Varti, 2003) and social support (e.g., Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999) in the low or higher ranges of that feature respectively. “Additional decrement” effects also occur at higher levels of E6. A laboratory experiment by Deelstra, Peeters, Schaufeli, Stroebe, Zilstra, and van Doornen (2003) arranged for workers in a simulated office setting to receive instrumental assistance from a co-worker, who was in fact a confederate of the investigators. Extremely high levels of social support of this kind led to a down-turn in affect, as illustrated in Figure 1. That pattern was also observed in an organizational sample by de Jonge et al. (2000).

In respect of the other environmental features in Table 1, only a few studies have examined possible non-linearity. However, stabilization of association after moderate quantities has frequently been demonstrated in respect of income (E7) and context-free happiness. A standard increment in income, which can provide a major benefit to people in poverty, yields a smaller benefit to happiness in the wealthy. This “constant effect” pattern has been found in comparisons between individuals within a single country (e.g., Diener, Sandvik, Seidlitz, & Diener, 1993) and in terms of average scores for entire nations (e.g., Frey & Stutzer, 2001). Non-linearity in respect of this feature appears not to have been tested in organizational research, although Kornhauser (1965) reported a stronger association between pay and happiness among lower-skilled employees.

Examining supervisors’ considerate behavior (E10), non-linearity at the group level (rather than in respect of individuals themselves) was observed by Fleishman and Harris (1962). They found that subordinates’ grievances and turnover were correlated with that environmental feature at low levels of consideration but not at higher levels. For equity (E12), Schaufeli’s (2006) review identified non-linear patterns in several studies. For example, Taris, Kalimo, and
Schaufeli (2002) found that, once a threshold of acceptability had been reached, further increments had no further impact. This “constant effect” pattern appears likely on conceptual grounds to be widely found: above a moderately high level of features E7 to E12, small gains (important at low levels) are expected to be of little average consequence.

Discussion so far has concerned individual aspects of a job, the 12 “vitamins” in Table 1. Jobs do of course involve several features in combination, and it might be expected that compounds of either “additional decrement” or “constant effect” elements will also yield the patterns in Figure 1. No study has examined non-linearity across an entire sub-set of “vitamins” (either all AD or all CE together), but Xie and Johns (1995) observed the asymmetric inverted-U in a study combining four assumed AD features and one of the “constant effect” kind.

Job features may also combine with each other in an interactive manner, yielding non-linear patterns only in certain combinations. For example, Chung-Yan (2010) found an inverted-U relationship between job complexity and job satisfaction for workers whose job autonomy was low but not for higher-autonomy workers: the tipping point at which additional complexity became undesirable to a job-holder was lower when the freedom to handle that complexity was also low.

In overview, the environmental vitamin model proposes non-linearity of association between job content and worker happiness or unhappiness, with different forms of non-linearity in two sets of job features. Additionally but not detailed here because of space limitations, the model contains different predictions for different indices of happiness. For example, very high job demands are expected and found to have a particularly negative impact in respect of job-related anxiety-contentment rather than for depression-enthusiasm (see Warr, 2007). Another implication of this non-linear account concerns between-study differences. If an examined sample is mainly to the right of Figure 1 in, say, job demands (E3), a negative association between that feature and happiness is expected. However, if the sample happens to be more widely spread or located mainly in the middle of the range, a correlation around zero is likely. Observed demands-happiness patterns are expected to vary somewhat between investigations, and that is indeed the case.

A Person-Centered Perspective: Mental Processes and Happiness

Although environmental sources are important as considered above, happiness and unhappiness also derive from within a person himself or herself. Two aspects are important: longer-term characteristics, such as dispositional or demographic features, and also an individual’s way of attending to and thinking about particular situations as they are experienced.

In the former respect, personality traits such as neuroticism, extraversion and conscientiousness are significantly related to many happiness indicators including job satisfaction (e.g., Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002) and job engagement (Inceoglu & Warr, 2011); and associations of well-being with age (e.g., Clark, Oswald, & Warr, 1996) and gender (e.g., Warr, 2007) are often also significant. In regard to shorter-term influences, happiness is partly a function of several comparative judgments, concerned with where one has been, where one might be instead, how the future might develop, and assessments of self-efficacy, novelty and
personal salience. Ten judgments of those kinds are summarized in Table 2, together with questions that people might ask themselves in respect of each one.

(Table 2 about here)

In respect of judgment J1 in the table, it is regularly found in non-organizational research that “downward” comparisons with other people (i.e., judgments made relative to people who are worse-off in the relevant respect) tend to enhance a person’s own happiness (e.g., Wheeler, 2000). Some studies in employment settings have adopted the framework of equity theory to examine social comparisons of several kinds, finding that perceived input-output ratios in comparison with other people’s ratios affect feelings; happiness can depend in part on perceptions of fairness in relation to other people. For example, satisfaction with pay received (an “output”) has been shown to depend on perceived comparisons with other people’s pay relative to their effort, skill and other “inputs” (e.g., Adams, 1965). Schaufeli (2006) has documented similar themes in respect of social exchange in organizations, and comparative processes of this kind are likely in respect of several other environmental contributors in Table 1.

Comparisons with other situations (J2 in Table 2) can be of two kinds – in relation to situations that were expected, or relative to those that otherwise might have occurred. In those ways, job-related well-being sometimes derives in part from judgments based on a person’s prior expectations (J2A) or on assessments of other situations, known or imagined (J2B). In the first case, laboratory studies have confirmed that events that are unexpected have a greater impact on happiness or unhappiness than do those that were expected. The J2B comparison involves consideration of either poorer or better counterfactual alternatives, those which are contrary to the facts. People may focus upon ways in which their current situation might instead have developed, for example judging that the situation could be a lot worse or better than it is.

Upward counterfactual judgments (relative to a more attractive possibility) tend to evoke unpleasant feelings, whereas downward comparisons (which consider an alternative that is worse than reality) can increase a person’s happiness (Olson, Buhrman, & Roese, 2000). The process was illustrated by Medvec, Madey and Gilovich (1995) in a study of Olympic medalists. Those receiving silver medals for achieving second place tended to be less happy with their position than were bronze medalists in third place. Many second-place winners appeared to base their feelings in part on upward counterfactual comparisons (“I failed to be the best”), whereas athletes in third place were more likely to make downward comparisons, being pleased to have reached the medal positions (“I did better than all the rest”).

Third in Table 2 are assessments of previous and likely future trends (J3). For example (J3A), has this stressful situation been getting better or worse? Have I moved adequately towards a goal? Given that goals may be defined as “internal representations of desired states” (Austin & Vancouver, 1996, p. 338), good progress towards a goal (a “desired state”) is generally associated with better well-being, and low or negative progress gives rise to reduced well-being (e.g., Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Linked to that, employees’ attainment of work goals can contribute to their job-related happiness and context-free well-being (Harris, Daniels, & Briner, 2003; Wiese & Freund, 2005).
Table 2 also draws attention to the possible impact on well-being of expectations about a future trend (J3B). This has sometimes been examined as perceived probability of success, and positive expectations of that kind are significantly associated with subjective well-being (e.g., Emmons, 1986); in everyday terms, happiness is often felt to depend in part on “having something to look forward to”. One implication is that in negative situations, for instance during job stress, it can be predicted that employees’ unhappiness will be in part a function of expected future levels of that stress. Examining the extent to which employees mentally “switch off” after a working day, Sonnentag and Bayer (2005) concluded it is not primarily the amount of time pressure that one has faced at work that makes psychological detachment difficult, but rather the anticipation that time pressure will continue during the working days to come.

The appraisal judgments reviewed so far (J1 to J3) have their impact on happiness or unhappiness through comparisons with reference standards that are external to the person. J4 to J6 in Table 2 operate instead in relation to a person’s own benchmarks, in terms of self-efficacy, novelty and personal salience.

Self-efficacy reflects a person’s perception that he or she is competent in relation to present demands (J4 in Table 2). Both retrospective and prospective judgments about situation-related self-efficacy are likely to influence happiness. In the first case, recent behavior is compared against one’s benchmark level of competence, in response to questions like “have I coped well?” or “have I made a mess of this?”. For example, an employee’s perception that he or she has failed to prevent a controllable negative event might give rise to even more unhappiness. Scheck and Kinicki (2000) found that employees’ positive assessments of their self-efficacy during organizational change were linked to lower perceptions of threat and potential harm. In addition, future-oriented beliefs about one’s personal efficacy in a situation (such as “I’m going to be able to handle this” or “I’m not going to cope”) are expected to influence current happiness, even when a perceived ability to exercise control over that situation is in fact illusory (e.g., Bandura & Locke, 2003). As in other cases, relevant investigations in job settings are still required.

Also important are a person’s assessments of the novelty or familiarity of a current situation (J5 in Table 2). Continued exposure to a situation tends to reduce its affective potential, either negative or positive, so that more familiar inputs come to generate feelings that are less extreme. In effect, you evaluate your position partly in terms of what you are used to.

Biological and psychological processes of habituation have been widely observed, when responses to a stimulus become diminished after repeated presentation of that stimulus. Such a change may be viewed in terms of a raised adaptation level, when exposure to earlier stimuli establishes a higher standard against which later stimuli are judged. Over time, instances of a particular stimulus have to exceed that increased threshold in order to influence well-being to the same degree. For example, judgmental thresholds may be indexed as the average pleasantness of recent experiences (Parducci, 1995). An increase across time in this average pleasantness implies that a later event or situation has to be more pleasurable (exceeding the raised judgmental standard) before it has the same impact on well-being.

Much research has demonstrated that positive feelings in response to a constant or
repeated environmental stimulus can gradually become reduced or even give way to indifference. For example, Brickman, Coates, and Janoff-Bulman (1978) reported adaptation across time in people who had won large sums of money in a state lottery, and also found that victims of serious accidents did not appear as unhappy as might have been expected. They drew attention to a common perceptual error, when observers see victims of misfortune as more distressed than do those people themselves.

Forms of hedonic adaptation have been illustrated in several projects in organizations. Boswell, Boudreau, and Tichy (2005) studied well-being changes longitudinally among employees voluntarily moving into a new job. Overall job satisfaction was found to increase immediately after entry into a new position, but in subsequent years it declined significantly as individuals became adapted to the realities of their role. Daniels and Guppy (1997) examined employees’ strain as a function of particular environmental stressors, finding that experienced strain was less from those stressors that had previously been encountered.

Processes of adaptation may thus contribute to an increased ability to handle environmental demands after a period of exposure to those demands. In that respect, everyday experience suggests that many people’s capacity to manage a substantial workload becomes “ratcheted up” after a period of coping with increased pressure; workload that would otherwise cause difficulties and strain can more easily be handled after a person has become adapted to a raised level. The impact of workload itself (an environmental feature) is not fixed – it depends in part on judgments about one’s situation.

Adaptation can operate through the application of other judgments in the framework. For example, changes in J1 and J2B (comparisons with other people and with other possible situations) can contribute to adaptation, as people over time come to reinterpret their situation through new social comparisons or by emphasizing different counterfactual possibilities. In addition, adaptation can give rise to changes in the impact of environmental features considered earlier. For example, environmental clarity (E5 in Table 1) can increase as knowledge develops, and contact with others (E6) may be modified as mutual learning occurs between an individual and people in his or her changed setting. Adjustment to a situation may also involve shifts in externally-generated goals (E3), as different activities are undertaken or a person’s ability to attain particular goals becomes enhanced or reduced.

The happiness or unhappiness of employees whose job features have improved or deteriorated is for these reasons likely to return towards an equilibrium level, perhaps being held under personal homeostatic control (Cummins, 2000). The “dynamic equilibrium model” of Headey and Wearing (1992) proposed that each person has a customary level of well-being, and that changes from that level are likely to be only temporary as subsequent adaptation occurs. Headey and Wearing observed this pattern in a community sample across a six-year period. The longitudinal pattern reported for job-changers by Boswell et al. (2005) (above) also illustrated a return to people’s baseline happiness levels after a temporary increase in happiness. Within banking organizations, Griffin (1991) found that, although the content of employees’ jobs remained enhanced for several years after job redesign, their overall job satisfaction increased only temporarily before falling back to its earlier level. This tendency for happiness and unhappiness to stabilize around a person’s baseline level is reflected in significant associations.
with personality traits (illustrated above) and in consistency of, for instance, satisfaction across time (e.g., Bowling, Beehr, Wagner, & Libkuman, 2005).

Finally in Table 2 are judgments about the personal salience of an environmental feature (J6). Research in this area has used two sets of descriptive labels, which are conceptually and empirically interdependent. On the one hand, the salience of a situation or environmental feature has been examined in terms of the degree to which it is viewed as personally important, significant, or of concern (how much it “matters to” a person). In other studies, descriptions have been in terms of a person’s wants, preferences or values – the extent to which he or she would like the feature to be present.

Judgments of personal salience are likely to have a moderating influence on happiness in many domains of life. Table 2 points out that relevant themes may be viewed at three levels of generality – concerned with the salience of role membership (e.g., the strength of one’s commitment to having a job, J6A), the salience of role characteristics (e.g., how much one values personal autonomy in a job, J6B), or the salience of core tasks (for example, how much one is attracted to working with animals in a job, J6C). Occupational research at all three levels has been reviewed by Warr (2007); the present focus (illustrated in the following section) will be restricted to J6B, concerned with the perceived desirability of job features.

In overview, the present section has emphasized that happiness or unhappiness in jobs and elsewhere depends on the person as well as the environment. Personal influences on well-being can derive from long-term attributes and dispositions, and in addition research has pointed to the importance of certain kinds of thought about a current situation. Both long-term personal features and situation-specific mental processes require inclusion in studies of work and happiness. However, most occupational research has focused only on the job or organizational environment, and conversely the few person-oriented studies that do examine within-worker variables have typically excluded the environment, reporting merely associations between, for instance, personality traits and outcomes irrespective of possible impacts from characteristics of an individual’s job. Findings to date are thus one-sided and incomplete.

A Combined Perspective: Happiness as a Function of Both Job and Personal Characteristics

How might these two perspectives – environment-centered and person-centered – be brought together? Several forms of joint operation can be envisaged. For example, the two kinds of variable might both affect happiness but operate independently of each other. Alternatively, they might work together through some form of mediation, perhaps such that the environment has its impact partly or entirely through personal variables. Or the two may have a moderating impact on each other, with one’s association depending on the level of the other. In addition, mutual impact can develop across time, for example as individuals’ cognitive, physical or personality attributes encourage a transition into certain forms of employment or a concentration on certain job activities, which then affect happiness. Joint operation of those kinds can involve personal variables that are either relatively long-term (e.g., dispositional traits) or shorter-term (as in situation-specific judgments).
Longer-term Personal Influences

Mediation of a personality-happiness link through aspects of job content has been illustrated by Judge, Bono, and Locke (2000) and Grant and Langan-Fox (2007), and across-time processes are reflected in a significant longitudinal association between negative affectivity and key job characteristics a year later (Houkes, Janssen, de Jonge, & Bakker, 2003). Evidence is also growing about the moderation of job-happiness associations by relevant aspects of personality; job features can have either more or less impact depending on certain dispositional traits.

For example, Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, and Snoek (1964) and Keenan and McBain (1979) showed that the correlation of role ambiguity with aspects of happiness differed between workers with low and high ambiguity-tolerance. Vroom’s (1959) study found that the autonomy-satisfaction correlation depended on a worker’s low authoritarianism and preference for independence. Other job-related instances of personality moderation have been reported by Dijkstra, van Dierendonck, Evers, and de Dreu (2005), Rogelberg, Leach, Warr, and Burnfield (2006), Bond, Flaxman, and Bunce (2008), and Rego, Souto, and Cunha (2009). Workman and Bommer (2004) described an experimental study in which call center jobs were redesigned to increase team-based interaction; job satisfaction increased most for those employees with a stronger preference for working in a group.

Moderation of this kind has also been demonstrated in respect of workers’ continuing preferences (a form of value-judgment) for particular job features. Individuals who more value a particular job characteristic are more likely to be affected by the degree to which it is present or absent (e.g., Rice, Gentile, & McFarlin, 1991). This pattern has also been shown for groups of job features, for which preferences have been recorded as “growth need strength” (GNS – the extent to which a worker values a mix of intrinsic job features such as personal autonomy, new learning, and so on.). Much research has confirmed that correlations between relevant job features and job satisfaction are greater for high-GNS employees than for those who value the features less (e.g., Loher, Noe, Moeller, & Fitzgerald, 1985).

Personal dispositions are expected also to affect the linearity or non-linearity of associations between job features and happiness. For example, the same level of high task demands can overload less able workers (yielding an AD pattern as described earlier) while their more able colleagues cope with those demands and may seek still more challenge. A down-turn in well-being is thus expected to accompany still-greater demands at more moderate levels for less able individuals. Similarly, low scorers on a particular personality trait will sooner reach a tipping point for trait-relevant job features; they do not want still-higher levels of those features in the way that high-trait individuals do. For example, Rego et al. (2009) found that workers with a lower need to belong showed greater non-linearity in the association between degree of social support and affective well-being than did high-need workers; for individuals with a lower need for interpersonal inputs, high levels of support more readily yielded “additional decrements” than for workers who more sought that support.

Shorter-term Personal Influences
It is clear (above) that environmental features are associated with happiness or unhappiness to different degrees and in different ways according to the nature of an individual, for example in respect of his or her personality traits and continuing values. This pattern is presumably linked to disposition-related differences in ways of thinking and feeling about one’s environment, and shorter-term mental processes of that kind require inclusion in studies and models of well-being. Staw and Cohen-Charash (2005) have illustrated how the experience of job satisfaction derives from several within-person information-processing steps – recognition and evaluation of work features, memory and retrieval, element-aggregation, and the expression of feelings. Aspects of those occur within the ten forms of situational judgment in Table 2, but mental processes of those kinds have rarely been investigated in job settings.

A key research need in this area is for the creation of thought-process measures that can be incorporated in studies of the environment. There are undoubtedly problems in the accurate measurement of cognitive activity, and the reliability and validity of retrospective self-reports is open to question. Nevertheless, given that observed correlations between job features and happiness indicators are often only moderate and that causal mechanisms can depend on the mental processes involved, it is essential to include measures of at least some of the Table-2 judgments in well-being research. For example, the nature of a worker’s relevant social or counterfactual comparisons (J1 and J2B) should be explored, and job-feature preferences (J6B) should routinely be recorded within studies of job characteristics and their outcomes. Given that the degree of discrepancy between job content and a worker’s preferences is in general linked to job-related well-being (e.g., Ostroff & Judge, 2007), more research into specific forms of misfit and different aspects of well-being would be valuable (Warr & Inceoglu, 2012).

It is also important to learn about factors linked to the occurrence or non-occurrence of each type of Table-2 judgment. Their prevalence, and thus potential impact, is likely to be associated with factors such as the nature of a setting, personality traits, age, and gender. Furthermore, differences in cognitive emphasis are likely to depend in part on local norms in a work-group or wider culture (Warr, 2006).

**Person-oriented Interventions**

In addition to environment-and-person studies that examine potentially important longer-term and shorter-term personal variables (above), a third combined approach is through individual-level interventions to enhance well-being. Counseling procedures to reduce strain in a particular setting may seek to encourage relaxation, meditation, stress awareness, more appropriate assertiveness, or improved time management and goal-setting. Some programs have applied themes from cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), in which a trainer and a client work together to identify a worker’s negative thoughts and seek to replace those by more constructive routines.

Occupational strain management programs have proved to be effective across at least several subsequent weeks (e.g., Richardson & Rothstein, 2008), especially for workers with high initial levels of distress (Flaxman & Bond, 2010). Positive findings in non-job settings have been brought together by Lyobomirsky (2008) and applied to happiness at work by Warr and Clapperton (2010). Person-centered studies of this kind, introducing and monitoring change, are
in effect experiments into the impact of potentially important cognitive and affective variables. They take us more directly to potential within-person causal explanations, and can go beyond the limitations of research which merely examines correlations between well-being and its possible sources. Worker-oriented interventions are therefore desirable for both practical and theoretical reasons – both to reduce strain and also to develop and test models about person-level processes underlying happiness or unhappiness in particular environmental conditions.

Intervention studies can sometimes be strengthened by the inclusion of person-oriented themes from the two previous sections, covering longer-term attributes or situational judgments. In that way, dispositional, demographic and judgmental variables found in correlational research to be associated with happiness or unhappiness can helpfully be incorporated in intervention projects, providing by means of experiment more detailed information about causal processes. For example, Bond and Bunce (2000) found that workers’ willingness to accept undesirable thoughts and feelings mediated the beneficial impact of an emotion-focused intervention on distress and depression. Intervention studies that change environmental variables as well as processes within an individual are particularly desirable, in part because adjustments to a work setting can themselves be important in implementing and maintaining person-level changes.

Conclusion and Future Directions

This chapter has emphasized that, in order to understand and enhance worker happiness, it is essential to examine aspects of the person as well as features of a job and organization. Within that overall need, the following developments are advocated:

- investigate the possible mediation or moderation of environment-outcome links by personality dispositions and personal values and by situation-specific mental processes
- explore the presence of non-linear relationships between job features and happiness or unhappiness, and examine how non-linearity may differ between individuals with different characteristics
- develop models and measures of job-relevant judgments of the kind illustrated in Table 2
- expand person-oriented intervention research in job settings, to enhance well-being and to learn more about key causal processes.

Other themes merely mentioned within the chapter’s space limitation also point to desirable action requirements. For example, it is essential to distinguish conceptually and empirically between different forms of happiness and unhappiness (e.g., Spector, Chen, & O’Connell, 2000, p. 216): each one has its own partly distinct sources and consequences (e.g., Warr, 2007; Warr, Bindl, Parker, & Inceoglu, 2012). And the joint investigation in a single study of our discipline’s two key outcomes – performance as well as well-being – remains extremely rare. It is essential to learn more about how those might affect each other. For instance procedures to enhance well-being might sometimes impair productivity, or personal or organizational efforts to improve performance might give rise to greater anxiety and tension before raised well-being becomes possible. In addition, a mental and behavioral trade-off may occur, as individuals seek to
regulate one in relation to the other; why work any harder if that will make you anxious, exhausted or even ill? Joint performance-and-happiness issues of these kinds provide exciting opportunities for future research.

References


Figure 1. The vitamin analogy: proposed "additional decrement" (AD) and "constant effect" (CE) relationships between environmental features and context-free happiness. For context-specific and facet-specific happiness see the text.
Table 1

Principal Job Characteristics Affecting Happiness or Unhappiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job feature</th>
<th>Themes and illustrative sub-components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E1. Opportunity for personal control</td>
<td>Personal influence, autonomy, discretion, decision latitude, participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2. Opportunity for skill use and acquisition</td>
<td>A setting’s potential for applying and developing expertise and knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3. Externally-generated goals</td>
<td>External demands, challenge, underload and overload, task identity, role conflict, required emotional labor, competition from others, work-home conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4. Variety</td>
<td>Changes in task content and social contacts, varied work location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E5. Environmental clarity</td>
<td>Predictable outcomes, clear requirements, role clarity, task feedback, low future ambiguity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E6. Contact with others</td>
<td>Amount of social contact, quality of social relationships, dependence on others, team working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E7. Availability of money</td>
<td>Available income, pay level, payment for results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E8. Physical security</td>
<td>Working conditions, degree of hazard, quality of equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E9. Valued social position</td>
<td>Significance of a task or role, contribution to society, status in valued groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E10. Supportive supervision</td>
<td>Consideration by bosses, fair treatment by supervisor, concern for one’s welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E11. Career outlook</td>
<td>Job security, the opportunity to gain promotion or shift to other roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E12. Equity</td>
<td>Justice within one’s organization, fairness in the organization’s relations with society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Multiple Judgments of a Situation within a Person-Centered Approach to Happiness or Unhappiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of mental process</th>
<th>Illustrative self-questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J1. Comparisons with other people</td>
<td>J1. “How does my situation compare with that of another individual/group or of the average person?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J2. Comparisons with other situations</td>
<td>J2A. “How does my situation compare with the situation I expected?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J2A. Expected situation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J2B. Counterfactual situation(s)</td>
<td>J2B. “How might the situation have developed in other ways?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J3. Comparisons with other times</td>
<td>J3A. “Up to now, has the situation deteriorated, improved, or remained unchanged?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J3A. Previous trend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J3B. Likely future trend</td>
<td>J3B. “From now on, is the situation likely to deteriorate, improve, or remain unchanged?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J4. Assessments of situation-related self-efficacy</td>
<td>J4. “Was/is my performance effective in this situation?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J5. Assessments of novelty or familiarity</td>
<td>J5. “Is the situation unusual or is it routine?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J6. Assessments of personal salience</td>
<td>J6A. “Do I want to be in this role?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J6A. Rated importance of role membership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J6B. Rated importance of a role characteristic</td>
<td>J6B. “Do I value this feature?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J6C. Rated attractiveness of core tasks in the role</td>
<td>J6C. “Do I like the things I have to do?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>