Article

Top-management attitudes toward workplace happiness: An exploratory case study at a semi-government organization in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

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Abstract: This study aimed to gain insights into the attitudes and strategies of top management regarding workplace happiness within a semi-government organization in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Six senior managers at the organization were interviewed to explore their perspectives on employee happiness and the initiatives implemented to enhance it. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts revealed several key findings. Top managers demonstrated strong commitment and willingness to prioritize employee well-being through long-term research-driven improvements. A variety of strategies incorporating personal, organizational, and Human Resources Management (HRM) factors known to impact happiness were utilized. Religious considerations and empowerment initiatives respect personal values while fostering intrinsic motivation. Top leaders modeled strategic priorities through their conduct, emphasizing visible support. The organization balanced individual needs with organizational goals respectfully. The findings provide practical implications for optimizing retention and performance outcomes through dedicated strategic happiness efforts guided by empirical research. However, more extensive research across diverse populations could further advance understanding in this field.

Keywords: workplace happiness; employee well-being; top management; UAE; qualitative research; organizational culture; leadership

1. Introduction

The well-being and satisfaction of employees are crucial considerations for HR professionals and top management. Research has shown that life satisfaction and subjective happiness play an important role in influencing individual behavior, including (Zia et al., 2022). It is widely acknowledged that a lack of happiness within an organization is a significant issue, and creating a positive and happy workplace has been identified as an effective way to enhance employee productivity and overall quality of work life (Mahmoudi et al., 2019). Therefore, prioritizing the promotion of a high-quality work life and fostering happiness at work is not only advantageous for employees, but also contributes to the overall performance and well-being of the organization.

Happiness and well-being, though often used interchangeably, represent distinct concepts in academic discourse. Happiness typically refers to the experience of positive emotions and a sense of pleasure or contentment in the moment. It is subjective and can vary among individuals based on personal perceptions and immediate circumstances. In contrast, well-being encompasses a broader spectrum, including not only emotional happiness but also physical health, mental stability, and

overall life satisfaction. Well-being reflects a more evaluation of an individual's quality of life, incorporating long-term factors such as work-life balance, stress levels, and personal fulfilment. Thus, while happiness is an important component of well-being, well-being itself is a more holistic measure of an individual's overall state of health and satisfaction with life.

Historically, one of the primary responsibilities of human resource (HR) personnel has been workforce motivation. However, the scope of HR functions has expanded beyond training and development incentives to encompass the overall well-being of employees, as this aspect influences their productivity and the profitability of firms. Al Maktoum (2017) identified distinctions between societal and personal happiness, establishing that happiness refers to a state where individuals or workforces feel comfortable, secure, and safe. By creating an environment that supports the well-being of employees, organizations can enhance their engagement in work operations.

According to various studies, senior executives prioritize the enhancement of employee job satisfaction. Factors such as work-life balance, organizational culture, motivation, leadership, corporate social responsibility, and digital transformation have been identified as key influences of employee job satisfaction. For instance, research conducted in the commercial banking sector revealed that sub-factors like flexible work arrangements, organizational culture, and motivation positively affect job satisfaction (Miswadi et al., 2023). Another study highlighted the impact of transformational leadership and corporate culture on job satisfaction (Samanta et al., 2022). Furthermore, a study on the relationship between corporate social responsibility and organizational performance established that employee satisfaction acts as a mediator between CSR and OP (YuSheng et al., 2021).

However, it has been noted by several researchers that job satisfaction represents only a fraction of overall employee well-being and happiness in the workplace (Aman-Ullah et al., 2022). Employee happiness encompasses various dimensions of work life, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, performance, and mental well-being. These factors are interconnected and can mutually impact one another. For instance, a study conducted among a hospital staff in Pakistan revealed that individuals who had positive interactions with their colleagues and experienced high job satisfaction reported a favorable or excellent level of happiness (Nejad et al., 2023). Similarly, a study focused on library professionals emphasized the significance of job satisfaction in providing quality service to users and fostering dedication to the library (Kumar, 2018).

Additionally, research has shown that factors such as work engagement, perceived organizational support, meaningful work, and work-life balance can significantly impact employee happiness. For example, a study in the public sector in Indonesia found that work engagement, perceived organizational support, and happiness were linked to turnover intention, indicating the importance of these factors in employee retention (Nehemnya and Bangun, 2023). Another study revealed that meaningful work, feeling appreciated by coworkers, and enjoyment of daily tasks significantly predict happiness at work, and they also reduce turnover intention (Charles-Leija et al., 2023). Additionally, the impact of working from home on work-life balance and its implication for employee happiness has been studied, with results

showing a positive effect on work-life balance and, in turn, on employee happiness (Elnanto and Suharti, 2021).

1.1. Concept of happiness in the workplace and its importance

Workplace happiness is a term that encompasses the experience of employees who derive energy and enthusiasm from their work, find meaning and purpose in their tasks, foster positive relationships within their workplace, and exhibit a strong commitment to their work, as stated by Kun and Gadanecz (2022). It refers to the overall evaluation of employees' work life and is often measured through global reports that reflect employees' perceptions of their work environment. The concept of workplace happiness is closely related to subjective well-being, which is a broader construct that encompasses various facets of well-being. Happiness is considered one of the most studied dimensions of well-being, and researchers have explored different determinants and factors that contribute to employees' happiness in the workplace, as per Kun and Gadanecz (2022).

To understand workplace happiness, it is essential to consider the various determinants that influence it. Previous research has identified several factors that can impact employees' happiness at work (Al Suwaidi, 2019; Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020; Kun and Gadanecz, 2022). These factors include personal attitudes and individual characteristics, such as a positive mindset and personal values. Additionally, HRM processes, including recruitment, selection, training, and performance management, can significantly influence workplace happiness. Leadership styles and organizational culture also play a crucial role in shaping employees' happiness and well-being.

Workplace happiness is of importance due to its positive impact on various aspects of employees' lives and organizational outcomes. Research studies have consistently shown that happy employees experience higher job satisfaction (Tunsi and Bhalla, 2023). Bhatia and Mohsin (2020) stated that when employees are happy in their work environment, they tend to be more engaged, motivated, and committed to their tasks. This, in turn, leads to increased productivity and performance (Tunsi and Bhalla, 2023).

Happiness at work also influences employees' well-being on a personal level. It contributes to their overall life satisfaction and psychological well-being, as per Bhatia and Mohsin (2020). Additionally, Tunsi and Bhalla (2023) argued that happy employees are more likely to have positive social interactions and better relationships with colleagues, which can lead to a more supportive and collaborative work environment.

Furthermore, workplace happiness has been linked to various organizational outcomes. Bhatia and Mohsin (2020) noted that happy employees are more likely to perform better on tasks, including those involving leadership and creativity. They are also more likely to receive favorable evaluations from supervisors and earn more. Moreover, Tunsi and Bhalla (2023) argued that when employees are happy, they tend to make extra efforts to complete their tasks, even under challenging conditions. The benefits of workplace happiness extend to the organization as a whole. Awada and Ismail (2019) stated that a happy workforce contributes to increased productivity, improved performance, and ultimately, higher profitability. In addition, Tunsi and

Bhalla (2023) stated that when employees are satisfied and content with their work, they are more likely to stay engaged, loyal, and committed to the organization, reducing turnover rates.

Understanding workplace happiness is particularly relevant in the context of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE has witnessed an increasing focus on employee happiness and well-being, both in the public and private sectors, as stated by Al Suwaidi (2019). Recognizing the importance of happiness in the workplace, organizations have implemented strategies to enhance employee satisfaction and engagement. However, there is still a need for further research to explore the specific attitudes of top management towards workplace happiness in semi-government organizations in the UAE, as this area remains relatively unexplored. Therefore, the present study examines the primary factors within top management that impact employee satisfaction and productivity in the workplace, as well as the various methods and strategies employed by organizations to enhance overall workplace contentment and productivity.

1.2. The role of upper management in enhancing employee happiness in the workplace

Upper management plays a crucial role in providing happiness at work. They have the power and responsibility to create a positive work environment that fosters employee well-being and satisfaction. The literature suggests that upper management's actions and leadership style can significantly impact employee happiness and job performance (Foncubierta-Rodríguez, 2021).

One of the key roles of upper management, as stated by Foncubierta-Rodríguez (2021), is to ensure that employees are motivated and committed to their work. They can achieve this by demonstrating effective leadership, promoting a positive organizational culture, and providing the necessary resources for employees to succeed. Bhatia and Mohsin (2020) noted that when upper management shows support and provides employees with the tools they need, it contributes to their happiness and job satisfaction. Moreover, upper management can influence the level of happiness in the organization by creating an environment that values and prioritizes employee well-being. This can be achieved through various strategies, such as implementing work-life balance initiatives, recognizing and rewarding employee achievements, and promoting a healthy work culture that encourages open communication and collaboration, as per Foncubierta-Rodríguez (2021).

Additionally, upper management plays a crucial role in shaping the organizational policies and practices that impact employee happiness, as stated by El-Sharkawy et al. (2023). They have the authority to design and implement strategies that promote employee engagement, autonomy, and growth opportunities. By considering the happiness and well-being of their employees, Tunsi and Bhalla (2023) stated that upper management can create a work environment that fosters positive emotions, satisfaction, and overall happiness.

On the other hand, the role of upper management in providing happiness at work has been investigated in the UAE through various research studies and initiatives. However, there is a shortage of happiness studies in both life and job levels across the

UAE. Nonetheless, Alnuaimi (2018) examined happiness implementation strategies and practices in public organizations in the UAE, focusing on the role of both top management and HRM. The study identified gaps in current practices and systems and proposed a conceptual framework to help organizations fill these gaps and enhance organizational culture and happiness. Furthermore, the UAE government has shown great attention to employee happiness and has encouraged government organizations to develop happiness plans and processes.

In addition, the UAE has implemented various initiatives and programs to promote happiness at work and recognize organizations that prioritize employee well-being. For instance, El-Sharkawy et al. (2023) mentioned the Happiness @ Work Award that was launched in partnership with Forbes Middle East to acknowledge corporate entities in the region that offer their employees the highest degrees of happiness. This award is aligned with the UAE's overall happiness strategy and enjoys the support of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Prime Minister of the UAE and Dubai Ruler. Such initiatives highlight the importance given to the role of upper management in creating a happy work environment.

1.3. Factors influencing workplace happiness

Workplace happiness is influenced by various factors that contribute to employees' overall well-being and satisfaction in their work environment. These factors can be categorized into different dimensions, including personal factors, organizational factors, and external factors, as discussed in previous research (Alnuaimi, 2018; Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020; Kun and Gadanecz, 2022; Tunsi and Bhalla, 2023).

Regarding personal factors, employees with a positive attitude and optimistic mindset are more likely to experience higher levels of workplace happiness, as stated by Bhatia and Mohsin (2020). Additionally, Alnuaimi (2018) stated that alignment between personal values and organizational goals can enhance employees' sense of purpose and fulfillment, leading to greater happiness at work. Moreover, striking a healthy balance between work and personal life is crucial for employee well-being and happiness, as per Bhatia and Mohsin (2020).

In terms of organizational factors, effective leadership that promotes trust, transparency, and open communication fosters a positive work environment, thereby influencing employees' happiness, as discussed by Bhatia and Mohsin (2020) and Kun and Gadanecz (2022). Furthermore, Alnuaimi (2018) argued that a supportive and inclusive culture that values employee well-being encourages collaboration, and recognizes achievements can significantly impact workplace happiness. Additionally, Tunsi and Bhalla (2023) stated that providing employees with meaningful and challenging tasks, along with the autonomy to make decisions, enhances their sense of control and satisfaction, contributing to overall happiness.

HRM practices also play a role in workplace happiness. Offering opportunities for learning, skill development, and career advancement can enhance employees' happiness by providing a sense of progress and personal development, as stated by Bhatia and Mohsin (2020). Moreover, Alnuaimi (2018) stated that recognizing and appreciating employees' contributions and achievements can boost morale and

increase workplace happiness. Additionally, Tunsi and Bhalla (2023) argued that a comfortable and conducive work environment that prioritizes employee well-being, safety, and comfort positively impacts workplace happiness.

External factors, such as the broader socio-cultural context, including societal norms, values, and religious beliefs, can influence employees' happiness and well-being at work. Furthermore, supportive policies and practices that enable employees to integrate their work and personal lives effectively can contribute to their overall happiness, as per Alnuaimi (2018).

1.4. Existing literature gap and research questions

While research on workplace happiness has grown significantly in recent years (Al Suwaidi, 2019; Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020; Kun and Gadanecz, 2022), the existing literature indicates there are still some gaps to address. One key area that has not been thoroughly explored is the topic of top management's attitudes and strategies regarding employee happiness in government and semi-government organizations in the UAE context. Much of the previous research has focused on private-sector organizations in Western countries (Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020; Kun and Gadanecz, 2022). Therefore, more studies are needed to understand the perspectives and approaches taken within public entities in the UAE.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a country that is known for its focus on happiness and well-being. According to the World Happiness Report 2023, the UAE ranks among the top countries in terms of happiness (Helliwell et al., 2023). The UAE also secured the 26th position out of 137 nations based on a three-year average (2020–2022). This remarkable achievement is attributed to the country's commitment to the pursuit of happiness, which predates the establishment of the Ministry of Happiness in 2016 and can be traced back to the leadership of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan. The UAE is fortunate to have visionary and optimistic leaders who believe in the necessity of change to ensure the happiness and prosperity of all citizens. Despite facing past and occasional present challenges and resource constraints, these leaders maintain a positive outlook. As noted by Forster (2017, p. 36), the recent economic and political history of the UAE is characterized by its "astonishing", "rapid", and "transformational" nature.

Additionally, previous work has primarily examined workplace happiness from the employee viewpoint, through surveys and questionnaires (Al Suwaidi, 2019; Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020). There is a lack of qualitative research eliciting the views and experiences of those in leadership positions. Hearing directly from senior managers could provide valuable insights into how happiness initiatives are developed and implemented from the top down (Foncubierta-Rodríguez, 2021).

To address these gaps in the literature, this research aims to answer the following main question: What are the attitudes of top managers regarding workplace happiness at one of the UAE's semi-government organizations? And the following sub-questions:
1) What are the top managers' attitudes towards happiness at work?
2) What are the top management's tasks and strategies implemented at the workplace, including social activities, to enhance employees' happiness?

1.5. Aims of the present study

This study aims to investigate the attitudes of senior management toward enhancing employee happiness in the workplace in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The focus will be on one semi-public organization's strategies and policies. Therefore, the objective of this research is to examine the currently under-researched area of top management's attitudes, policies, and procedures concerning employee happiness in UAE public or semi-public organizations. There is a lack of studies on happiness at work in the Middle East and the United Arab Emirates, with the existing literature primarily focused on private corporations and Western contexts.

The research was conducted within a notable semi-governmental organization in the UAE to address specific research questions. This organization, renowned for its work in developing the education sector in Dubai, was chosen as the focus of this study. The organization's primary objective is to promote a high-quality education sector that prioritizes happiness and well-being, through collaboration with educational institutions, parents, students, teachers, investors, and government authorities.

The lack of research on top management's attitudes regarding employee happiness in the UAE public sector may be due to limited prioritization, cultural factors, resource constraints, data accessibility challenges, and a research gap. Limited prioritization refers to insufficient emphasis on employee happiness at the top management level. Cultural factors and traditional management practices may shape the focus on employee happiness research. Limited resources and competing research priorities within the public sector can also contribute to the lack of attention to this area. Difficulties in accessing data and obtaining participation from top management may be a contributing factor. The existing literature is scarce, indicating a research gap. However, it is important to understand and foster employee happiness, given its impact on job satisfaction and organizational performance.

The findings from this research can assist top management in fostering a happier work environment and establishing a culture that values employees' input and ensures their well-being. Furthermore, it can help cultivate a more prosperous business by encouraging employees to think innovatively and find better solutions to the organization's challenges. However, it is worth noting that the field of organizational behavior and human resources management is continuously evolving, leading to ongoing research. As a result, there is a possibility that more research on this specific topic will become available in the future as our knowledge expands. With that said, this study is the first of its kind to be conducted in the UAE context within a public institution, albeit semi-public.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Participants

The primary objective of this case study is to gain a better understanding of the factors that influence employee behavior and attitudes toward workplace happiness and the role of management. To accomplish this, six semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals in managerial positions, including three chiefs, a chairman, a deputy director, and a head of employees.

2.2. Instruments and procedures

The interview consisted of 11 questions that examined the top managers' perspective on happiness at work (knowing what). Additionally, it explored the tasks and strategies implemented by top management to foster employee happiness in the workplace, including social activities (knowing how).

The interviews with the senior administrators lasted between 30 and 45 min. The selection of these individuals was motivated by a desire to highlight the efforts and strategies employed to improve employee satisfaction and happiness at work. Each participant willingly agreed to participate in the study, and their confidentiality was ensured through signed consent forms.

The comments provided by the participants in semi-structured interviews were thoroughly examined through qualitative analysis. Each discussion was carefully analyzed to identify recurring themes and subsequently categorized for further examination. This process involved thoroughly listening to and reviewing all responses to identify key codes and major themes.

The selection of interviews as the data collection approach for this study was based on several reasons. Firstly, interviews allow for the collection of more detailed and in-depth information, which is particularly valuable in educational and social research. Secondly, this approach enables researchers to delve deeper into the participants' perspectives and generate fresh questions, providing opportunities for future research (Alnuaimi, 2018). Interviews were chosen as the data collection method for this pilot exploratory study due to the privacy policy of the organization under study, which prohibited surveying its employees. Additionally, interviews provided a more comprehensive understanding of how each respondent perceived and managed workplace happiness.

2.3. Data analysis

This study employs the inductive approach to gather and analyze data (**Figure 1**). The inductive approach is appropriate when there are limited sources available (Milyankova, 2015). This approach involves deriving a theory from the collected data and using what is known as the "bottom-up approach" (Blackstone, 2018).
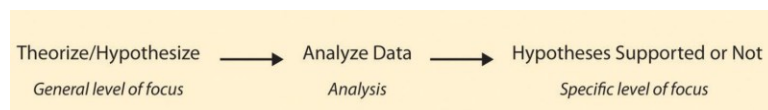

Theorize/Hypothesize ⟶ Analyze Data ⟶ Hypotheses Supported or Not
General level of focus   *Analysis*   *Specific level of focus*

Figure 1. Inductive research.

Source: Blackstone (2018).

This study utilizes the above approach by conducting interviews with sample groups and making deductions based on their responses. Additionally, government organizations in the UAE are examined to gain insights into the functioning of similar government organizations in the same context.

The process of collecting data goes through several stages, mixing quantitative and qualitative methods to consider the subject from all aspects. The stages are shown in the following **Table 1**. The data was collected from 140 employees in four government organisations in the United Arab Emirates over period of 4 months. The

case study organisations are: Sheikh Zayed Housing Programme (SZHP), Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA), Ebrahi, bin Hamid bin Abuid Allah Hospital, and Suhaila school.

Table 1. Profile of questionnaire respondents based on organisations and departments.

Organization	Number of Respondents	Departments Surveyed
1. Sheikh Zayed Housing Programme	50	• Human Resource Department. • The Financial and Administrative Affairs Department • Strategy & Future Department • Departments of Information Technology • The Government Communication Department • Customer Care Department • Department of Housing Studies • Project Execution Management • Corporate Services Management
2. Dubai Electricity and Water Authority	30	• Business Support and Human Resource Department • Power & Water Planning • Innovation &The Future • Technical Advisors • Strategy & Business Development • Marketing & Corp Communication • The Financial Department
3. Ebrahi, bin Hamid bin Abuid Allah hospital	30	• Human Resource Department • Finance and Budget • Quality and Excellence • Information Technology • Infection Control Office • Laboratory Department • Medical Records
4. Suhaila School	6	• Principal • Vice Principal • Primary Coordinators • Advisor • Social Specialist • Social Specialist

3. Results

Each question with its answers is presented as follows.

3.1. First question: What are top managers' attitudes towards happiness at work?

The results indicated that all respondents expressed a favorable perspective on experiencing satisfaction in their workplace. Upon analyzing the data, several recurring themes emerged, which were found to be prevalent in the majority of the responses.

3.1.1. Readiness & determination

The majority of respondents agreed that the director general has consistently said that the needs of employees are their top priorities. He looked for both prospective remedies and the root reasons for people's disengagement. According to a survey on job satisfaction, the set and uncontrollable working hours and salary are the least enjoyable components of the job. They wanted to think about maximizing what they

currently have as a consequence. At this point, a shift began to take place, employing learned knowledge and the world's finest practices.

"We moved from measuring job satisfaction in 2007 to using the Engagement Survey by Gallup in 2009 and then to a happiness survey in 2013. It took huge efforts at the beginning, but now the positive practices are a part of organizational culture. The happiness level according to the 2013 survey was 6.5, rising to 7.3 in 2014 and we reached the top 30 in 2013, then top 20 in 2014, and the top 15 in 2015." (E6).

In response to a statement on their perspective on workplace happiness, one of the respondents stated: "We focus on employee happiness and making sure that they are excited about the organization's vision or making them think they are a part of it. We got to know Nick Mark, the creator of the happiness index, and we also studied other prosperous companies like Google and Zappos."

The senior executives in the organization seemed to prioritize the optimization of existing resources. They demonstrated a strong commitment to implementing strategies that they believed would enhance employee satisfaction. Their actions exhibited a focus on addressing employee needs and desires and offering support to promote their success.

3.1.2. Willingness to change

In 2015, the UAE Ministry of Happiness was established, representing a significant development. Before this, happiness was regarded as a luxury, as mentioned by a respondent. This study reveals that in 2007, the organization started evaluating employee satisfaction at work, later transitioning to the use of the Gallup Engagement Poll in 2009, and ultimately adopting a happiness poll in 2013. The comments gathered from participants indicate that the management was determined and firmly believed that implementing effective practices requires substantial effort. About this, one participant expressed their perspective on the matter.

"According to the 2013 poll, the happiness level was 6.5, increasing to 7.3 in 2014, and we made it to the top 30 in 2013, the top 20 in 2014, and the top 15 in 2015."

3.1.3. Positive company culture

The majority of participants have indicated that the organization's management has successfully cultivated a culture of trust to enhance employee satisfaction. The management has prioritized three key values, namely evidence-based strategy, teamwork, and continuous improvement. As mentioned by one participant regarding the significance of connections in the workplace: "The five pillars of wellbeing— connect, be active, keep learning, give, and take notice—were taken to heart by the organization, and we created chances for the individuals to live them, not by force but by choice."

Incorporating these components is intended to cultivate a positive company culture and enhance employee well-being. Based on all the feedback received, it is evident that the organization highly regards a friendly work environment. The majority of respondents explicitly expressed that they: "Have people with good heart and soul who feel about one another, we meet each day in a very fun environment and we share different entertaining interaction and social events."

To foster a collaborative and inclusive work culture, our management and staff have adopted an open-office concept. This approach encourages team members to

work together, supporting each other both professionally and personally. The positive and welcoming atmosphere remains a prominent feature of our organization.

3.2. Second question: What are the top management's strategies implemented at the workplace, to enhance employees' happiness?

The company demonstrated a strong commitment to research and implementing effective workplace happiness practices. The top managers in this organization believe that creating a positive and productive work environment is key to success. They acknowledge that organizations with inclusive cultures, where employees feel valued and empowered, tend to achieve higher levels of productivity. The research conducted in this field played a significant role in informing this organization's progress. Across the interviews, eight major themes were identified based on the participants' comments.

3.2.1. Theory and practice

The company conducted a research study in 2012 to identify the characteristics of successful individuals within organizations. The findings indicated that traits such as curiosity, creativity, ability to handle challenges, enthusiasm, and dependability were prevalent among successful employees. The research suggested that individuals who display satisfaction and engagement in their work are more likely to thrive. The CEO expressed their thoughts on the matter, stating: "I think research has led us to create a system in support of characteristics that successful employees embrace to prosper at work, such as curiosity, excitement, challenge, and empowerment."

They conducted research as part of their objectives to enhance employee satisfaction in the workplace and identified certain findings that they deemed valuable and applicable for fostering employee growth and development, including the concept of autonomy.

3.2.2. Religious considerations

Fostering religious observance at work is a notable strategy employed by upper management. This approach is instrumental in acknowledging the needs and values of employees. The administration demonstrates support for religious practices by providing designated spaces for prayer within the workplace. Given that the company employs individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds when asked about their approach to managing this diversity, it was revealed that the company offers prayer areas and adjusts working hours during Ramadan and Islamic holy days. The company ensures equal access to benefits for all employees, irrespective of their ethnicity or beliefs. Such policies play a vital role in preserving the organizational culture and values.

According to the CEO, "All employees have access to facilities so they can practice their religion at work, and we treat all employees as fellow humans regardless of their religion. All government agencies, including non-Muslim personnel, have lower hours of operation during Ramadan, and we no exception."

The interview questions indicate that UAE governmental institutions hold religion in high regard and foster its practice. Leaders are also tasked with supporting and promoting it as part of labor rights. Specifically, Islamic education is encouraged,

and values of tolerance are emphasized. Considering the UAE Constitution's adherence to Islam, tolerance is an integral aspect of Emirati culture.

3.2.3. No doors policy

One notable theme that emerged was the company's commitment to an open and inclusive work environment. The organization prioritizes activities and events aimed at fostering better communication and loyalty among employees. Rather than having individual offices, the office layout is designed with an open floor plan that encourages spontaneous and amicable communication. All participants confirmed that employees are actively encouraged to raise any concerns or suggest improvements in a supportive and friendly atmosphere. This approach stands in stark contrast to conventional hierarchical structures that often intimidate employees and erode trust in management. According to the management, informal meetings with employees serve to enhance engagement and cultivate strong personal and professional relationships.

"We gather every day in a really pleasant environment and share many enjoyable communication and interpersonal events."

We would like to mention that they drew inspiration from the open and welcoming atmosphere provided by the hotels to their guests. This is aimed at creating a lasting impression and showcasing the values they uphold in their surroundings.

3.2.4. Establishing positive culture

The cornerstone of a strong organizational culture and an essential element of our daily operations are our shared vision and values. The leadership team at our institution fully comprehends the importance of these guiding principles. They actively involve all employees in the process of defining and perpetuating the company's values, goals, and vision. One participant said: "Our vision and values are the basis of everything; they got ingrained in our organization's way of life, and this is not possible without our inspiring leader, who is regarded as a powerful role model. He exhibits organizational principles by his actions and has faith in our capabilities."

Based on the feedback received, it is evident that the organization's vision, values, and wellness components play a crucial role in cultivating a supportive culture and fostering a sense of mission. In simpler terms, individuals who perceive a supportive culture and a clear mission stemming from an organization's vision, values, and wellness initiatives are more inclined to embrace and align themselves with said organization's values.

3.2.5. Accountability

Any working professional should comprehend and put into practice the notion of accountability. "Holding yourself and others accountable is a key component of productive workplace cooperation, whether you're a team leader or an employee", one participant affirmed. As a result, by adopting a respectful and accountable approach and fostering teamwork, the organization has achieved notable improvements in performance and results.

Instead of assigning blame to the Human Resources Department (HRD), they restructured the division and established a talent-focused panel. This team was granted the responsibility and authority to focus on talent acquisition, performance management, rewards allocation, and employee training to ensure their success. "We

eliminated the department since they weren't in charge of ensuring everyone's happiness", one participant said.

The idea of accountability was backed up by another participant, who stated: "Our leader always emphasizes that it is good to behave differently or to fail because we learn from experiences. What I mean is that we acknowledge the failure and proceed as a result."

3.2.6. Trust

The concept of "trust" was found to be a key strategy embraced by the organization. Rather than relying on strict top-down control, the organization prioritizes employee autonomy, leading to a more effective and collaborative relationship between employees and their leaders. The employees have the freedom to choose a workplace environment that aligns with their values and allows them to make a meaningful impact. Professionals are increasingly seeking a participatory and trustworthy environment that empowers them to have a voice in how they carry out their duties. One participant in the study affirmed this finding by stating: "We have never had an attendance or departure signing system since we trust our members of staff to not misuse it." Another participant's assertion that they "enjoy flexible working hours, no desks policy, and you can work from wherever you choose" reinforced this claim.

3.2.7. Encouraging initiatives

While an organization is always ready and enthusiastic about supporting and developing high-performing individuals, the most valuable employees are those who consistently demonstrate dedication and determination. However, it is possible that certain individuals may be satisfied with their current roles and hesitant to embrace new challenges. Successful leaders strive to foster a culture of continuous learning and inspire others to proactively seize growth opportunities. One respondent stated that: "Based on individual reviews, we developed a system called Pearls. Each employee has access to the system and can suggest a colleague for a pearl based on a quality they have noticed in them, such as inventiveness. Due to the open nature of the system, everyone can see both the pearl that one employee is giving to another and the motivation behind the kind gesture. Each employee has their own personal credit card that is used to store pearls in place of cash. To control the process, each employee can supply up to 6 Pearls and get any number of Pearls over a specific period of time."

The same opinion was supported by another respondent who emphasized that: "Because of the regular encounters that make it simple to listen to the employees' opinions, their proposals and ideas become reality so rapidly. Along with that, some programs have been implemented to promote conversation and provide an outlet for all staff members to share their thoughts."

The consensus among participants was that senior management consistently encourages employees to step out of their comfort zones and cultivate a distinct, efficient, and proactive mindset. According to all respondents, the most valuable employees are those who possess critical thinking skills and demonstrate a willingness to acquire new competencies and expand their knowledge for the benefit of the organization. All top managers who were interviewed confirmed that this appears to hold true within their own organization.

3.2.8. Organizational and self-growth opportunities

Individuals may experience job-related stress due to imbalances between their knowledge and skills and the expectations and pressures at work that exceed their capacity for adjustment. While stress can occur in various work environments, it often becomes intensified when employees perceive a lack of support from top managers and colleagues, have limited control over their jobs, or are uncertain about how to handle expectations and pressures.

However, the situation within this organization is distinct. A majority of respondents have acknowledged that stress management is incorporated into workplace policies and steps are being taken to minimize work-related stress among employees. The organization also appears to prioritize personal growth by providing opportunities for social and recreational activities, which contribute to a positive and harmonious work environment. Furthermore, top management has explicitly expressed their support for these efforts, saying that: "We must admit that stress is a reality, but that stress can be controlled and dealt with. We are focusing on stress management with the aid of yoga, tai chi, CrossFit, and cookery workshops. To make employees happy and alleviate the negative effects of stress on them, the management believes in the significance of the physical activity, charitable giving, and indulging in chosen activities."

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain insights into top management attitudes and strategies regarding workplace happiness within a UAE semi-government organization. The findings revealed several themes that reflected existing literature and offered implications worth further exploration. This discussion will analyze the key results in more depth and relate them to the broader research context. It will also consider limitations and present recommendations for future studies.

4.1. Relationship to prior research

One of the most notable findings was the demonstrated readiness, determination, and willingness of top managers to prioritize employee happiness and drive continuous improvements. This aligns strongly with research emphasizing the crucial role of upper management in cultivating organizational culture and happiness (Foncubierta-Rodríguez, 2021; Tunsi and Bhalla, 2023). Previous studies have shown that leadership styles, policies, and actions heavily impact employee well-being, motivation, and satisfaction (Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020; Foncubierta-Rodríguez, 2021).

The proactive stance taken by the studied organization, transitioning measures from basic satisfaction to overall happiness and engagement, reflected the recognition of happiness as a strategic goal rather than just a metric (Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020). Investing long-term efforts to systematically improve based on research placed them among the global top rankings for workplace happiness (Alnuaimi, 2018; Helliwell et al., 2023). This highlights the importance of tangible, visible support and commitment from the highest levels (Foncubierta-Rodríguez, 2021).

Additionally, the variety of strategies implemented appropriately incorporated known personal, organizational, and HRM factors influencing workplace happiness

identified in prior literature (Alnuaimi, 2018; Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020; Kun and Gadanecz, 2022; Tunsi and Bhalla, 2023). Religious considerations and an inclusive culture addressed personal and cultural dimensions, while initiatives like trust, rewards, and growth opportunities related to leadership, resources, and development practices shown previously to enhance well-being (Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020; Kun and Gadanecz, 2022). Crucially, integrating evidence-based research promotes a comprehensive, systemic approach (Alnuaimi, 2018; Tunsi and Bhalla, 2023).

4.2. Considering cultural context

Concerning the broader cultural context, it is worth noting that cultivating the appropriate organizational values and behaviors requires alignment across different levels within the organization (Foncubierta-Rodríguez, 2021). The vision and conduct of senior leaders modeled the intended culture as the theory proposes is essential (Foncubierta-Rodríguez, 2021).

Moreover, societal values in the UAE emphasize concepts like trust, tolerance, and collectivism that feature prominently in the organization's approach (Alnuaimi, 2018; Kun and Gadanecz, 2022). Accommodating religious practices respected personal values and diversity—important considerations for the cultural context (Kun and Gadanecz, 2022). This reflects the interconnected nature of personal, organizational, and societal factors in shaping happiness as prior studies emphasize (Alnuaimi, 2018; Kun and Gadanecz, 2022).

However, balancing extrinsic and intrinsic motivations to satisfy both individual and organizational priorities requires a nuanced understanding of how cultural dynamics interact with workplace happiness (Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020; Foncubierta-Rodríguez, 2021). Flexibility may be needed to adapt strategies respecting cultural particularities while maintaining global standards of well-being and fulfillment (Alnuaimi, 2018; Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020; Kun and Gadanecz, 2022). More cross-cultural research can offer deeper insights in this regard.

4.3. Value and behavior association

The findings of this study highlight the importance of aligning values and behaviors across different levels of the organization to successfully foster a culture of happiness. As **Figure 2** depicts, three main factors must be considered: values, behaviors, and time. Management must first adopt core values that reflect their commitment to employee well-being and happiness. Then, these values must be translated into concrete actions and behaviors over time to create meaningful change.
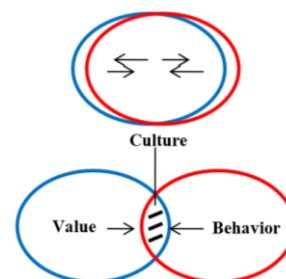

Figure 2. Value-behavior association.

Source: compiled by the authors.

A challenge is that individual employees may hold personal values that differ from those of the organization. However, as shown in **Figure 3**, organizations consist of interrelated dimensions beyond just corporate values—they also encompass the values and behaviors of leaders as well as staff. Successful alignment across these levels appears critical according to the results. The studied organization demonstrated strategic alignment between senior leaders modeling the culture through their conduct and policies reflecting organizational priorities.
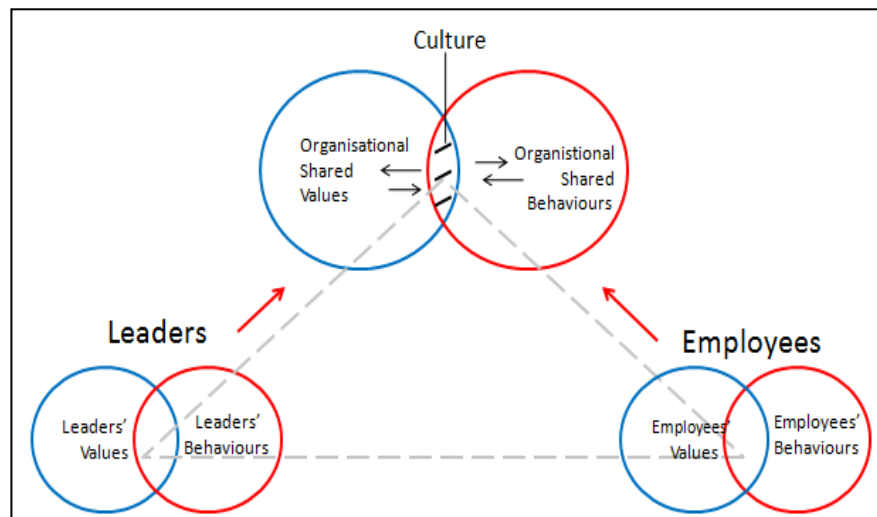

Figure 3. Integration of values and behaviors at a different organizational level.
Source: Compiled by the author.

Moreover, the study finds the barriers persist between top management and employees, as interactions are typically limited to formal settings such as meetings, activities, or scheduled appointments. In contrast, Organizations adopt an open-plan layout without traditional offices, potentially fostering more spontaneous and informal communication.

4.4. Leaders' values and behaviors

The findings emphasized the valuable role of leaders in shaping workplace values and behaviors. As theoretical models propose, the values and actions of top managers heavily influence employee attitudes, satisfaction, and performance outcomes (Foncubierta-Rodríguez, 2021).

In the studied organization, senior executives appeared genuinely dedicated to prioritizing happiness based on their unwavering long-term commitment and research-driven continuum of improvements. Their actions embodied strategic values like dedication, innovation, and community—likely inspiring staff through the authentic embodiment of the culture (Foncubierta-Rodríguez, 2021; Tunsi and Bhalla, 2023).

This affirms that visible, congruent prioritization and role-modeling of values from the highest levels may prove indispensable for aligning staff and achieving happiness goals (Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020; Foncubierta-Rodríguez, 2021). However, flexibility is still important to respect diverse personal dynamics.

4.5. Employee personal values

A key finding was the organization's attentiveness toward balancing organizational priorities with individual needs, values, and well-being. Respecting religious practices and fostering inclusion accommodated personal identities and intrinsic motivations (Alnuaimi, 2018; Kun and Gadanecz, 2022).

Moreover, strategies like empowerment, rewards, and growth opportunities likely satisfied both extrinsic and intrinsic factors important for fulfillment (Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020; Tunsi and Bhalla, 2023). This nuanced consideration of how personal values interact with the work context aligns with models emphasizing their interplay in shaping happiness (Foncubierta-Rodríguez, 2021; Kun and Gadanecz, 2022).

However, fully resolving conflicts between individual and corporate priorities requires ongoing understanding and adaptation, meriting continued exploration. Flexibility remains paramount to balancing priorities respectfully across levels.

4.6. Practical implications

The findings carry several practical implications worthy of consideration. First, the study exemplifies how evidence-based strategies derived from happiness and motivation theories can be effectively operationalized in real-world organizational settings (Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020; Kun and Gadanecz, 2022). It provides a case example of translating academic knowledge into impactful workplace initiatives (Tunsi and Bhalla, 2023).

Senior managers seeking to drive meaningful change can draw lessons on garnering leadership support, prioritizing research, and adopting tailored, multi-dimensional approaches (Alnuaimi, 2018; Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020; Foncubierta-Rodríguez, 2021). The tactics utilized, such as flexible policies, rewards, and growth opportunities, additionally offer a model framework that could inspire replication suited to different organizational contexts (Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020; Tunsi and Bhalla, 2023).

Second, scholars and practitioners gain insight into relatively unexplored areas like public sector happiness in the Middle East (Alnuaimi, 2018; Al Suwaidi, 2019). It addresses prior calls for more employer perspectives and non-Western, non-private sector research (Alnuaimi, 2018; Kun and Gadanecz, 2022). The study thus contributes new knowledge and perspectives that advance global understanding of workplace happiness.

Overall, the findings carry practical implications for optimizing workplace environments, retention, and performance outcomes through dedicated happiness strategies founded on academic literature (Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020; Tunsi and Bhalla, 2023).

4.7. Limitations and future research

This study offers a valuable exploration but presents limitations that future studies could address. First, as a single-case examination, generalizability remains limited (Milyankova, 2015). Replicating this inquiry across multiple organizations would strengthen validity and uncover other influencing factors (Blackstone, 2018).

Comparisons between sectors or countries could provide deeper cultural understanding too (Kun and Gadanecz, 2022).

In addition, this type of research necessitates a small sample that is deliberately chosen for research purposes, and as such, may not precisely reflect the viewpoints of a larger population. The restricted size of the sample and the careful selection of participants limit the degree to which our findings can be generalized, which is a typical characteristic of all interview-based studies.

Second, interviewing solely top managers risks omitting employee perspectives, a valuable data source (Alnuaimi, 2018). Surveys or focus groups incorporating diverse staff voices could offer fuller insights, potentially revealing discordant viewpoints (Milyankova, 2015). Triangulating mixed methods would offer richer, more nuanced analyses too (Blackstone, 2018).

However, it should be noted that the aim of these interviews is not to provide a comprehensive representation but rather to offer insights into the opinions of the senior managers we engaged with regarding workplace happiness. Additionally, these interviews shed light on the approaches, policies, and activities they employ to cultivate a positive work environment.

Third, the cross-sectional design presents a snapshot lacking longitudinal examination of changing attitudes, policies, or impacts over time (Milyankova, 2015). Future research might investigate strategy implementation processes or conduct pre/post evaluations to assess outcomes more rigorously (Blackstone, 2018).

Finally, exploring connections between specific initiatives and tangible results like productivity, retention or well-being could strengthen understanding of return on happiness investments (Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020; Tunsi and Bhalla, 2023). Qualitative studies may also delve deeper into underlying rationales, perspectives, or sociocultural factors (Kun and Gadanecz, 2022; Milyankova, 2015).

Overall, more extensive, mixed methods research designs across varied populations could significantly enhance knowledge on optimizing workplace happiness in diverse contexts through informed, effective leadership. This remains a rich topic meriting continued scholarly focus.

5. Conclusion

This exploratory case study provides novel insights into top management attitudes and strategies regarding workplace happiness within a semi-government organization in the UAE. The key findings shed light on how the organization prioritizes employee well-being and drives continuous improvements through a dedication to research, leadership commitment, and tailored initiatives. Top managers demonstrated readiness to optimize existing resources and willingness to systematically transform cultural practices based on evidence. A variety of strategies incorporated known personal, organizational, and HRM factors shown previously to impact happiness.

Notably, strategies appropriately balance intrinsic and extrinsic motivations by respecting religious values and fostering autonomy, growth, and rewards. Top leaders served as role models, aligning their conduct with strategic priorities. This emphasizes the importance of visible support from the highest levels in cultivating organizational

culture. While limited in generalizability, the study offers a valuable example of operationalizing academic knowledge into impactful workplace policies and initiatives centered on fostering genuine happiness.

The findings carry meaningful implications for optimizing retention, performance, and well-being outcomes through dedicated strategic happiness efforts founded on empirical literature. However, more extensive mixed methods research across diverse populations remains imperative to advance broader understanding. Continued scholarly focus on cultivating happy workplaces informed by leaders' perspectives can offer richer insights for enhancing both individual lives and organizational success in various cultural contexts globally. Overall, the study offers novel contributions while highlighting opportunities for future research to build on its exploratory foundation.

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