

HOW HAPPY ARE PROJECT MANAGERS IN THEIR JOBS?

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Employers and researchers have focused over the last several decades on how to sustainably improve employee performance. Antecedents of happiness at work including employee satisfaction, work engagement, employee engagement, wellness and well-being or happiness have been demonstrated to correlate positively to improvements in key performance outcomes including: employee retention and attendance profitability, productivity, customer loyalty, health, creativity, safety environment, losses to theft, etc. Projects have increasingly been used by organizations in all sectors and industries to deliver significant strategic change initiatives. Project management techniques have improved project success rates, but there is room for further improvement. This study explores the level of self-reported happiness at work for project managers using the Happiness@Work survey and the elements of happiness at work which are most positively correlated with happiness at work for project managers. Preliminary results show PM's happiness is in the bottom 50% against the U.S. benchmark for this survey with effects of total work experience, gender, age, and employment status on overall happiness at work for project managers. Role, team well-managed, organization well managed, meaning of work, and some personal factors (health, happiness, vitality, and confidence) and the level of project management maturity at the organizational level show significant positive effects on overall happiness at work. At the component level of happiness at work (personal resources, organizational system, functioning at work, experience of work), significant differences were noted relative to sector, gender, role, age, time at organization, work experience, stage in the project management process maturity model, and expectations of success of current project.

Keywords: subjective well-being, happiness at work, maturity model, statistical analysis

INTRODUCTION

Recently countries and companies have been moving to measure the happiness of their citizens and their employees. Best place to work indices have proliferated and companies are increasingly striving to be an employer of choice as the competition to attract and retain highly qualified employees increases with the retirement of the Boomer generation. Researchers have reported that happiness or its essential components is linked with reduced morbidity, increased longevity, less symptoms of ill health; positive emotions with increased resilience, motivation, task persistence, creativity, information processing and memory as well as goal attainment. It is not a surprise to see a happier employee is more productive (Oswald et al 2009). Job satisfaction and organization commitment are negatively related to intention to quit, actual turnover, absence from work, poor employee behavior. Improved job

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satisfaction is positively related to reductions in mental health issues and burnout (Fisher 2009). Each of these benefits which are linked to happiness at work or its components are likely to be of benefit to the project management outcomes as well in all sectors and industries.

So far, however, the literature has not focused on project managers as a profession and whether happiness at work might result in better project outcomes. This paper reports on our findings from a pilot study conducted via online survey in the fall of 2014. We solicited responses from 400 PM professionals attending an annual PMI chapter educational event in Montgomery County, Maryland. We received completed responses from 225 project managers. All participants in this study received a report of their own happiness at work results and then attended a debriefing held at the chapter educational event.

DEFINITION OF WORKPLACE HAPPINESS

Happiness is comprised of two types in the literature: hedonic and eudaimonic views of happiness. In the first instance, hedonic, happiness is seen as an abiding sense of satisfaction with life by the individual considering the overall and domain specific life experiences (Ryan and Deci 2001; Ryff and Singer 2008). Life satisfaction is accompanied in the hedonic view of happiness by a net positive emotional experience over time, meaning that the individual experiences more positive than negative emotions in their life (Diener et al 1999). Happiness in this sense concerns “what benefits a person, is good for her, makes her better off, serves her interests, or is desirable for her for her sake” (Haybron 2011).

The second view of happiness, the eudaimonic view, is concerned with the individual living a good life in a virtuous or moral sense, being true to themselves, acting morally, doing meaningful activities and growing as a person. Seligman (2002) combines these two view of happiness into one, noting that hedonic happiness, while necessary, is limited by genetic inheritance and subject to the hedonic treadmill (highs and lows of hedonic happiness are transitory). He postulates that hedonic happiness is insufficient and authentic happiness is derived by the partnering of hedonic and eudaimonic happiness which is not limited by genetically inherited predispositions to the experience of pleasant emotions and which is unlimited in the experience of eudaimonia through work that is congruent with the self-actualization of the individual, attainment of important self-set goals, and contributing to the greater good.

Happiness at work is conceptualized as transient, person and unit level (Fisher 2009). Transient happiness-related constructs include: transitory affect and mood as well as state affect, flow, mood, engagement, task engagement, and intrinsic motivation. Person level happiness includes physical and emotional health, engagement, job involvement, job satisfaction, and personality-based predispositions. At the unit level, happiness at work includes group level engagement, morale, satisfaction, emotional tone and mood. Happiness at work is the result of the individual, the work, the social environment (the team and the organization as a whole) (McNulty 2012).

HAPPINESS SURVEY AND SAMPLE

The standard questionnaire from HappinessWorks (Marks, 2011) was used as the basis for this survey because it addresses the key elements of hedonic and eudaimonic happiness and the three levels of happiness related constructs at work: transient, person and unit levels. The questionnaire includes 40 questions grouped into four interrelated categories: personal resources, organizational system, functioning at work,

and experience of work. This survey is completed by respondents using a 7-point Likert Scale and data is indexed on a 0 to 10 scale where 5 is the average. Index scores are developed by extensive data analysis of each question to the benchmark survey data. The 40 questions are aggregated without weighting into 16 subdomains and then into four domains or categories which are then combined to yield the overall happiness at work score. Within the standard 40-question survey is one question which asks respondents to rate their happiness at work. Information about the standard questionnaire is available at the HappinessWorks website (<http://www.happinessworks.com/>).

The standard questionnaire was modified to include expanded demographic filters including: years of work experience, stage of project management process maturity model (PM2), project role, project organization type, industry and sector. Several supplemental survey questions were added: availability and use of alternative work schedules, trusted by manager, and expectations of current project's success.

The sample was obtained by providing an online survey link to registered participants at an educational event sponsored by a chapter of the Project Management Institute, PMI, in October 2014 in Montgomery County, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C. There were approximately 400 registered participants and 227 responses were obtained; two were deleted as outliers prior to analysis of the sample. Respondents were rewarded with their personal results compared to the U.S. benchmark immediately upon completion of the survey and all participants attended a debriefing of the results at the event.

Our sample was nearly equally divided between male and female respondents. The majority of the respondents, 90.75%, were between the ages of 35 and 64 with a similar percentage reporting they were employed full-time. Time at organization was well distributed with 22.91% with 2 years or less tenure with their current organization and 27.31% with 2-5 years, 19.38% with 5-10 years, and 20.70% with 10-20 years. The respondents, while many were new to their organizations, reported significant overall work experience with less than 3% having less than 10 years of work experience and 53.74% with more than 25 years of work experience; 25.15% had 10-20 years of work experience and 17.62% had 20-25. The respondents were well distributed across the various stages of the PM2 model with 23.19% in ad hoc or planned stages, 45.37% in managed stage, and 37.09% in integrated or sustained stages. Project roles of respondents ranged from entry level to PMO director with concentrations in subject matter expert roles, project manager, senior project manager and program manager roles. Project organization (pure project, functional, matrix) of respondents was dominated by matrix organizations at 58.15% with pure project and functional at 19.38% and 22.47%, respectively. Fourteen industries were identified with IT products and services and consultancy dominating. Private sector organizations accounted for 64.32% of respondents; public sector with 20.51% and only 6.17% from not for profit sector.

WORKPLACE HAPPINESS FOR PROJECT MANAGERS

Reliability of Self-reporting of Workplace Happiness

Within the standard 40-question survey, one question asks respondents to assess their happiness at work. The analysis began with evaluating the relationship between the single question self-report of PM happiness at work and the calculated PM happiness at work. Overall PM happiness at work was 5.16 while responses to the single

question was lower at 4.7422 (Figure 1). This difference is significant; however, the overall happiness score and the single question happiness score are highly correlated. The difference between these two happiness at work scores supports the use of the full 40-question survey for assessing PM happiness at work. The difference between these two scores was not found to have a strong positive correlation with demographic characteristics of the respondents based on our initial review.

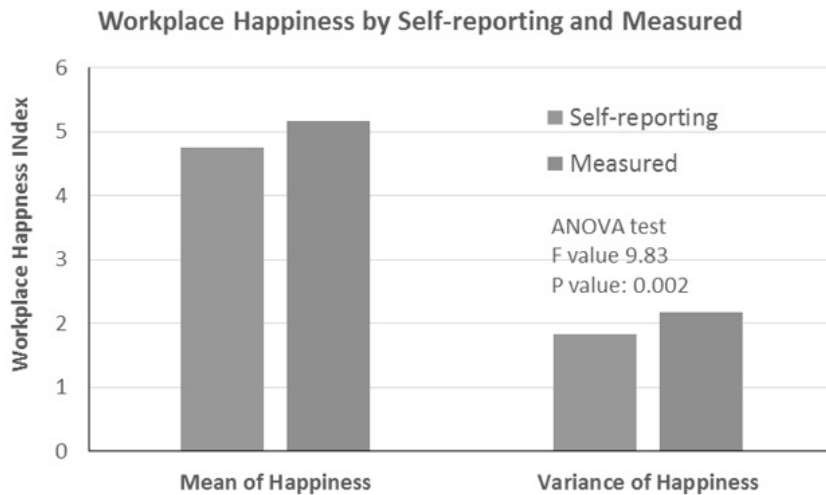


Figure 1: Self-reported vs measured happiness at work

However, in performing a linear regression analysis to explain the driver behind the self-reporting bias, career prospects and free to be self were found to account for nearly half of the observed variance (Table 1). A positive constant indicates an optimism bias on workplace happiness without any impact of factors. Two factors, career prospects and free to be self, help project managers to reduce the optimism bias.

Table 1: Factors affecting cognitive bias in happiness self-report

Indicators	Coefficient	t-statistics
(Constant)	1.094	5.440
Career Prospects	-.126	-3.769
Free to Be Self	-.196	-5.534
Number of cases	225	
R Square	0.215	
F value	30.423	

Overall PM Happiness at Work

The overall workplace happiness score for the 225 total respondents was reported at 5.15, with a standard deviation of 1.47, placing PM's on the average line of the U.S. population per the survey benchmark. Furthermore, significant differences were found in happiness at work for specific subsets of the sample respondents. These are discussed later below.

The overall PM happiness at work scores were correlated with a number of the demographic characteristics of the sample. Gender, age, work experience, employment status, sector, role, PM project management process maturity model (PM2) stage and organization type were analysed for their effect on PM happiness at

work. Gender, age, years of work experience, employment status were not found to be positively correlated with PM happiness at work overall for this sample. However, role, PM2 stage and project organization type were found to have statistically significant correlations with reported overall PM happiness at work. Results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic factors affecting PM happiness at work

Description	Pearson Correlation	P-value
Gender	-	0.158
Age	-	0.440
Work Experience	-	0.342
Employment Status (full or part-time)	-	0.424
Role (task...PM...PMO)	.215**	0.002
PM2 Stage	.181**	0.006
Project Organization Type	.148*	0.026

Note: 1. Sample Size = 225
 2. * significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
 3. ** significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Overall PM Happiness at Work by Sector

Our sample did not include sufficient responses from the not-for-profit sector to support a comparison with the private and public sector results. The public sector results were significantly higher for overall happiness at 5.33 compared to 5.10 for the private sector as shown in Figure 2. Data for the private sector separated respondents working for closely held companies and those working for publicly traded private sector companies. Results for these two groups were 5.26 and 4.92, respectively. Not-for-profit results, reporting from a small number of respondents, was 5.14.

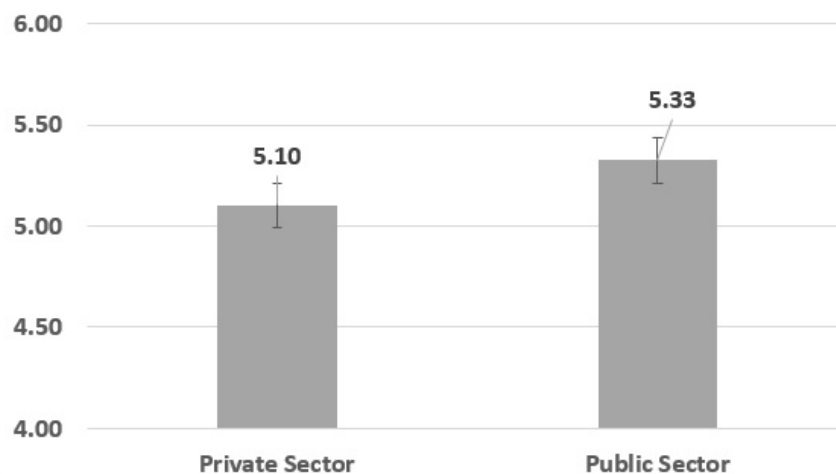


Figure 2: Overall PM happiness at work by sector

The unexpected outcome of public sector PM’s reporting higher overall happiness at work than private sector PM’s resulted in further exploration of overall happiness by considering possible differences at the category level as a first exploration of what might be contributing to these reported differences. Overall PM happiness at work is developed by aggregating responses in four categories: personal resources, organizational system, functioning at work and experience of work. The favourable overall results for PM happiness at work in the public sector was consistent across all four categories (See Figure 3 below). It is interesting, and a somewhat unexpected

finding, to note that PM's report higher levels of happiness overall and relative to the four component categories for the public sector.

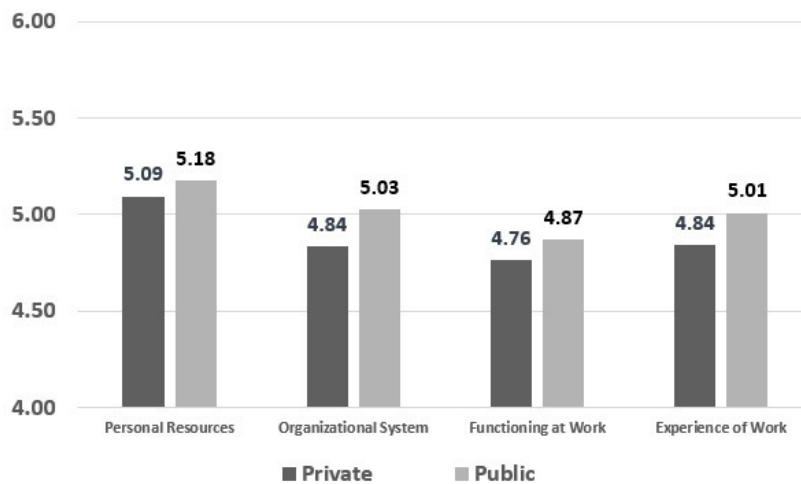


Figure 3: PM happiness at work by category by sector

Exploration of the data for personal resources indicated that the public and private sectors enjoyed modest differences in three of the four subcategories: vitality, happiness, and confidence. Work-life balance was significantly higher for the public sector respondents.

Organization systems category showed very similar results for the public and private sectors for management system but the private sector was below public sector for job design, work environment, and social value. Within the management system subcategory, public sector exceeded private sector PM happiness at work for constructive feedback and team well-managed while the private sector reported stronger results for trusted by manager and organization well-managed. On job design, the public sector results were higher for two of three elements of this subcategory: fair pay and job security while roughly equivalent for achievable job.

Functioning at work, a proxy for intrinsic motivation, showed the sectors with roughly equivalent results for free to be self, with public sector reporting higher scores for use strengths and creativity. Work relationships showed favourable results for the public sector for good friends at work and team relationships with the private sector showing better results for cooperation between teams. The sectors reported roughly equivalent results for relationship with manager. Sense of control and sense of progress were not analysed.

Experience of work shows the public sector with better results for positive emotions and worthwhile work while reporting roughly equivalent results for negative emotions and engaging work.

Project Manager Happiness at Work by Category

At the category level, PM happiness at work showed significant differences for several subsets of respondents.

Gender Differences. Significant gender differences were noted within the four component categories. Females reported higher levels of personal resources when compared with males, but were lower for each of the three other categories. Functioning at work, essentially intrinsic motivation, was the lowest for females at 4.64.

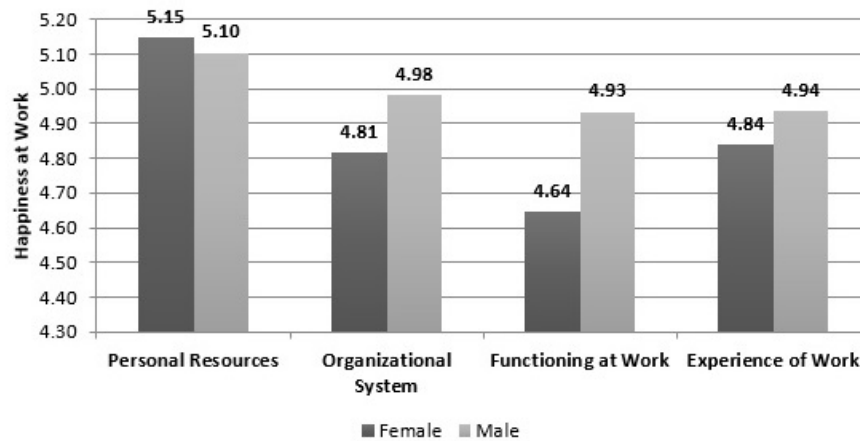


Figure 4: PM happiness at work by category by gender

Although most demographic variables show insignificant impact on the overall workplace happiness, at the category level, age, time at organization, and current project expectations of success showed significant positive relationships for all four categories. PM2 stage showed significant positive relationships for personal resources, functioning at work and experience of work. Work experience showed significant positive relationships only for functioning at work and experience of work (Table 3).

Table 3: Factors positively correlated with PM workplace happiness by category

Description/P-value	Personal Resources	Organizational System	Functioning at Work	Experience of Work
Age	2.85E-36	1.57E-21	1.29E-15	5.21E-20
Time at Organization	9.11E-37	5.28E-67	0.003808	1.57E-87
PM2 Stage	7.94E-85	Insignificant	1.03E-81	0.001256
Current Success Expectations	4E-135	1.7E-111	1.04E-98	8.3E-107
Work Experience	Insignificant	Insignificant	0.0038	0.0453

CONCLUSION

PM happiness at work is on average against the U.S. benchmark for the Happiness@Work survey tool used in this exploratory study suggesting that there is need and opportunity to enhance PM workplace happiness as a pathway to enhanced project performance over time. Distinct differences were found in overall PM happiness at work between the public and private sector with the public sector, somewhat surprisingly, reporting higher PM happiness at work scores. Further exploration of the areas of stronger public sector results and investigation of the underlying causes may lead to development of suggested interventions for the private and possibly not for profit sectors. Areas where the private sector reported stronger results should also be further explored to identify successful practices supporting PM happiness at work.

Overall PM happiness at work was further analysed into its four component categories: personal resources, organizational system, functioning at work and experience of work. Each of these categories, when considered at a sector level reported significant differences in many of the subcategories. This further supports the need and opportunity for further exploration of best practices in each sector to develop and disseminate enabling practices to enhance PM happiness at work.

Demographic differences within the sample examined also resulted in significant differences, some at the overall level and some only at the category level. Further analysis of these demographic differences is needed to assess how best to intervene for organizations, teams and individuals to enhance PM happiness at work. Clearly, one size is unlikely to fit all.

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