Research on Employee Well-Being: Concepts, Perspectives, Causes, and Consequences

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Abstract: With the rise of positive psychology research, academic attention to employee well-being remains high. By combing the classic literature on employee well-being at home and abroad, this paper summarizes the existing concepts, antecedents, and consequences of employee well-being; Based on the five theoretical perspectives of self-determination, resource conservation, social exchange, emotional events, and individual organization, this paper explores the formation mechanism of employee well-being and constructs the research framework of employee well-being at the present stage; Finally, combined with the localization situation in China, this paper provides some practical research suggestions and research directions on the current research status of employee well-being.

Keywords: Employee well-being, Job satisfaction, Theory perspective.

1. Introduction

As an important part of people’s happiness, employee well-being has a positive role in promoting the innovation ability of enterprises. In recent years, employment and population aging have become hot social issues in China today. In recent years, emergencies such as “employees jumping off a building” and “brain death of employees in a company due to overtime work” have emerged endlessly, and the happiness of the new generation of employees has gradually attracted the attention of the academic circle. The recent layoffs on JD increasingly indicate that the new generation of employee management has become a new issue in human resource management in the new era (Zhao et al., 2019). At the same time, the aging population of Chinese society has also increased the work pressure on middle-level employees, and the employment problem is becoming increasingly prominent.

By combing the classic literature on employee well-being at home and abroad, it is found that there is still no consensus on the concept and dimension of employee well-being. Many studies use job satisfaction instead of employee well-being; secondly, there is a lack of studies on employee well-being, mainly at the individual level, and relatively few at the organizational and group level. Many studies are limited to the impact of the workplace on employee well-being and ignore the impact of other places on employee well-being; Finally, there are few localization studies on employee well-being, most of which are based on western theories. Based on the above problems, this paper sorts out the current literature from the perspective of concept, cause, consequences, and theory, and on this basis, provides some practical suggestions for future research on employee well-being.

2. The Concept and Measure of Employee Well-Being

2.1 The Concept of Employee Well-Being

Employee well-being is a very broad concept, which includes cognition, perception, emotion, and health (Zhao et al., 2015). To better understand the concept of employee well-being, the academic community divides employee well-being into three aspects: subjective happiness, psychological happiness, and integrated happiness.

Subjective well-being originates from hedonism. It consists of two parts – an emotional component and an evaluation or a cognitive component. The affective component is related to the degree of positive emotions that one is experiencing, or a dynamic balance between positive and negative emotions. The evaluation and cognitive components include judgments of a person’s living conditions, often closely related to life satisfaction (Diener E, 1994; Tay L, Chan D, and Diener E, 2014). Therefore, subjective happiness emphasizes the physical and spiritual experience, which is subjective, explicit, and volatile (Peng and Chen, 2010).

Psychological happiness is the perfect experience achieved by exploiting your potential. Mental happiness includes six dimensions: autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, purpose, the meaning of life, control, and good friendship (Ryff and Keys, 1995). Compared with subjective happiness, psychological happiness focuses more on emotional experience, with internalization, stability, and malleability (Peng and Chen 2010).

Peng and Chen (2010) put forward the concept of integrating happiness based on integrating happiness and psychological happiness. Integrated happiness includes executive happiness and psychological happiness, cognitive evaluation, and emotional experience in dimension. Focus on both material experience and spiritual experience. In recent years, there has been more and more research-based on integrated happiness, but further empirical research is needed to define integrated happiness (D Agenais-Desmarais and Savoie, 2012).

2.2 Analysis of Related Concepts

Employee well-being, work happiness, and career happiness have often been mixed up in previous studies, but in fact, there are obvious differences between the three. Compared with the first two types of happiness levels, research on career happiness started relatively late. British scholar Kidd (2008) first put forward the concept of career happiness. She believes that employees’ career happiness refers to people’s overall emotional experience of a series of problems such as career
well-being shows the overall feeling of the events they experience at work. These events include not only work-related, related to their career planning, but also non-work areas, such as family events. Therefore, employee well-being has a relationship and difference between with career happiness, similar is that they all include job happiness. The relationship between the three is shown in Figure 1.

2.3 Measure of Employee Well-Being

There is still no uniform standard for measuring employee well-being. Like the concept of employee well-being, the research on employee well-being measure is also divided into three perspectives: subjective happiness, psychological happiness, and integrated happiness. The specific measurement dimensions are shown in Table 1.

![Figure 1: Relationship among employee well-being, job well-being and career well-beings](image)

Table 1: Measurement dimensions of employee well-being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement perspective</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Measurement dimension</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Page (2005)</td>
<td>Job-specific happiness, Overall job satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gao Lili (2014)</td>
<td>Single dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate happiness</td>
<td>Warr (1990)</td>
<td>Emotional happiness, Work ambition, Work autonomy, Job competence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Orsila (2011)</td>
<td>Positive emotions, Negative emotions, Self-actualization</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Demo (2013)</td>
<td>Organizational atmosphere, Internal individual happiness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Huang Liang (2014)</td>
<td>Emotional happiness, Professional happiness, Cognitive happiness, Social happiness</td>
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Source: Sun and Li (2016).

The above is the theoretical research on the concept and measure of employee well-being. At this stage, the concept of employee well-being has not yet formed a unified definition. In addition, there are significantly fewer Chinese studies of employee well-being than western scholars, indicating that the opening employee well-being scale in China is still in its infancy, and efforts should be made to develop localized employee well-being scales in the future.

3. The Antecedents of Employee Well-Being

3.1 Personal Factors

First, from a demographic perspective, employee age and gender, and education can affect employee well-being. For gender, Siltaloppi, Kinnunen, and Feldt (2009) found that male employees were generally happier than women, but later scholars found that this result was not true in specific industry areas (Tan et al., 2009); for age, Diener, Sapyta, and Suh (1998) believed that the positive emotional curve showed a slow and stable decline between 20 and 80. Lam, Zhang, and Baum (2001) found that the relationship between happiness and age was a U, or U at 40. However, Zhang and Guo (2011) believe that there is no correlation between employee well-being and age, and the “U” curve expresses the relationship between employee well-being and career. Finally, Lam et al. (2001) indicate a negative correlation between education and employee satisfaction, while Zhang et al. (2011) believe that the higher the degree, the greater the promotion space, the less pressure they face, which leads to less negative emotions and higher happiness at work.

In addition to basic demographic variables that can affect employee well-being, personality traits and emotional intelligence can also affect employee well-being. Previous studies have found that employees with neurotic personalities experience too many negative emotions, which can not effectively relieve work pressure and have relatively low happiness, while employees with extroverted personalities can relieve work pressure and improve their happiness when communicating with people (Barrick and Mount, 1991). In terms of emotional intelligence, employees with high emotional intelligence can properly handle their relationships with colleagues, effectively adjust their own emotions, and calmly deal with the difficulties and challenges encountered in the work, to obtain high job satisfaction and happiness. (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Schutte et al., 2001).
3.2 Group Factor

3.2.1 Leadership style and behavior

Zheng et al. (2016) found that ethical leaders have significant effects on improving employees’ happiness. In addition, relevant scholars have found that real, service, inclusive, sharing, and transformative leadership styles all positively affect the happiness of employees (Song, 2021; Fang, 2018; Chen, 2020; Long, 2021; Xie, 2017; Rowold, 2001). Peng et al. (2021) found that participatory leaders have a dual impact on employees’ happiness. On the one hand, participatory leaders improve employees’ happiness by enhancing their organizational self-esteem; on the other hand, potentially increased workload and psychological pressure reduce their happiness.

Leadership behaviors are divided into destructive leadership behavior and constructive leadership behavior. The destructive leadership behaviors include autocratic and abusive subordinates. These behaviors have negative effects on employees’ job satisfaction and happiness, and indirectly affect the legitimate rights and interests of the organization. Constructive leadership behaviors, such as trust and authorization, can improve employees’ happiness. (Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad, 2007; Liu and Fu, 2012).

3.2.2 Supervisor-subordinate relationship

Gerstner and Day (1997) used meta-analysis to find significant positive effects on employee job satisfaction. Zhu (2014) believes that the relationship between supervisors and subordinates and job satisfaction works twice, that is, a harmonious relationship between supervisors and subordinates can improve employees’ job satisfaction, and high satisfaction will also enhance the relationship between supervisors and subordinates. van Vianen, Shen, and Chuang (2011) believe that quality executives’ relationships with subordinates can improve organizational commitment and thus employees achieve higher employee well-being.

3.3 Organizational Factors

3.3.1 Organizational change

In previous studies, great changes in organizational change can have a significant impact on employee work and behavior. For example, organizational change is a psychological blow to employees, who have a sense of uncertainty and fear about the future (Cochetal, 1948). At the same time, some scholars point out that organizational change, such as job demand, will virtually increase the workload of employees, bring new skills and new methods to learn, increase the work pressure of employees, and lead to the reduction of the happiness of employees (Hettyetal, 2009). In the situation of organizational change, organizational change skeptical employees usually have low job satisfaction and organizational commitment, on the contrary, the organizational change presents optimistic employees, who often have high job satisfaction and organizational commitment, the higher the importance of change, the higher the employee job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Lauetal, 2002). Domestic scholar Xu et al. (2019) found that when employees realize the significance of the organizational change, they will appropriately increase work input, reduce work burnout, and voluntarily join in the organizational change, thus improving employees’ happiness and reducing their tendency to leave.

3.3.2 Organizational culture and values

Organizational culture can not only affect organizational performance but also have a significant impact on the organizational commitment and job satisfaction of organizational members (Hariis, Mossholder, 1990). He and other scholars (2009) divided organizational culture into four dimensions, namely, integrity-oriented culture, team-oriented culture, achievement-oriented culture, and innovation-oriented culture. All four dimensions have a significant positive impact on employee job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

3.3.3 Human resource management practice

Ramsay (2000) et al. Found that high-performance work system is positively correlated with job initiative, superior subordinate relationship, salary satisfaction and job security, which improves happiness; Gust (2002) found that the high participation work system will enable employees to participate in the operation and management of the company, create a harmonious and friendly working atmosphere and improve employees’ job satisfaction; Kooij (2010) and others found that when employees perceive a high commitment human resource management system, employees’ emotional commitment and employee satisfaction will be improved. There are abundant researches on human resource management practices, such as unconventional tasks, work conflict and work complexity, which lead to increased work pressure, reduced happiness and positive emotions due to increased work requirements (eatough et al, 2016).

4. Results Variable

4.1 Individual Level

4.1.1 Personal behavior

Barbara L. (1998) and other scholars have found that positive emotions can enhance the intellectual, physical, and social resources that individuals can use to better cope with threats in the workplace, thus reducing their intention to leave. This is consistent with the research conclusions of Chinese scholars such as Cheng (2017). In addition, employee well-being has a significant positive impact on employee advice, innovation, and assistance behaviors (Liu, 2020; Xu, 2021; Zheng, 2016). At the same time, Wei (2009) found that subjective happiness has a significant positive impact on employees ‘organizational identity, which indicates that employee well-being can not only affect employees’ behavior but also affect employees’ personal feelings. Dong (2017) and other scholars introduced employee well-being as a regulatory variable when studying the relationship between service-oriented leadership and engagement. The study found that employee well-being has a positive impact on engagement, that is, the higher the employee well-being, the lower the turnover rate. Arieana (2019) and others found that employees with high happiness also had high productivity, and at the same time, they tried to
avoid counterproductive behavior and protect the interests of the organization.

4.1.2 Personal performance

Personal performance includes work performance and innovation performance. Zhao (2018) introduced employee well-being as an intermediary variable when studying whether employee mindfulness can improve work performance. The results showed that employee mindfulness has a significant positive impact on work performance, and employee well-being plays an intermediary role in it. For innovation performance, most scholars have found that employees’ work happiness positively affects employees’ innovation performance, but a few scholars believe that there is a significant negative correlation between the two (Huang, 2015). Ren (2019) and other scholars believe that the reason for the different results is that previous researchers ignored their emotions, ability, and growth space when studying the correlation between work happiness and innovation performance. They studied the correlation between work well-being and innovation performance by introducing dual regulatory variables of work values and job autonomy. The study found that employees’ work happiness positively affects innovation performance through the adjustment of work values and work autonomy.

4.1.3 Family and life

Culbertson, Mills, and Fullagar (2012) suggest that positive emotions generated at work trigger cognition consistent with those emotions. These positive emotions then extend to the employees’ home field. In other words, employee well-being has a spillover effect that can alleviate family conflicts. White and Dolan (2009) et al. sought a new way to measure subjective well-being by recording the daily lives of experimenters, which found that it positively affected their life well-being. Zou (2015) proposed the work happiness-cross dynamic model, which confirmed that the happiness obtained by employees in the workplace is transmitted to other team members through the cross. In addition, after work, work happiness overflows over to the family, alleviating family conflicts and improving family happiness, which in turn promotes employees’ enthusiasm for work, forming a virtuous circle.

4.2 Organizational Level

Schneider, Hanges, Smith, and Salvaggio (2003) tracked 35 companies and found that employee satisfaction at the organizational level accurately predicted returns on assets and earnings per share. Tao (2018) tested and evaluated the progenitor and outcome variables of employee well-being based on Meta, and the results showed that employee well-being had a significantly strong correlation and positive value between organizational commitment and organizational civic behavior (organizational level), indicating that employee well-being can positively affect organizational commitment and civic behavior at the organizational level.

Overall, there are many studies on the causes and consequences of employee well-being. This includes both review articles and many empirical scientific research papers. The only deficiency lies in the lack of research on the outcome variables of employee well-being at the group level, and the consequences at the organizational level are still in their infancy.

5. The Formation Mechanism of Employee Well-Being

5.1 Self-Determination Theoretical Perspective

The core content of self-determination theory is: Individuals have three needs: autonomy, competence and relationship. When the organizational environment can meet the above three basic needs at the same time, the individual motivation adjustment mode is more inclined to the internal motivation. When individual psychological needs are met, work motivation increases, and happiness is enhanced.

Gavin (2014) based on SDT research found that work skills can meet the needs of autonomy, competence, and relationship, promoting organizational performance and happiness. From the perspective of human resource management, later Hou (2021), Cao (2019), and other scholars, based on self-determination theory, have proved that an efficient work system and work remodeling can positively affect employees’ happiness. Ye (2018) and other scholars start from the two aspects of autonomy and competence and analyze that the career call of knowledge-based employees’ professional commitment and meet the autonomy and competence, thus improving their work happiness. In addition, Chen (2020) and other scholars study the relationship between employees’ work input and their psychological happiness from the perspective of employees. The study found that the relationship between job engagement and psychological well-being was also different between employees with different job motivations, that is, job motivation and employee psychological well-being were correlated.

5.2 Theoretical Perspective of Resource Preservation

Resource preservation theory originally emerged as a stress theory. The theory suggests that individuals tend to preserve, protect, and acquire resources. Therefore, when individuals have lost resources or are threatened, they feel stress and tension, which trigger psychological and physical reactions; Instead, when individuals acquire or can preserve the resources they need, they have the desire to obtain new resources and alleviate the negative emotions caused at work (Hobfoll, 1989).

When previous scholars cited COR to study employee well-being, there are two ways to choose from single path research and dual-path research. Under a single path, Barbara (2013) found that individuals feel work insecurity due to the loss of work resources, which directly leads to the reduction of employees’ happiness. Zheng (2016) introduced employee well-being as an intermediary variable when studying the influence of ethical leadership on employees’ helping behavior. The results show that ethical leadership, as a work resource, can alleviate the negative emotions generated by employees and improve their happiness. Under the dual path, Song (2019) discusses the influence of work demand and

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family support supervisor behavior on employee well-being based on resource preservation theory and the work demand-resource model. The study found that job demands reduce employee well-being through the work loss path, and family support supervisors improve employee well-being through the job gain path. Work-family conflict partially mediated both paths.

5.3 Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory holds that when individuals receive favors from others, individuals develop a sense of reciprocal obligation and thus voluntarily provide similar benefits in return (Blau, 1964). Reciprocity and altruism are one of the basic principles of social exchange theory. Under the principle of reciprocity, employees who get the vested interests they want (respect, material semester, upward space, etc.) will also improve their work initiative, and improve their well-being and organizational performance.

The research of employee well-being from the perspective of social exchange theory is roughly conducted from three perspectives: leadership-member exchange, organizational commitment, and trust. Elise (2019) found that developmental human resource management practices reduce work fatigue and improve happiness by providing promotion opportunities, career counseling, development, and performance evaluation. Based on the social exchange theory, developmental leadership behavior plays a regulatory role between the two. When Xie (2017) discussed the impact of transformational leadership, social relations, and subjective happiness in employee work scenarios, he used the structural model to conduct two rounds of surveys on 668 employees. The results showed that the three different social exchange relationships (leadership-member exchange, team-member exchange, and perceived organizational support) all partially mediated the impact of transformational leadership on employee well-being. Xu (2020) visited 561 non-state-owned enterprises and found that the commitment of both organizations positively affected the happiness of employees. Yang (1999) believes that according to the social exchange theory, subordinates with high-level leadership trust will reward leaders with a more positive working attitude and more full work passion, to obtain positive emotional experience.

5.4 Theoretical Perspective of Emotional Events

Promotional beliefs events believe that employees’ emotions are directly affected by work events. At the same time, emotional events also analyze the mechanism of emotional response production, that is, cognitive evaluation is a necessary prerequisite for emotional production. Cognitive evaluation of work events determines emotional response rather than that directly caused by the event itself, and cognition of work events precedes the generation of emotional response (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). As a positive emotional experience for employees, employee well-being is based on employees’ cognitive evaluation of external working hours.

Zhang (2019) in the study of female knowledge of employees’ work-family balance impact on innovation performance, points out that the workplace and family employees get two main sources of emotional experience, working family balance, making the employee’s family and work needs are met, employees psychological satisfied, improve the employee well-being. Deeg (2021) found that individuals who work with highly ethical employees should experience higher work-based self-esteem and self-efficacy to improve well-being. This is because they show a great ability to deal with work-related ethics, a positive behavior affecting the emotional experience of employees working with them. Long (2021) in the study of shared leadership on the influence of organizational harmony and mechanism research, sharing leadership shortens the power distance between employees and leaders, employees gradually identified with the identity of the “insider”, experience the cognitive and emotional satisfaction, to promote the employee’s work happiness.

5.5 Individual-Organization (Environment) Matching Theoretical Perspective

According to the theory of individual-organization matching, individual behavior and attitude are determined by individuals and their environment, and when the characteristics of individuals and organizations have a very good fit, individual-environment matching will appear. Individual-environment matching can produce positive work attitudes and work behaviors. It has been shown that individual-environment matching can affect organizational performance, well-being, and work complexity (Caplan, 1987).

Existing research on individual-organizational matching and employee well-being focuses on emotional and psychological well-being. Yang (2008) and other scholars studied the relationship between career development is lower than employee satisfaction and psychological happiness based on the individual-organization matching theory. The results show that when the actual career development and expected career development do not match, it will reduce the psychological happiness of employees. When they match, the high level of actual and expected career development is lower than when both are at low levels. The study also found that the actual and expected work relationships did not affect their psychological well-being. Edwards and Rothbard (1999), based on the individual-organizational matching theory perspective, In the direction of “Personal Demand (V) - Organization Supply (S)”, Analyze the relationship between S-V matching and well-being from four dimensions: autonomy, colleague relationship, security and degree of work and family separation, result display, When the organizational supply gradually meets the needs of employees, Employees’ happiness increases; When organizational supply exceeds employee needs, And, when within the appropriate range, Employees’ happiness will continue to increase slightly; When organizational needs exceed employee needs to a certain extent, Employees feel the work pressure, Happiness began to decline; When the demand of individuals and the supply of organizations are much higher than when both are low.

The above are the five theoretical perspectives on the formation mechanism of employee well-being at the present stage. It should be pointed out that there is an imbalance in the theoretical perspective of employee well-being in China, and there are few studies on localization in China. In addition, at the present stage of empirical research appears the
phenomenon of theoretical perspective intersection, scholars not only from a theoretical perspective but also multi-perspective cross research. At the same time, some scholars have opened up a new research perspective based on the original theoretical perspective, such as the psychological goal realization process of Zhang and Lin (2018), which enriches the theoretical research perspective of happiness. As for the scientific nature and practical nature of this theory, it still needs further testing.

![Figure 2: Research framework of employee well-being theory](image)

### 6. Summary and Outlook

By combing the classic literature on employee well-being, this paper summarizes the concept, leading variables, and consequence variables of employee well-being; Secondly, it explores the research framework of well-being theory; Finally, it provides some suggestions for future employee well-being based on the localization situation in China:

First, constantly improve the measurement level of employees’ happiness. Fisher (2010) identifies three levels of employee well-being: transient level, individual level, and unit level. Ashkanasy (2011) also believes that measures of employee well-being should be divided into five levels: individual, inter-individual, interpersonal, group, and organization. At present, the measurement of employee well-being only stays at the individual employee level, and the research on other levels is still in its infancy. Therefore, expanding the layer measurement level of employee well-being is one of the research directions for future employee well-being.

Second, to enrich the theoretical research perspective of employees’ happiness. The existing theoretical research perspective of employee well-being has certain limitations, which cannot fully reveal the internal motivation of employees to pursue happiness and the basic psychological logic behind the relationship between individual motivation, needs, cognition, and happiness (Zhang, 2018). Although scholar Zhang put forward the theory of employee well-being after summarizing the defects of previous theories, the logic and scientific nature of this theory still need to be verified. In recent years, many scholars have studied employee well-being based on new theoretical research perspectives, such as signal theory and behavioral planning theory (Xu and Meng, 2021). Therefore, applying the theory of other disciplines to the research system of employee well-being is conducive to enriching the theoretical research perspective of employee well-being.

Third, strengthen the localization research of employee well-being. First of all, there are obvious differences between Chinese culture and western culture. Hofstede (1985) found that compared with western culture, Chinese culture has the characteristics of high right distance, strong uncertain avoidance, collectivism, and feminization. These characteristics have certain relevance to the components, dimensions, and formation mechanism of employees’ happiness (Huang, 2014). Secondly, the new generation of employees has gradually become the main force in the workplace. Compared with the older generation of employees, the new generation of employees is different is accepted. The work values of the new generation of employees have changed, and there are obvious intergenerational differences in employee well-being. Finally, population aging has become one of the social problems in China today. Yan (2019), based on C GSS data analysis, the family pension has significantly reduced residents’ life happiness, and middle-aged groups suffer from huge pressure on pension. Therefore, the localization research of employee well-being can start from the three aspects of Chinese culture, the new generation, and aging. Based on improving the research system of Chinese local culture, can provide a theoretical basis for solving the current pain points of Chinese society.

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