Better Life: Perceptions of Happiness in the Capital of Latin America

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Abstract- Most individuals in the US spend a significant amount of time at work. Happiness at work becomes an important element of an individual's overall happiness. Some findings suggest that job satisfaction can be determined by each person's internal characteristics and not necessarily due to the employer. These internal characteristics may be related to culture. Miami is a city with a large Latino immigrant community. It was hypothesized that there is a significant difference between Latino immigrants and born-in-America individuals in their perception of happiness at work. In addition, it was also hypothesized that there is a significant correlation between the perception of happiness at work and the individual's acculturation level. This research study utilized 100 respondents, who were selected via convenient quota sampling. The sample was divided into two groups according to their immigration status: Latino immigrants, and individuals who were born in America. Participants were given a questionnaire with 25 items intended to measure perception of happiness at work, acculturation level, and demographic information. A t-test and a correlation were used to test the hypotheses. However neither of these hypotheses were confirmed by the research results. These results suggest that Latino immigrants and American born individuals are more similar than different in terms of happiness at work.

Index Terms- latino, immigrants, born-in-the USA participants, happiness at work, acculturation

I. INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of happiness is such an integral part of the human condition that the founding fathers identified it as an inalienable right. Most of our daily decisions and   activities are oriented to the final end of being happy. Gavin and Mason (2004) take   Aristotle's concept of happiness "The greatest human good is to live a good life" and propose that this is what we currently known as happiness (p.379). Gavin and Mason (2004) argued that the human being is a complex self that cannot be separated from his or her social environment in the process of achieving happiness. Therefore interpersonal relationships, social activities, and working environments are all key elements of the pursuit of happiness (p.387).

According to Diener, Lucas and Oishi (2002) individuals' happiness and life and life satisfaction are the cognitive and emotional judgment of their own lives. Different elements are part of happiness, such as the lack of negative moods or experiencing a large number of positives emotions (Diener, et al., 2002). Individuals evaluations of their well-being may change depending upon life events (Diener, et al.,2002).

However an individual's subjective interpretation of the world also affect their happiness independent of the circumstances that they are experiencing (Diener, et al., 2002). Demographic factors also seem to influence happiness, although how much these factor will increase happiness depends on individual's particular characteristic such as their specific culture (Diener, et al., 2002).

According to Fisher (2010) happiness at work has multiple components such as the type of task to be performed or short-lasting episodes at the workplace. Other   elements are people's goals, personalities or job-fit (2010). Fisher (2010) also argues that people tend to experience happiness when their are meeting higher performance   standards at work. Fisher (2012) suggests that promoting happy workers will increase their loyalty towards the employer and the overall quality of the workforce.

Gavin and Mason (2004) state that "over 25 million of the 130.5 million workers in America work 49 or more hours a week" (p.379). They state that in 2002 Americans spent 1,815 hours at work. This data is a clear indication of the large number of hours that the average American spends at work. Therefore, how happy or satisfied an individual is at work should greatly impact the pursuit of one's happiness. The individual's perception of his or her happiness at the workplace then becomes an imperative issue in modern times.

There are several elements that can contribute to the promotion of happiness at the work place. Gavin and Mason (2004) argued that organizations should have certain characteristics in order to obtain a happy and productive employee. The authors related to basic characteristics of the Greek definition of happiness: freedom, knowledge, and, virtue. According to them, an organization that allows the individual to achieve these professional needs will increase the chances of having happy and productive employees (p.388).

Gavin and Mason (2004) also stated that an employee's happiness depends in part on the kind of organization for which a person works. Although, this seems to be a   fundamental source of an employee's satisfaction, perhaps there are other elements   influencing the perception of happiness at work from a more \personal source. Staw and Ross (1985) explain job satisfaction from a dispositional approach. According to Staw and Ross the dispositional approach, "involves the measurement of personal   characteristics and the assumption that such measures can aid in explaining individual attitudes and behavior" (p.470). Thus Staw and Ross (1985) propose that an individual's attitudes   towards work may be influenced by dispositional factors (p.478).

This perspective leads to the question: to what extent do an individual's characteristics or social factors influence their perception of happiness at work. According to Stay and Ross (1985), an individual's job attitudes can be evidence of socially learned answers or reactions to different events. This idea opens a window to a wide variety of factors that may influence the individual's attitude towards specific jobs and his or her perception of happiness. If individual characteristics or social factors do in fact influences happiness at work, them diversity in the workplace may be a critical factor as well.

Ethnic diversity characterizes multiple employment sectors in America. Miami is a city with one of the most ethnically varied workplaces in America. According to Resnick (1988) Miami's demographics, social environment, and language have suffered deep transformations since 1959 due to continued waves of immigration from Cuba, and other non-Anglo countries (p.89).

Mohl (2013) suggests that the population of Florida is compounded by North American retirees, black immigrants from the Caribbean, Jewish people, Italians, Cubans, Nicaraguans, and immigrants from other areas of the Caribbean Basin (p.60). Immigration related issues are the frequent use of languages other than English, especially Spanish, as common practice in Miami. According to Resnick (1988), Spanish is commonly used in Miami at the workplace, as an aid for the incoming Hispanic immigrants, in the family context (especially among Cubans, whose children born in the USA are mainly bilingual), and to a certain extent in local governmental and political affairs (p.89). This certainly reflects the powerful impact of Hispanics in Miami. It is logical to believe that other ethnic groups have also influenced the social life of this city.

Since Miami has such high Latin immigration, important factors of the economy of the city are related to companies trading with Latin America, investors and businessmen, and the constant flow of Latin American tourists. As per Resnick (1988), around the year of 1979 the number of multinational corporations that had founded their headquarters in Miami exceeded 80.

As previously stated happiness at work or, work satisfaction, has been approached from a situational and a dispositional perspective. The situational approach relates to task characteristics, wage, and other workplace issues. Gavin and Mason (2004) propose that when the workers are provided with a meaningful workplace they will tend to be more productive and happy (p.381). These authors place an important relationship between the happiness at work and the overall individual's happiness. The idea that an individual cannot be truly happy if he or she is not happy at work was sustained by Gavin and Mason (2004). Gavin and Mason (2004) alert that recently, productivity has taken precedence over workers' happiness and wellbeing (p.390). According to Gavin and Mason, working in fine organizations is essential in order to reach happiness.

On the other hand, Near, Rice and Hunt (1978) propose that individual's job satisfaction will depend on his or her overall life satisfaction (p.261). Weaver (1978) suggests that job satisfaction would not be the main cause of most employees' happiness (p.839).

Staw and Ross (1985) defend the dispositional approach suggesting that individuals' attitudes towards work are learned responses to wide range of previous social experiences (p.471). According the Staw and Ross (1985) the individual may have developed positive or negative attitudes towards work due to other jobs or family experiences (p.471). Staw (1986) points out that although individuals may be concerned about the characteristics of their job, satisfaction is more closely related to their unique way of interpreting the world (p.44). Therefore, Staw (1986) suggests that an individual who is predisposed to be happy will perceive his or her job situations very differently from an individual who is negatively predisposed (p.44). Staw's (1986) findings suggest that people's attitudes towards work were stable over time, even when people changed employers and occupations (p.44). He proposes that an individual who is unhappy in a workplace is likely to be unhappy in another work environment, even if is better (p.44).

Staw et al. (1986) stated, "affective disposition is a significant predictor of job satisfaction" (p.69). Here Staw et al. (1986) proposes to define affective disposition as "internal cues" that modify how individuals interpret and act upon their workplace (p.72).

It is also very important for this study to acknowledge the particular characteristics of Miami and its workforce. Nissen and Russo (2006) point out that Miami that has a large number of immigrants, who mostly work in the industries of service, tourism, and business with Latin America (p.123). Another important aspect of the city is its varied demographics. It is mentioned by Nissen and Russo (2006) that Miami has attracted immigrants from all Latin America (Central and South America), the Caribbean Isles (Haiti, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and the Bahamas); other residents of the city are African Americans, European-Americans and Jews (p.124).

According to Nissen and Russo (2006) the Hispanic population in Miami is exceptional; most of them Cubans, Centro and South Americans differing from the rest of the country where the majority of Hispanics are Mexicans (p.124). Nissen and Russo (2006) state that, in Miami, the majority of occupations are not in the management or professional fields, but they are highly concentrated in the service industry (p.125). Nissen and Russo further note that in general, wages in Miami are lower than in the rest of the United States (p.125).

It is also important to note that in Miami the use of languages other than English is common. According to Resnick (1988) not knowing Spanish is perceived by many as an unjust barrier since bilingual skills are required for many positions (p.91). Resnick (1989) notes that in Miami, unlike the rest of the USA, immigrants have a unique loyalty to their language of origin, which is predominantly seen among the Cuban community (p.100).

Another important factor that needs to be consider is the changes that the immigrant goes through as a result of adapting to the new land. This individual brings with him a language, traditions, values that belong to his homeland. The psychological and cultural transformations that an individual experiences when encountering the new culture is known as acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2010).

According to Sam and Berry (2010) people acculturate and adapt to the new environment in diverse ways. However those who are able to keep their original culture and be a part of the new one, have a better adaption than those who chose one the cultures or none of them (Sam & Berry,2010).The concept of adaptation refers to changes that people experience in the process

of meeting environmental requirements (Berry,1997). One possibility during this adaptive process is that the individual can highly   assimilate the environment or integrate it with his original culture (Berry,1997). In   another scenario the immigrant can display segregational and marginal behaviors due to an   internal conflict created by the acculturation process (Berry,1997). According to Berry (1997) these behaviors lead to acculturative stress.

Berry (1997) states that immigrants, on a group-level, suffer different transformations while acculturating. These changes can go deeply enough to shift languages, religion, and values (Berry, 1997). According to Berry (1997) different pre-existing factors may affect the acculturation process, variables such as: immigration age, level of education, gender, or how different cultures are can have an impact.

One of many challenges for Latino immigrants is the exposure to a new language. The lack of this skill represents a big obstacle for the immigrant. Learning the new language is part of the acculturation process. According to Ahadi and Puente-Diaz (2011), fluency in both native and host languages is an indicator of acculturation. Bilingualism shows that the individual has been able to integrate elements of their original culture with new one (Ahadi & Puente-Diaz, 2011). Ahadi and Puente-Diaz advised that although monolingualism in the new culture's language is uncommon, it can be used as indicator of acculturation level in immigrant's children. It would be a sign of a high acculturation level and the vanishing of the native culture to a certain extent (Ahdi &Puente-Diaz, 2011).

Another variable that needs to be taken into account is if the individual comes from a culture that is individualistic or collectivistic. This will play a role during the acculturation process. Gomez (2003) indicates that this process impacts the individual's values. Gomez (2003) also suggests that work attributes preferences will be influenced by collectivism and individualism. As per Mollol, Holtom and Lee (2007) individuals from a collectivistic culture, like Hispanics, will feel obligate to help economically to their extended family.

It is likely that individuals born in America would have a different perception of happiness at the workplace than their Latino immigrant coworkers. In a city like Miami, it is important to know if Latino immigrants and natives perceive happiness at the workplace in the same way. This is the main purpose of this study. This study has two hypotheses. The first one, states that there is a significant difference between Latino immigrants and American born individuals in their perception of happiness at work. The second proposes that there is a significant correlation between perception of happiness at the workplace and level of acculturation

II. Method

Participants

This study had a total of a hundred participants. The sample was divided in two equal groups. The first group was composed of individuals who were born and raised in the United States. The second group was individuals who were born in a country other than the United States, and who immigrated to the United States. All participants were full time employees and 18 years of age or older.

The subgroup of immigrants had a higher number of male individuals (34 participants), while the group of individuals born in the USA the number of male participants was significantly lower (16 participants). The average age of the immigrant participants was 41 years old, with oldest participant being 67 and the youngest 23. While the average age of individuals born in the USA was 32 years old. The oldest individual in this group was 66 and the youngest 19 years old.

In the immigrant subgroup level of education was well distributed, two participants with no educational degree, 7 respondents with a High School degree, 25 with a   College degree and 16 with Graduate diplomas. The majority of the immigrant participants worked in entry level positions (N=25), with 12 respondents were employed as supervisors, 7 as managers, one with an upper management position and one executive director. One immigrant participant did not select any of the given choices, and wrote "team leader" instead. Also, three participants of this group left this item in blank.

The American born group was integrated by one participant with no educational degree, 10 with a High School diploma, 36 with College and 3 with Graduate degrees. In terms of level of employment entry level positions were the most common (N=37), there were few supervisors (N=4), managers (N=5), only one respondent in an upper management position, and 3 executives directors..

The immigrants who participated in this study were from Central, South America and the Caribbean. There were 7 participants from Central America, 13 South Americans, and 30 from the Caribbean. Immigrants from the Caribbean represent the 60% of this group (see Figure 1). The average age at immigrate of this group was 21 years old, with an age range of 61. The earliest age of immigration of this group was one year old and the oldest 62.

The American born participants were 12 White American individuals, 4 African American, 31 Latinos and 4 that selected other as their ethnicity. One participant selected both, Latino and White American as ethnicity. This participant's grandparents had emigrated from South America. Out of these 50 participants, 28 stated that either their parents or grandparents had emigrated from the Caribbean, Central and South America.

III. Instrumentation

The researcher created a Likert Scale Questionnaire in order to measure happiness in the workplace and acculturation level. The questionnaire also collected important demographic data. The questionnaire's content was influenced by numerous articles described in the literature review (e.g. Gavin & Mason, 2004; Staw, 1986; Ross & Staw, 1985; Resnick, 1988). Statements were designed to be simple and clear in order to facilitate understanding for all participants. The instrument was designed to have strong face validity.

The questionnaire was composed of three sections. The first one was oriented to measure the individual's happiness at work. It has ten items, one of which is a reversed scored (item 3) to control biases. Participants were instructed to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with each statement by selecting a number from 1 to 5 (ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5

"strongly agree"). A maximum score of happiness at work was 50 and a minimum was 10.

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of five items designed to measure acculturation level. This part of the questionnaire has two reversed scored items (items 3 and 5). This questionnaire has a maximum score for acculturation level of 25 and a minimum score of 5 as a minimum score. Finally, the questionnaire included a demographic section, which is composed of ten items.

IV. PROCEDURES

The researcher selected participants via a convenient quota sampling strategy in the community of Miami. The researcher went to commercial plazas, colleagues' workplaces, and a local university. The researcher approached all potential subjects personally, and made note of the number of individuals who refused to participate. This was done for the purpose of calculating the response rate. Only two individuals refused to participate. Therefore the response rate for this survey was 98%. Participants were then given the research questionnaire. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation. The data was collected once the participants have completed the questionnaire. The completed questionnaires were placed in a large manila envelope labeled results. This was done in order to assure the anonymity of the responses. The completed surveys were kept in a locked drawer of the researcher's desk. Only the primary researcher and her supervisor had access to the collected data.

V. DATA ANALYSIS

This study presented two hypotheses. The first one stated that there is a significant difference between Latino immigrants and non-immigrants in their perception of happiness at work. A T-Test was implemented by the research to test the first hypothesis. The second hypothesis proposed that there is a significant correlation between perception of happiness at work and level of acculturation. Then, a correlation was the chosen method to test the second hypothesis.

The variables involved in this study are: immigration status (immigrants vs. individuals born in the USA), perception of happiness at workplace, and acculturation level. Immigrant vs. individual born in the USA (immigration status) is considered an independent variable (IV) in this study, since it is supposed to affect an individual's perception of happiness at work. The acculturation level in this study is an IV because it is thought to influence the individual's perception of happiness at the workplace. Perception of happiness at the workplace is considered to be the dependent variable (DV) since it is the measured phenomenon. Other variables presented in this study are age and gender.

VI. RESULTS

The immigrant group had a lower happiness at work score (M=35.18, SD= 5.42) than their American born peers (M= 36.44, SD= 5.50). The researcher analyzed the data in order to answer the question proposed by the first hypothesis with a t-test. The t-test results did not show a significant difference between these groups (P(T<=t) two-tail 0.2512, t Critical two tail 1.9844). The results failed to reject the Ho (see table 1).

As expected immigrant participants also scored lower on acculturation level (M= 17.4, SD=2.157, max. score =23, min. score=13) compared to American born participants (M=19.02, SD=2.075, max. score 24, min. score=15). For the second hypothesis, the researcher conducted correlations. No significant correlation was found between happiness at work and acculturation for immigrants(r=0.25). Likewise there was not a significant correlation between happiness at work and level of acculturation for American born participants (r=-0.20) (see table 2).

VII. CONCLUSIONS

According to the results obtained it seems like there is not a significant difference between immigrants and American-born individuals in their perception of happiness at work. The results also suggest that there is not a significant correlation between acculturation level and happiness at work for either immigrants or American born employees.

According to these results it is logical to assume that equal incentives or rewards strategies may be used to motivate Latino and American-born employees. Since there is not a significant difference between these groups, same retain strategies to promote employees' loyalty to the organization could be used for both groups. These results also may suggest that Latino and American-born employee experience similar job satisfaction in Miami.

It is important to keep in mind that these results may be unique for Miami due to its demographic characteristics. The results may also suggest that due to the large number of immigrants that have moved to Miami during several generations the environmental demands are not very high for the immigrant individual compared to other cities in the country. As a result of different waves of Latino immigration that Miami has received throughout the years many employees who are born in the USA are Latino immigrant descendants. Taking into account the place that Latinos have in the city's demographics significant part of Miami's workforce are Latino immigrants and Latino immigrant descendants. Based on the on the results of this study these subgroups may not have very different job expectations and satisfaction.

It is important to consider that this study was conducted using a convenient quota sampling strategy, which could have biased the obtained results. Also, the analyzed problem could have been approached using a more elaborated instrument and measurements. There is the possibility that extraneous variables have escaped the researcher's control, influencing results. One variable could be gender (males very significantly dominant in the immigrant group, whereas American born participants where mostly women). It is important to consider that 56% of participants stated that either their parents or grandparents had immigrated from Latin American. This could be a significant bias since these American born participants could be more culturally close to the immigrant participants than other American born participants.

Although, the results did not prove researcher's hypothesis this study aims to encourage future research regarding happiness at work and level of acculturation. There are more answers to be found in this gap in the literature.

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Table 1

t-Test: Two-Sample   Assuming Unequal Variances

	Happiness at Work Immigrants	Happiness at Work Individuals Born in USA
Mean	35.18	36.44
Variance	29.37510204	30.21061224
Observations	50	50
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	98	
t Stat	-1.154209042	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.251221403	
t Critical two-tail	1.984467404	

Table 2

Correlation				
	Happiness at Work Immigrants	Happiness at Work Individuals Born in USA	Acculturation-Immigrants	Acculturation Individuals Born in the USA
Happiness at Work Immigrants	1			
Happiness at Work Individuals Born in USA	-0.040391682	1		
Acculturation-Immigrants	0.248573504	0.105343124	1	
Acculturation Individuals Born in the USA	-0.21445472	-0.202986788	-0.293628225	1

Figure 1