



Signing up for Happiness: An Exploratory Study of Workforce Changes in the UAE Market in Response to the National Program for Happiness and Wellbeing

Omar, O.

Citation: Omar, O. (2018). Signing up for happiness: An exploratory study of workforce changes in the UAE market in response to the National Program for Happiness and Wellbeing. *Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4(1), 80-101.

Abstract: In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), there is a widespread fascination around happiness, given its promotion by the government's Minister of Happiness and Wellbeing. As such, the purpose of this paper is to explore changes in the local job market in response to the UAE National Program of Happiness and Wellbeing. A qualitative content analysis of 200 LinkedIn profiles was conducted, utilizing timelines of changes to profile information to explore the relationship between government happiness programs, changes within the UAE workforce and consequent educational qualifications. The results suggest that the implementation of happiness programs to the business sector has been significant; yet, no relationship was found between educational qualifications and the increased number of employees reporting happiness roles. This study is part of an ongoing project focusing on the UAE Happiness and Wellbeing policy implementation. If any recommendations can be drawn at this stage, it is for UAE policy makers to ensure that the fidelity of the National Happiness Program be upheld and implemented, such that they effectively impact the roots of happiness, rather than enacting superficial policy objectives.

الملخص: في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة، هناك افتتان ثقافي ملحوظ ومنتشر حول السعادة وجودة الحياة، نظراً لترقيته من قبل وزير السعادة وجودة الحياة التابع للحكومة. على هذا النحو، فإن الهدف من هذه الورقة هو استكشاف التغييرات في القوى العاملة المحلية وسوق العمل استجابةً لبرنامج الإمارات الوطني للسعادة وجودة الحياة. تم إجراء تحليل محتوى نوعي لـ 200 ملف شخصي من موقع لينكد إن، لاستكشاف العلاقة بين برامج السعادة التي وضعتها الحكومة، والتغييرات في القوى العاملة في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة وما يترتب عليها من المؤهلات التعليمية. تشير النتائج إلى أن تنفيذ برامج السعادة لقطاع الأعمال كان كبيراً؛ ومع ذلك، لم يتم العثور على أي علاقة بين المؤهلات التعليمية والزيادة في عدد الموظفين الذين يقومون بالإبلاغ عن أدوار السعادة. هذه الدراسة جزء من مشروع مستمر يركز على تنفيذ سياسة السعادة وجودة الحياة الإماراتية. إذا كان من الممكن وضع أي توصيات في هذه المرحلة، فإنه يتعين على صانعي السياسة في الإمارات أن يضمنوا الحفاظ على أمانة برنامج السعادة الوطنية وتنفيذها، بحيث تؤثر بشكل فعال على جذور السعادة، بدلاً من تفعيل أهداف السياسة السطحية.

Keywords: UAE; happiness; wellbeing; policy implementation; labour market

About the Author: Omneya Omar (ABD) is an interdisciplinary researcher based in Abu Dhabi (UAE), with a research interest in business, education, the practice of positive psychology, and



more recently, the education-work gap. She was the former Director of Positive Education at Al Maaref School in Dubai. She has an MSc in Organizational Psychology from Herriot Watt University and is a current PhD candidate in Educational Research at Lancaster University, UK.

Address all correspondence to: Omneya Omar at omneia.kassem@gmail.com

The manner in which happiness is currently being sought is highly organized, politicized and marketed in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), suggesting it has garnered social acceptance across the activities of many government and business entities. This is founded upon the observation that in UAE society, there is a notable, widespread cultural fascination around happiness as its importance is encouraged by the UAE government under the direction of a Minister of State for Happiness and Wellbeing. Conceiving it as a cultural phenomenon substantiated in subjects, objects and practices, happiness is spread throughout many channels. The purpose of this study is to explore a growing trend; that of an explicit national program, which seeks to actively promote the happiness and wellbeing of citizens. This is done by exploring the growing phenomenon of “happiness jobs” across the UAE after February 2016, the date of the official declaration of a Minister of Happiness, and how the UAE job market has responded.

The Progression of Happiness Science

The science of happiness has witnessed significant change since its early beginnings. Moving from a focus primarily on emotions and mental illness, today the field encompasses greater depth, addressing a broad range of topics including not only personal happiness, but the economic and social indicators of happiness as well. Accordingly, happiness economics was introduced as a new interdisciplinary subject taking the attention of economists and politicians. As a result, countries have taken to measuring societal happiness through national accounts of wellbeing, with Diener and Tov (2012) recommending its direct measure rather than placing a sole focus on economic indicators. The use of national accounts of wellbeing is evidenced in the UK, which in 2010, implemented an ONS Wellbeing Survey and added questions concerning wellbeing to its Annual Population Survey (Knight, 2016). Since, legislation has been passed with the aim of improving societal wellbeing, including the Health and Social Care Act 2012, which requires public health bodies in the UK to work toward reducing inequalities. Similarly, the Social Value Act 2012 mandates that public health commissioners consider the environmental, economic and social wellbeing in the procurement of all contracts and services (NHS England, 2012). Yet, such legislation and other uses of wellbeing survey data has been criticized as efforts are often disjointed and play into political agendas rather than the improvement of society.

Most notably, the country of Bhutan developed the Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index to measure wellbeing since it adopted happiness as its primary measure of societal success in 1972 (Hirschauer, Lehberger, & Musshoff, 2015). Bhutan has seen a great deal of success with its programs as they align with the country’s Buddhist philosophy. The GNH Index is also a component of the education system, such that students are taught about the country’s happiness



goals and educated on Bhutanese values (Gyem, Dorji, & Phuntsho, 2013). While the Bhutanese GNH model has been successful, the country nonetheless struggles to overcome infrastructure and budgetary concerns.

The UAE warrants comparison to these initiatives in the manner in which it has introduced its happiness and wellbeing mandate. While slow to fully communicate the effort, the country also lacks a cornerstone of many long-standing developed nations, that of civil society, i.e., the partnerships and engagements of research institutes, non-governmental organizations, community and/or civic groups to help support and give voice, action, and legitimacy to such broad national initiatives. Yet, unlike Bhutan's limited financial resources and the UK's budget which must compete for allocation priorities, the UAE government's resources are abundant and support for the programs comes directly from the highest levels. While much research supports the effect of happiness policies in those countries, little has been done to concretely analyze and publicize the changes as a result of the happiness policies and programs in the UAE, in particular with respect to education and the workforce.

The strongest indicator of the steady progression of happiness science can be found in the publication of the World Happiness Reports. Following early research around societal happiness, the first official World Happiness Report was published in 2012 by The Earth Institute at Columbia University (USA), with subsequent reports published by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network. These have become intensive data packages for happiness researchers. The first report included insights about the necessity of research on happiness, giving significant attention to the statistical indicators for wellbeing and life satisfaction (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2012), as well as the scientific foundations of the measurement and understanding of subjective wellbeing (Layard, 2016). The subsequent 2013 (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2013) and 2015 (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2015) reports continued in this pursuit, while the most recent (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2018), focused on the happiness of migrants worldwide.

As the science of happiness has grown, the focus has changed from determining individual wellbeing and happiness, to one which focuses on the ways in which societies as a whole can become happier. Of the contributors related to happiness, four themes emerge: economic freedom, the dignity of work, good governance, and social trust (Layard, 2016). Good governance and social trust are the key themes through which the UAE is developing workforce and education happiness. This is being done through positivity programs to support major changes in the wellbeing of society. The focus on economic freedom and the dignity of work bring us to a more recent focus in happiness science which centers on how happiness can improve productivity and the state of work, and the workforce itself. The present study takes a look at the impact of such changes on the state of a national workforce.

Why is the workforce being “Happified”?

There is much value to be had in the scientific promotion of happiness. Helliwell and Wang (2012) describe the importance of happiness research and measurement, suggesting that the methods used are highly democratic. They emphasize that when citizens of a country are given the



opportunity to report on their own feelings, histories, and preferences, it is empowering. They are not told by governments what they need, but become an integral part of the process in improving their own wellbeing. While the value of happiness measures in society is strongly supported from a psychological and sociological viewpoint, the same can be for the business sector.

Within the private business sector, there has been a marked change in the manner in which employers view employee happiness and its effect on performance and profits. Increased value placed on workplace happiness can be attributed to the results of advancements in happiness science. As employers become aware of the benefits associated with happier employees, how to implement such initiatives nonetheless remains a question. In the last few decades, the employment of workers whose primary function is to promote happiness within organizations has grown. Well-known companies employing happiness officers include Google, French fashion brand, Kiabi, and McDonald's who recently promoted its mascot, Ronald, to Chief Happiness Officer (Cooper, 2018). One reason for this attention is that unhappy employees cost companies directly through illness, presenteesim (being at work but unproductive) and absenteeism, which cost the economy billions a year (Davies, 2015). Another assumption is that when employees are happy, they are more productive and less likely to look for new positions, thereby increasing productivity and profits, as well as decreasing turnover, a major cost for employers as it directly increases recruitment and outlay costs (Fisher, 2010; Sgroi, 2015; Wright & Bonett, 2016). Greater happiness in the workforce was notably found to improve productivity by up to 12% (Oswald, Proto, & Sgroi, 2015).

The UAE Happiness & Wellbeing National Program

The UAE is situated between the Middle East's nations of Oman and Saudi Arabia. Relatively young and following the discovery of oil, the UAE was officially formed on 2 December 1971. In 2017, the UN estimated the UAE population to be over 9.4 million with migrants making up more than 88% of the total population and representing nationalities from all over the world. Almost 59% of the population consists of South Asians (including Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakastani), who make up the majority of the manual labor force working primarily in construction, maintenance and sanitation (Export.gov, 2018). The makeup of the UAE is due partly to its oil wealth which, since its inception, founders saw as an opportunity to invest heavily in infrastructure, education and public services, requiring a workforce larger than its own citizens could support. It also invested heavily in the diversification of its economy and job creation, making it one of the fastest growing economies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations (CIA, 2018). By 2017, the country was a global hub for tourism and trade, with top branded resorts, shopping malls, and skyscrapers. It is also home to the Burj Khalifa, the tallest skyscraper in the world.

Culturally, the UAE is also unique. Utilizing Hofstede's cultural dimensions which describes how one's culture affects values and behaviors, the UAE scores high in Power Distance, meaning there is a clear and accepted hierarchical structure in its society. Also, stemming from its humble beginnings and religious leanings, the UAE is a collectivist society, implying a great deal of interdependence among its people, where loyalty is paramount and citizens maintain close



connections and support each other, be it through familial bonds or other relationships. The UAE measures as neither masculine nor feminine, reflecting a balance between the motivation to achieve, and the desire to enjoy what one does. Finally, in the area of Uncertainty Avoidance, the UAE scores high with strict rules, norms and cultural expectations to which it is expected that individuals adhere. Innovations which might disrupt established ways of doing may not always be welcome in a society with a high need for uncertainty avoidance (Insights, 2018). The UAE also maintains a rich heritage and tradition, which include the expectations of hospitality, as well as markers of heritage found in traditional dress and architecture (Saeid, Arifin, & Hasim, 2012).

As Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, His Highness (H. H.) Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum has continued the vision and work of the country's founding fathers by pioneering many innovative programs, policies and initiatives. These include the Dubai Smart Government and Mohammed bin Rashid Centre for Government Innovation (Cabinet, 2018a). In 2010, he also launched UAE Vision 2021, which highlighted six priority areas for government, including the development of 1) Cohesive Society and Preserved Identity, 2) Safe Public and Fair Judiciary, 3) Competitive Knowledge Economy, 4) First-Rate Education System, 5) World-Class Healthcare, and 6) Sustainable Environment and Infrastructure (Vision-2021, 2010). Happiness and positivity were among these. H. H. Sheikh Mohammed advised federal employees, "The government's role is to make the nation and the people happy. When you interact with people in your department or institution, you have to bear in mind that you are serving people [not controlling them]." Fostering this vision, he incorporated happiness into the National Agenda and created the first position of Minister of State for Happiness and Wellbeing in 2016 (Schwartzstein, Hall, Chang, Sameh, & Thapar, 2018). With H. H. Sheikh Mohammed's quote highlighted as the first few lines in the official UAE National Program for Positivity and Happiness website (www.happy.ae), it is no doubt that he remains its visionary leader.

Under the country's National Agenda and Vision 2021, which is comprised of the country's goal to be a leading nation in the world, the UAE government has set a goal to be among the top five happiest. To achieve this, the UAE has been raising awareness about the importance of positivity and wellbeing, putting it in official form on February 8th, 2016, where H. H. Sheikh Mohammed conducted the most radical re-shuffling of positions in the cabinet's history by appointing a Minister of Happiness (Al Maktoum, 2016). He explained his rationale behind the cabinet re-shuffle publicly:

The new Cabinet comes at an essential stage of the UAE, which moves steadily with an unlimited ambition towards a better future (Malek, 2016).

He also highlighted:

Ours is no empty promise. We will seek to create a society where our people's happiness is paramount, by sustaining an environment in which they can truly flourish. And we hope our formula benefits others in the region. The formula is straightforward: national



development based on core values, led by youth and focused on a future in which everyone achieves happiness (Al Maktoum, 2016).

The Minister of Happiness started her work across government sectors and most significantly, throughout the education and private business sector. The responsibilities of the Minister's position held by Her Excellency (H. E.) Ohood bint Khalfan Al Roumi, are to "harmonise all government plans, programs and policies to achieve a happier society" (Government, 2018). With the aim of a happier society as a whole, the minister's title was changed in 2017 to the Minister of State for Happiness and Wellbeing. The introduction of a Minister of Happiness was a new idea in 2016 and garnered much attention. By March 2018, the UAE was ranked the happiest country in the Arab world and the 20th happiest country globally in the World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al., 2018). As such, the implementation of national programs plays a unique position in shaping the future of UAE society.

Happiness Policies and Programs across the UAE

One of the first UAE initiatives concerning happiness came in October of 2014 when H. H. Sheikh Mohammed introduced the Happiness Index to measure the public's happiness with government services using smart devices (Anderson, 2017a; Cabinet, 2018b). Before this measure, the Dubai Electric and Water Authority (DEWA) had already been gathering happiness data as a means of identifying areas within the entity which needed improvement. Released in 2016, survey results showed an improvement in overall customer happiness, increasing from 87.12 per cent in 2015 to 89.01 per cent in 2016 (Anderson, 2017a). This preliminary work in happiness and the use of the Happiness Index laid the initial groundwork for a comprehensive happiness program.

Soon after, under the direction of the Minister of Happiness, the National Program for Happiness and Positivity (NPHP)¹ was presented to H. H. Sheikh Mohammed on March 7th, 2016 and approved on March 20th, 2016 (Government, 2018). The goals of the Program consisted of three pillars: 1) incorporating happiness and positivity at work; 2) developing tools for measuring happiness and its progress; 3) fostering a national environment to make happiness and positivity a lifestyle (Schwartzstein et al., 2018). In his book, *Reflections on Happiness and Positivity*, H. H. Sheikh Mohammed emphasizes why happiness has become an essential part of the nation's discourse and government's initiatives. He puts forward the notion that it is a government's responsibility to create an environment for people to achieve their dreams and empower them, rather than merely having power over them (Al Maktoum, 2017). The opinion of H. H. Sheikh Mohammed chimes with current ideas around the manner in which governments are deemed successful (Bok, 2010; Diener & Seligman, 2004; Duncan, 2010; Ott, 2010).

One element of the NPHP is the *National Happiness and Positivity Charter* which outlines the country's commitment to instilling a culture of positivity in society through the use of research-

¹ The National Program for Happiness and Positivity (NPHP) term is used in this section as this was the original name of the program when approved March 2016. Later, it changed to The National Program of Happiness and Wellbeing (NPHW) as referred to in the title and rest of the paper.



based policies, planning and implementation of services and projects (Anderson, 2017a). On 10 May 2016, the Minister of Happiness and Wellbeing presented the Customer Happiness Formula; its primary components revolve around employee pride, quality government services and customer feedback and participation (Government, 2018). The government continued its efforts in July 2016 by training 60 Chief Happiness and Positivity Officers nominated by federal and local government entities. After training in areas of mindfulness, science and leadership, the officers were charged with designing and implementing projects and programs towards the success of the UAE's happiness goals (Government, 2018). In announcing the training program, H. E. Al Rouni emphasized the need for forward thinking to address social changes and how the government can serve as a tool in creating a better society (UAE Minister launches, 2016). Training partners included Oxford University's Mindfulness Center, with whom a signed memorandum of understanding allows them to assist in training with a focus on being mindful of positivity in addressing everyday challenges and stressors. It also included the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California-Berkley, a leader in the field of happiness science, which supports worldwide research related to wellbeing, and designs training programs aimed at assisting experts and professionals in the development of happy societies (UAE Minister launches, 2016).

Positivity councils were also created within each federal government entity, whose purpose was to align each entity's policies and services with the happiness agenda, as well as streamline its development within the division's office setting (www.happy.ae). Under the program's direction, job titles within many entities were changed to reflect the happiness agenda, with customer service agents being renamed Customer Happiness Employees. A Happiness and Positivity Hero medal is awarded periodically to those who drive exceptional results in their efforts to increase customer happiness (www.happy.ae).

In October 2017, the UAE government also developed a Happiness Policy Manual, which merged the science of happiness with government policy creation. The policy manual provides the government with practical tools with which to harmonize policies, as well as to quantify and evaluate those policies (Sutton, 2017), and was presented at a workshop for federal policymakers by behavioural scientist Dr. Paul Dolan. Through the use of the manual's model, happiness should be a component at every level of policy decision-making including formulation, assessment and implementation. The manual addresses the economy, health, education, society and culture, government services and governance, and infrastructure. It outlines how happiness can be incorporated into these areas and the cost-benefit analysis as it relates to societal happiness and productivity. An additional goal is to simplify and improve an understanding of how happiness is measured. The Minister's team also developed a Happiness Impact Assessment tool, a guideline for scoring proposed policy based on how it affects different domains of happiness, as well as surveys to measure happiness and productivity in the community (see Figure 1; provided by Schwartzstein et al. (2018).



<i>Surveys to Measure Happiness & Productivity in the Community</i>	
Customer Happiness Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PMO conducted an annual Customer Happiness Survey starting in 2012 • The PMO conducted a pilot survey with 1,000 respondents which identified 16 drivers of customer happiness • The sample for the pilot survey was selected from the population of customers who had used a government service three times in the past few months • The main survey incorporated the 16 drivers identified from the pilot and lasted 15-30 minutes with a random sample of 35,880 respondents • Finally, survey responses were translated into KPIs, which factored into the entities' evaluations
Employee Happiness Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UAE surveyed all 90,000 of its federal government employees • They intended to use this data to gain insights on worker happiness and positivity within the government • They could also uncover associations between happiness and various factors such as position in the hierarchy, work tenure, etc...
National Happiness Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UAE created its own "National Survey for Happiness and Positivity" that went above and beyond the single Cantril ladder question • The Government's statistics centers went door-to-door to survey a representative sample of 16,000 individuals including 10,000 household adults, 3,000 children (aged 10-14), 1,000 visitors, 1,000 tourist, and 1,000 laborers. • They hoped to use this data to establish a baseline measurement of happiness in the UAE, while identifying specific drivers of and barriers to happiness

Source: Created by casewriters based on interviews of employees from the Prime Minister's Office.

Figure 1. Surveys measuring happiness and productivity in the UAE community

While the UAE's happiness agenda is a national goal, the emirate of Dubai has gone to great lengths to champion it. Dubai has for many years been considered the hub of commerce and tourism in the Arab world and has steadily made its place in the international community. With Sheikh Mohammed also being its ruler, Dubai has supported the initiative and created the Dubai Happiness Agenda website (www.happinessagenda.ae) to communicate to the community its implementation plans. It describes the need for an objective, scientific approach to understanding and increasing happiness as well as measures to teach society about it, stating: "To achieve a deep organisational and personal understanding of happiness factors across the city; the happiness agenda will put forward a collection of events, content and training programs to build awareness, teach self-reflection and influence the city." It further describes the components of needs fulfilment, positive psychology and ongoing programs, such as Smart Dubai and the Happiness



Experience Strategy, as well as the role of leadership. As such, Dubai has positioned itself as a leader in the quest to influence the success of the UAE's happiness vision.

Happiness in the UAE Private Sector

With the initial call for increased happiness in the UAE's private sector, came a wave of expectations. With little understanding of the role of positive psychology or education about how happiness could be influenced, businesses and employees took it upon themselves to follow the government's announcement with initiatives including parades, ceremonies, pizza parties, happy face emojis, and much glitter; none of which are known to affect wellbeing over time (Haziq, 2017; HCT, 2017; Zakaria, 2017). The UAE government had announced a Minister of Happiness and its goal to increase happiness, but communicated little about how this should come to fruition within the private sector. However, this will soon change with recently provided toolkits for workplace happiness in both Arabic and English, giving scientific strategies for implementing positive practice across the workplace (www.happy.ae).

In January 2017, the UAE implemented the *Happiness and Positivity Program for the Private Sector*, aimed at mid and senior level executives. The leadership program focused on the government's happiness direction, the importance of happiness within organizations, personal happiness, and the management of happy employees (Positivity, 2017). The program was developed with the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton Institute of Executive Education and Positive Psychology Center. Its goal is "to equip private sector employees with intuitive, practical skills necessary to become the drivers of happiness and positivity in their respective organisations and beyond" (Positivity, 2017). In the same month, the Dubai Statistics Center launched a project encouraging the use of motivational cards to enhance employee happiness. The center encouraged employees to use pre-printed cards to send messages of gratitude to and from all levels of staff. Tarek al Janahi, Deputy CEO of the Center reported that "boosting morale works like magic on employees and enhances their performance and appreciation for one another" (Dubai Statistics Center, 2017). The cards have seen positive results within and outside the Center as employees have even utilized them in their personal lives. Many private companies now implement happiness policies. In August 2017, one of the UAE's largest healthcare providers, NMC Healthcare, appointed happiness officers across its national branches. According to the company's CEO, Prasanth Manghal, happiness officers will be available for all stakeholders and tasked with promoting happiness among doctors, nurses, hospital staff, and patients (CIPD, 2017).

The Present Study

Given the plethora of government initiatives across the country to date, it is of interest to see how these changes have impacted the private sector. A spontaneously occurring barometer of change to determine work role transformations was sought and LinkedIn was considered a viable tool. LinkedIn is the largest business-oriented social networking site in the world, which enables users to create an abbreviated CV with relevant taglines to connect with other professionals (Papacharissi, 2009; Skeels & Grudin, 2009). LinkedIn further provides a framework that allows



for professional identity, conversation, mutual sharing, brand or professional presence, relationships and learning (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). Importantly, it offers a means to synthesize changes in workforce demands and job patterns across a region (Robinson, Sinar, & Winter, 2014). As a result, it was identified as the vehicle of choice to determine ongoing changes within the UAE workplace as a result of the introduction of the national happiness initiative. In sum, the study's questions were twofold: What workforce changes reflect the implementation of the UAE's National Program of Happiness and Wellbeing; do these changes equally correspond to changes in educational workforce qualifications?

Method

Sample Profiles

In February 2018, a search was conducted using LinkedIn. The keyword searched was "Happiness", with the added filter on "People" in the "United Arab Emirates"; 2,200 results were returned. Each search page showed ten profiles. The first 20 pages were taken as the official data sample to make up the 200-profile sample. Prior to finalizing the sample, other keywords relevant to the UAE's NPHW were tried to ensure the sample's inclusiveness. This included; "Positivity," "Wellbeing," and "Subjective wellbeing". The results from the latter showed fewer results, while the "Positivity" results were accompanied by the "Happiness" keyword resulting in the decision to depend solely on this last term. Each profile was saved and given a serial number for anonymity. Each profile was searched for the information in Table 1. The final sample contained 131 profiles, as a number of profiles were excluded due to a lack of relevance to the 'happiness' keyword.

Table 1

Content analysis search criteria

- | | |
|---|--|
| • Gender | • Previous title prior to 'happiness' position |
| • Emirate of employment | • Nature / Type of the Business |
| • Position of 'happiness' term within profile | • The Sector / Industry of the Business |
| • Earliest year associated with 'happiness' | • Key function / Job description |
| • Current job title / role | • Recent(s) Educational qualification(s) |

Procedure

The use of content analysis as a method of inquiry among researchers using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, is growing (Hamad, Savundranayagam, Holmes, Kinsella, & Johnson, 2016). A Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) for the final 131 LinkedIn profiles' sample was conducted. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) consider QCA a useful method for the subjective interpretation of text data through a systematic classification process of coding and identification of themes or patterns. A code sheet was designed to extract content from the profiles and results were tabulated for analysis. This method has been used in many studies investigating online phenomenon (Hamad et al., 2016; Kacker & Perrigot, 2016; Li, Cox, & Wang, 2018). The 'current job title' and 'education qualification' terms needed further coding after



tabulation as the raw data resulted in many different types which could not be synthesized for analysis.

Results

Being an explorative study, frequencies represent a large portion of the findings. The study findings are categorized into three sections: (1) Descriptive findings: which include a gender analysis, emirate of employment, position of the search term in the profile and earliest year associated with the search term; (2) Job analysis findings: including all the job-related analysis, as of the current and previous job titles and its relationship to the search term, the nature of the business and the sectors with the most frequency of endorsing the ‘happiness’ policy, and finally; (3) Educational qualifications analysis: addressing the current education qualifications and its relevance to the ‘happiness’ job patterns across the sample.

Descriptive Findings

The sample results show 53% of the sample to include female profiles associated with the ‘Happiness’ keyword, and 45% male (the remaining 2% belonged to companies). The emirate of employment was determined by searching the addresses of the organization or business name in the work experience section. Dubai had the highest number of companies/businesses found where employees had job titles shifting and/or adding the term ‘happiness’, followed by Abu Dhabi (see Figure 2). The remaining seven emirates had one or no profiles, while 8% of the profiles belonged to companies with multiple branches across the emirates.

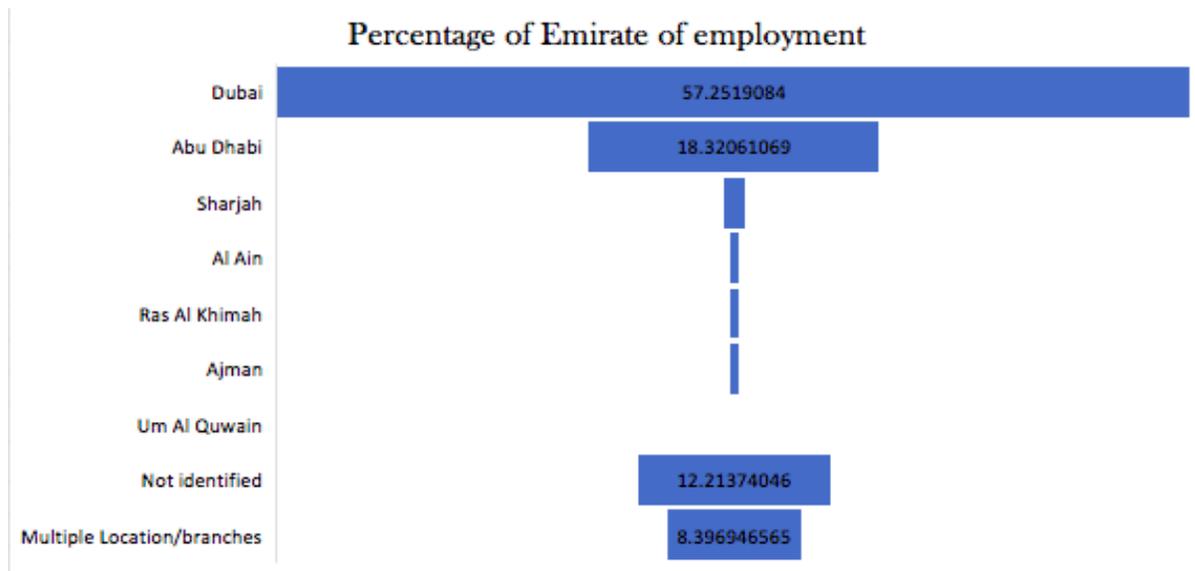


Figure 2. Emirate of employment

The search also revealed the position(s) of the term ‘happiness’ within the profiles, such that a job title with the word “happiness” could have appeared in the experience section, an educational certificate, part of a job description or business name, as well as profile headline quote.



The most frequent use appeared in the job title (64%) and profile headline category (21%) (see Figure 3). A total of 61 different job titles included 'happiness' across the profile sample, such as happiness and positivity officer, happiness expert, happiness ambassador, customer happiness service, etc.

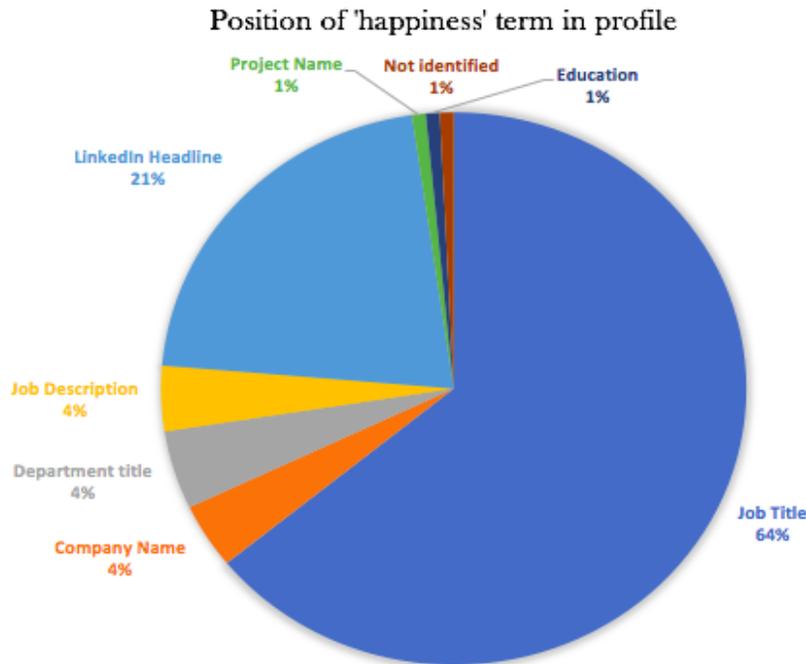


Figure 3. Position of 'happiness' term in profiles

The earliest year associated with happiness was 2016 - the year of the Minister's appointment - hence, data frequency was calculated as: *Prior to 2016; 2016; 2017; Early 2018*. In the years 2016 and 2017, 51% of the sample had 'happiness' added to their profiles. In the year 2018, happiness was added to profiles by only 4.5%; that is because the data collection included January and February 2018 only (see Figure 4). Further, 17% of the profile sample had no year identified as a joining date and those profiles had neither 'happiness' in the job title nor job description or company name; instead, the key word was merely mentioned in the profile headline, such as: Leadership - Innovation - Happiness or, Project Manager - Happiness Specialist.

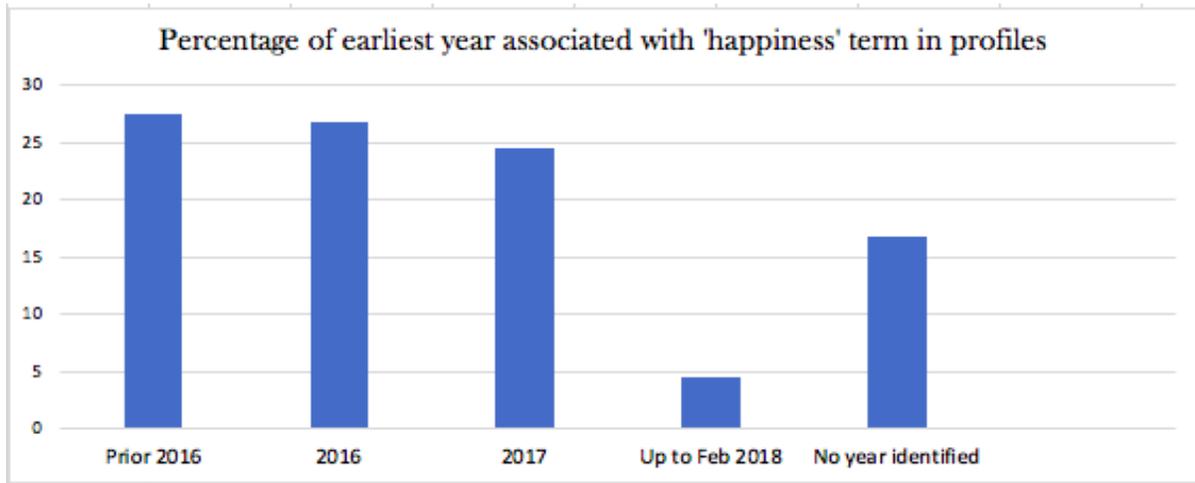


Figure 4. Earliest year associated with 'happiness'

Jobs Analysis Findings

The sample revealed 61 different job titles associated with happiness. For purposes of analysis, titles were grouped into eight different codes: *Ambassador*, *Chief Officer*, *Director*, *Executive*, *Expert/Specialist*, *Manager*, *Head* and *Trainer*. Results showed the top three titles as Manager (28.5%), Chief Officer (21%) and Director (11%). The frequencies are noted in Figure 5.

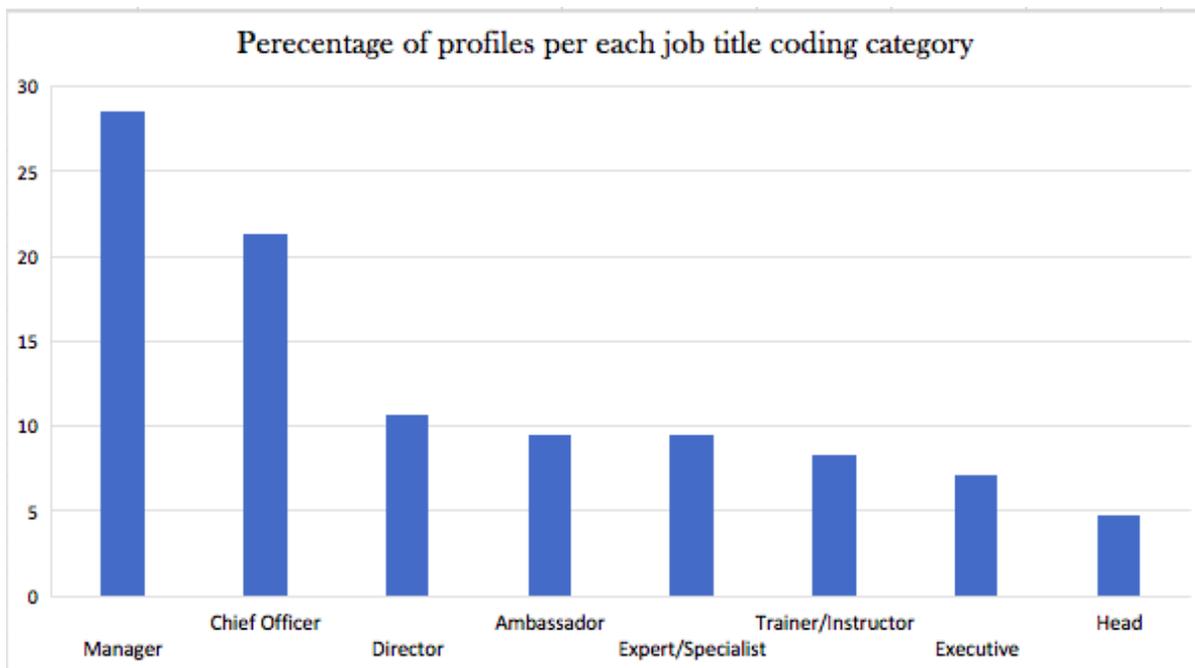


Figure 5. Percentage profiles per Job titles Coded group

Eight profiles did not include or mention previous job experience, while the remaining 123 profiles were coded and classified as represented in Figure 6. The filtration resulted in 80 profiles of the original 131 including 'happiness' as part of their current job title, from which they were



compared to their previous title. The comparison revealed three themes: (1) Got Promoted: two profiles were promoted into 'happiness' titles from middle to senior/executive position; (2) Shifted out of 'Happiness': 11 profiles identified 'happiness' jobs in the past, but now reflected a different title, such as "happiness ambassador" to "real estate agent"; (3) Shifted towards 'Happiness': the 67 remaining profiles had a career shift into 'happiness.' These were coded either as relevant or irrelevant. A relevant shift included titles that moved into the same position/field yet added 'happiness', such as moving from "Customer service manager" into "Customer happiness manager," while an irrelevant shift included jobs from which a connection between a previous position or field did not correspond to a current role, i.e., moving from a "Business manager" to "Happiness" expert.

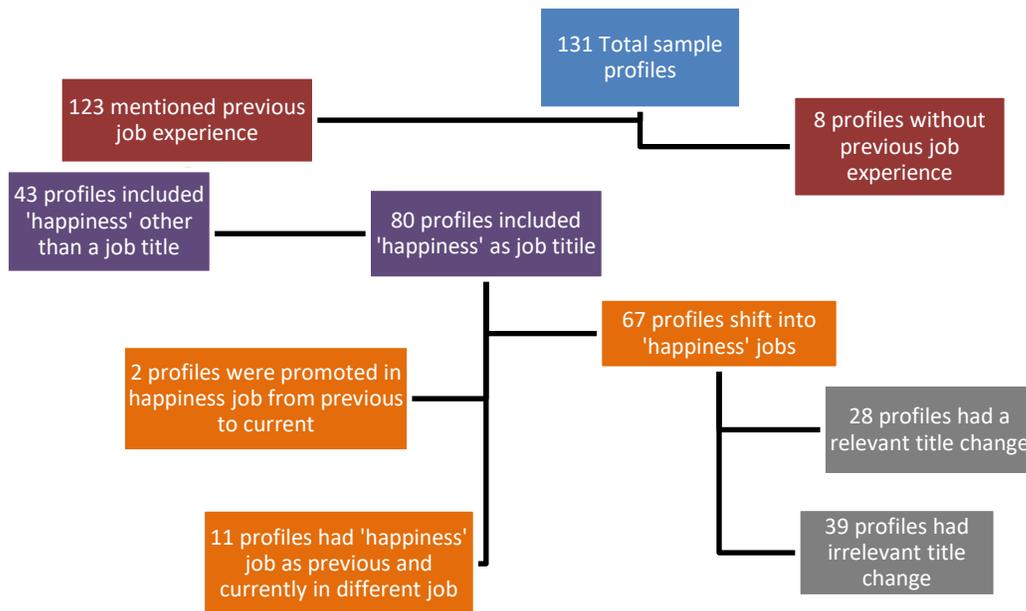


Figure 6. Classifying the current versus pre 'happiness' job titles

The search also identified the type of work in which 'happiness' was used as a descriptive term and whether it was a public or private entity, or charity. A total of 58% of the profiles belonged to private sector employees, while 40% belonged to public sector employees. The work industry coding included six categories, including business consultancy, education, financial/banking, government, personal development and 'other.' The 'other' category represented 32% of the sample and included job types that occurred only once, such as real estate, catering, and entertainment business. The main industries were the government sector (24%) and education (16%).

Job descriptions were also analyzed, when found, for all profiles mentioning 'happiness' as a job title resulting in a sample of 84 profiles. Of these, 56 had no job description. The remaining



28 included an 'Employee/corporate' theme such as Happiness and PR manager, Chief Happiness enabler, and Employee happiness officer, as well as a 'Customer theme' such as Customer happiness executive, Customer social responsibility and happiness, or Customer happiness consultant. All job descriptions that included a 'happiness' key term or descriptions for 'happiness' job titles were screened and coded. Job descriptions were associated with: (1) engagement, (2) voice, and (3) empowerment; while customer job description themes were associated with: (1) complaints, (2) enquiries and (3) satisfaction. Job descriptions which mentioned the development of policies or the UAE vision all belonged to the public government work sector such as: "develop customer happiness policies, communicate customer happiness standards", "develop people's happiness strategy" or "implement national program of happiness, coordinate between internal happiness councils".

Educational Qualifications Findings

The final section addressed the field of study found within profiles. The data included various degree levels, from diploma to doctorate degrees, and were coded into ten fields; business, education, healthcare, hotel management, international studies, languages, life sciences, mass communication, science and technology and military studies. The top three categories were business studies as the highest education qualification (48%), followed by science and technology (16%), and the life sciences (11%) (see Figure 7). The 'science and technology' category included: information technology, aviation, mathematics, computer science and engineering; while the 'life science' category included: psychology and sociology studies, as well as life coaching certifications.

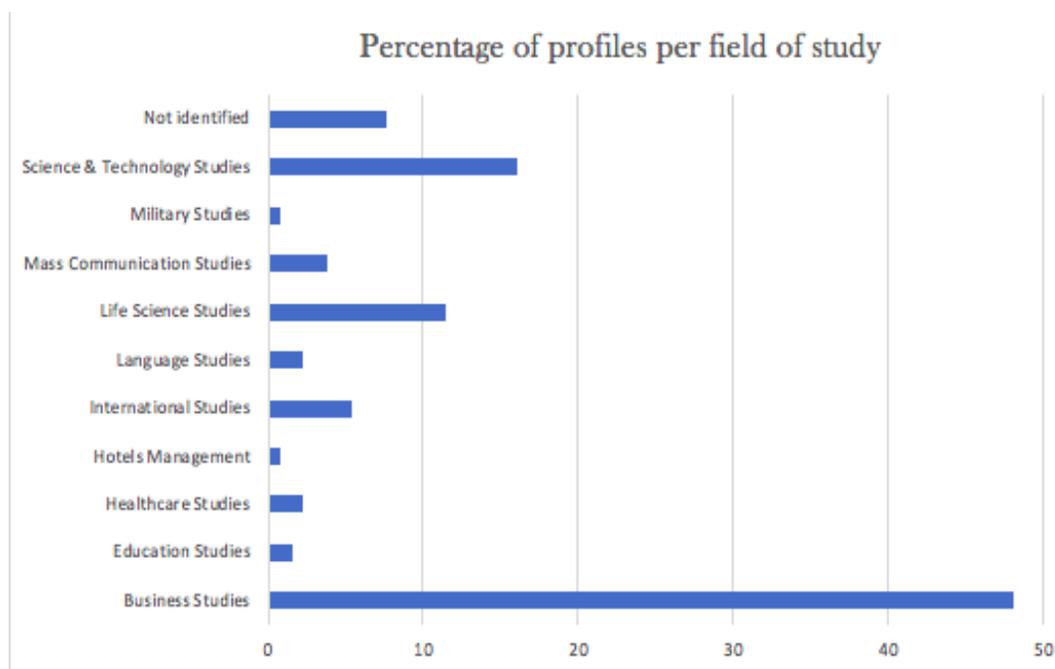


Figure 7. Percentage of profiles per coded field of study



Discussion

From the LinkedIn data results used to determine the visible impact of both the NPHW and subsequent NPHW on the UAE job market and corresponding educational qualifications, a number of insights were gained. The descriptive data revealed an equal gender distribution among the UAE workforce in implementing the NPHW; while the location data confirms the earlier discussion about Dubai taking the nation's lead in the program's implementation, followed by Abu Dhabi, the nation's capital. The study also explored the ways in which the National Program is being implemented across the UAE workforce and patterns through which the term was introduced. For example, is happiness a job title and consequently reflected in the employee's educational qualifications or is it a business name promoting happiness and accordingly, included in the job title as well? A notable finding was that only a single profile mentioned 'happiness' in the education section, reflective of a certification, but did not mention it in the job title or profile headline. In contrast, 28 profiles that included 'happiness' as a profile headline were unsupported by any work or educational qualifications.

In light of these findings, a number of questions arise. In reference to the job market as a whole, what is the motivation behind formal job title changes? If companies change titles to include happiness or positivity, is it in an effort to align with government mandates for the public sector, to actually boost happiness, or simply to increase profits? It can be argued that happiness has been co-opted and is being used as an instrument of capitalism in the pursuit of profit (Davies, 2015). It has been widely documented that businesses are looking to happiness as a way to increase profit, and happiness by way of consulting, books, movies and classes on self-improvement are a multimillion dollar industry (Gunnell, 2004). This may be why some companies are turning to happiness and its marketing. Whether true organizational happiness can come about as a result remains unknown.

Another question which can be asked is to what extent these employees have been influenced, perhaps by direct instruction from employers or government bodies, to contribute to the happiness agenda, or by the steady promotion of happiness and positivity throughout the UAE? The UAE's strategies to increase happiness have been widespread and strongly promoted. For example, the announcement of a Minister of Happiness and Wellbeing and goal of becoming one of the five happiest countries in the world received extensive media attention (Baldwin, 2017). Dubai's Happiness Agenda website, events, and training have also received much publicity and involvement from the public. As the stated goal of improving the personal understanding of happiness is noted on Dubai's Happiness Agenda website, a possibility exists that the personal understanding of the meaning and effect of happiness as well as increases in workplace happiness discussions as part of formal company and/or government initiatives have had an influence in such job description shifts. It is possible that these account for the increased use of happiness in job titles even when employees are not officially employed in a happiness role.

The year associated with the 'happiness' search term revealed that 57% of the users added 'happiness' into their profiles, either as a job title, business name, job description post February 2016, reflecting the ministerial appointment. Given the Minister's advocacy for the incorporation



of happiness and positivity into the workplace as a primary pillar of the program (Schwartzstein et al., 2018), a number of insights can be drawn. Nine profiles had the word 'positivity' accompanied with 'happiness' in the title, seven of which belonged to the public sector. While the Ministerial mandate encompasses both happiness and wellbeing, its early work admittedly lent itself much more towards a focus on happiness alone. This may be due in part to the common use of the word 'happiness' as one the general public can readily understand (Duncan, 2014). However, positivity is also an element of the initiative. The nine profiles may have been informed by the published book '*Reflections on Happiness and Positivity*' written by H.H. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid, Prime Minister of the UAE, Ruler of Dubai and prime proponent of the happiness agenda, which quickly sold 20,000 copies and prompted the GCC based publishing company, Explorer, to print 20,000 more for distribution in the country. There were also clear directives to allocate a "Chief Happiness and Positivity Officer" and positivity councils throughout all government entities. The word positivity has frequently been noted in government programs and websites available to the public and business entities, which might account for its increased use.

Comparing current and previous job titles brought more findings to light. Of the 67 profiles that had a job shift into 'happiness', 39 were categorized as 'irrelevant.' An optimistic explanation could include a career shift into a 'happiness' job, whereby the profile member might have found their personal character and soft skills aligning with newly introduced 'happiness' posts in the job market. Yet, another explanation is that these shifts were merely to fill job openings within companies in the absence of the relevant qualifications. Additionally, 11 profiles encountering a shift out of a 'happiness' job; for what reason might an individual resign from a happiness job? Was it no longer deemed relevant or necessary? There are other possibilities, including planned career changes before the rollout of the happiness initiatives, a poor job fit, or even the movement of staff from one role to another so that one suited for a happiness role could be put in place. Nonetheless, these reversions back to unrelated positions represent a small percentage of the sample and provide little insight into what effect government initiatives may have had.

The work sector analysis further showed an even distribution in title changes between the public and private sector. These results support an increase in the number of UAE companies including happiness in job roles or descriptions in line with the January 2017 *Happiness and Positivity Program for the Private Sector* (Positivity, 2017). Further, among the 52 profiles of employees working in the public sector, 32 of them were for government positions, such as ministries. This corresponds with the directive given through the NPHP that changes in job titles be made within the public sector to reflect happiness objectives. The balance of job title changes of employees in the private and public sector may also correspond with this directive in that companies may have proactively aligned their job titles with those of the public sector in hopes of receiving government incentives, contracts or recognition for their efforts.

From the 84 profiles having 'happiness' related job titles, only one explicitly mentioned 'happiness' education, quoting "The national happiness & positivity program certificate," which is a certified program offered by the Happiness and Wellbeing Program to all government appointed Chief Happiness and Positivity officers. With respect to the educational qualifications of the



remaining 83 profiles, only four had a semblance of happiness education conferrals in their qualifications background with life science degrees including, Master of Educational Psychology, Master of Occupational Health, Certified Life Coach and Bachelor of Counselling and Psychology. While it is possible that these conferrals required an element of education in positive psychology, it is important to note that much of psychology education is centered on the resolution of mental health problems and states of distress and do not generally offer explicit training in positive psychology. Thus, the analysis reflects a non-existent connection between an educational qualification and obtaining a 'happiness' job. This leads to questions concerning how the UAE's happiness policy is being implemented on a broader scale, with implications for the extent to which current employees are prepared to take on their happiness roles and how government programs are addressing the need to fill happiness positions at the present time.

Conclusion

This study captured the visible changes across the UAE workforce that reflect the UAE's NPHW implementation through the lens of LinkedIn profiles and explored the connection between those changes and corresponding educational qualifications acquired by the workforce as a result. It has only been a short time since the UAE has put programs into place to encourage the growth of happiness and wellbeing among its workforce. Changes associated with the rollout of the Happiness and Wellbeing national program and the limited communication concerning its implementation in all sectors resulted in early changes to be enacted at a superficial level. Yet, the LinkedIn data shows that the happiness trend is catching. The changes, while evident, are presented in a variety of ways, from changes in job titles to the manner in which employees describe what they do. These changes suggest that the UAE's NPHW is gaining ground among the private and government sectors and that increased visibility of the changes in the workforce are likely to continue as more entities become involved. As changes in titles and job descriptions take root, it can be expected that more training and understanding of the deep-rooted goals of the programs will become more prominent, ensuring that programs have lasting effects. Nonetheless, the data show that current happiness job roles and their qualifications bear little connection to the actual work of increasing happiness and wellbeing from a scientific grounding. This raises concerns about how well the NPHW can be implemented and sustained over time; how can employees be trained in the science of happiness and wellbeing to ensure they are capable of promoting and implementing happiness in the workplace if they themselves have not pursued an understanding of its core components?

As the UAE continues to implement happiness programs, it is important to look at quality higher education programs in positive psychology to facilitate the attainment of careers which include happiness components. This is currently being done in the UAE through programs such as the NPHW as well as through the aforementioned projects; however, greater focus can be given, particularly through the restructuring of programs in business administration, human resource management, design, humanities, and even hospitality management, all of which could benefit from an added focus in the field of positive psychology. Making these changes within the realm of



higher education as a precursor to employees being placed in happiness roles would ensure the UAE's vision for happiness is properly implemented and sustainably so. This would also ensure that happiness becomes a part of society at every level, with the business and workforce being a catalyst for this societal change.

References

- Al Maktoum, M. B. R. (2016). *Why ministers for happiness, tolerance, youth and the future?* Retrieved from <http://wam.ae/en/details/1395292124434>
- Al Maktoum, M. B. R. (2017). *Reflections on happiness & positivity*. Dubai, UAE: Explorer Publishing & Distribution.
- Anderson, R. (2017a, March 3). Happiness in the GCC. *Gulf Business*. Retrieved from <http://gulfbusiness.com/happiness-in-the-gcc/>
- Anderson, R. (2017b, March 20). UAE climbs to 21st in 2017 World Happiness ranking. *Gulf Business*. Retrieved from <http://gulfbusiness.com/uae-climbs-21st-2017-world-happiness-ranking/>
- Baldwin, D. (2017, November 8). UAE strives to be among top five happiest countries. *Gulf News*. Retrieved from <https://gulfnews.com/news/uae/society/uae-strives-to-be-among-top-five-happiest-countries-1.2121228>
- Bok, D. (2010). *The politics of happiness: What government can learn from the new research on wellbeing*. United Kingdom: Princeton University Press/Kindle.
- CIA. (2018). *Middle East: United Arab Emirates: The World Factbook*. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ae.html>
- CIPD. (2017). *Healthcare provider to appoint 'happiness officers' across its business*. Retrieved from <https://www.cipd.ae/people-management/news/healthcare-happiness-officers>
- Cooper, C. (2018, June 4). Happiness officers and ping-pong tables are not the answer. *Times of Malta*. Retrieved from <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20180604/business/happiness-officers-and-ping-pong-tables-are-not-the-answer.680834>
- Davies, W. (2015). *The happiness industry: How the government and big business sold us wellbeing*. Brooklyn, NY: Verso/Kindle.
- Diener, E., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). Beyond money: Toward an economy of wellbeing. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 5(1), 1-31.
- Diener, E., & Tov, W. (2012). National accounts of wellbeing. In K. C. Land, M. J. Sirgy, & A. C. Michalos (Eds.), *Handbook of social indicators and quality of life research* (pp. 137-157). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.
- Dubai Statistics Center. (2017, June 10). *"Dubai Statistics Center" enhances happiness of its employees with motivational cards*. Retrieved from <https://www.dsc.gov.ae/en-us/DSC-News/Pages/happiness.aspx>
- Duncan, G. (2010). Should happiness-maximization be the goal of government? *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 11, 163-178.



- Duncan, G. (2014). Politics, paradoxes and pragmatics of happiness. *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 55(1), 79-95.
- Export.gov. (2018, April 23). *United Arab Emirates labor policies & practices*. export.gov. Retrieved from <https://www.export.gov/article?id=United-Arab-Emirates-labor>
- Fisher, C. D. (2010). Happiness at work. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 12, 384-412.
- Gulf News. (2016, July 30). UAE Minister launches training programme for 60 chief happiness and positivity officers. *Gulf News*. Retrieved from <https://gulfnews.com/news/uae/government/uae-minister-launches-training-programme-for-60-chief-happiness-and-positivity-officers-1.1870548>
- Gunnell, B. (2004, September 6). The happiness industry. *New Statesman*. Retrieved from <https://www.newstatesman.com/node/160445>
- Gyem, T., Dorji, M., & Phuntsho, T. (2013). *Infusion of Gross National Happiness in education*. Paper presented at the Indo-Bhutan International Conference on Gross National Happiness, Bhutan. *International Journal of Business Intelligents*, 2, 239-244.
- Hamad, E., Savundranayagam, M., Holmes, J., Kinsella, E., & Johnson, A. (2016). Toward a mixed-methods research approach to content analysis in the digital age: The combined content-analysis model and its applications to health care Twitter feeds. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 18(3), e60.
- Happiness Agenda. (2018). *Make Dubai the happiest city on earth*. Retrieved from <http://en.happinessagenda.ae/#overview>
- Happy.ae. (2018). Toolkit handouts. *Publications*. Retrieved from <https://www.happy.ae/en/download/handouts-1>
- Haziq, S. (2017, June 30). Employee happiness is the priority. *Khaleej Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/nation/dubai/employee-happiness-is-the-priority>
- HCT. (2017). SJW Happiness Ambassadors spread joy of “Onshuri Al Sa’ada” on World Happiness Day. *HCT News*. Retrieved from <http://news.hct.ac.ae/en/2017/05/sjw-happiness-ambassadors-spread-joy-onshuri-al-saada-world-happiness-day/>
- Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R., & Sachs, J. (eds.) (2012). *World happiness report, 2012*. The Earth Institute, Columbia University, New York, USA.
- Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R., & Sachs, J. (eds.) (2013). *World happiness report 2013*. New York, NY (USA): Sustainable Development Solutions Network.
- Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R., & Sachs, J. (eds.) (2015). *World happiness report 2015*. New York, NY (USA): Sustainable Development Solutions Network.
- Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R., & Sachs, J. (eds.) (2018). *World happiness report 2018*. New York, NY (USA): Sustainable Development Solutions Network.
- Helliwell, J.F. & Wang, S. (2012). The state of world happiness. In J. F. Helliwell, R. Layard & J. Sachs (Eds.), *World Happiness Report* (pp. 10-57). New York, NY: The Earth Institute, Columbia University.



- Hirschauer, N., Lehberger, M., & Musshoff, O. (2015). Happiness and utility in economic thought—or: What can we learn from happiness research for public policy analysis and public policy making? *Social Indicators Research*, *121*(3), 647-674.
- Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, *15*(9), 1277-1288.
- Insights, H. (2018). What about the United Arab Emirates? Retrieved from <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country/the-united-arab-emirates/>
- Kacker, M., & Perrigot, R. (2016). Retailer use of a professional social media network: Insights from franchising. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *30*, 222-233.
- Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B. S. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons*, *54*(3), 241-251.
- Knight, L. (2016). *Problematising 'happiness': A critical explanation of the UK's happiness agenda*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from <http://repository.essex.ac.uk/20044/1/Laura%20Knight%20PhD%20Thesis.pdf>
- Layard, R. (2016). Promoting happiness ethics: The greatest happiness principle. In J. F. Helliwell, R. Layard, & J. Sachs (Eds.), *World happiness report, 2016* (pp. 51-55). New York, NY (USA): Sustainable Development Solutions Network.
- Li, X., Cox, A., & Wang, Z. (2018). How do social network sites support product users' knowledge construction? A study of LinkedIn. *Online Information Review*, *42*(3), 304-323.
- Malek, C. (2016, February 2). New UAE Cabinet ministers sworn in. *The National*. Retrieved from <https://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/new-uae-cabinet-ministers-sworn-in-1.211140>
- NHS England. (2012). Reducing health inequalities: Key legislation. Retrieved from <https://www.england.nhs.uk/about/equality/equality-hub/resources/legislation/>
- Oswald, A. J., Proto, E., & Sgroi, D. (2015). Happiness and productivity. *Journal of Labor Economics*, *33*(4), 789-822.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2009). The virtual geographies of social networks: A comparative analysis of Facebook, LinkedIn and ASmallWorld. *New Media & Society*, *11*(1-2), 199-220.
- Robinson, S. D., Sinar, E., & Winter, J. (2014). Social media as a tool for research: A turnover application using LinkedIn. *The Industrial Organizational Psychologist*, *52*(1), 133-141.
- Saeid, A. G., Arifin, Z., & Hasim, M. (2012). The cultural tourism in Abu Dhabi. *Journal of Applied Sciences Research*, *8*(6), 2888-2896.
- Schwartzstein, J., Hall, B. J., Chang, T. Y., Sameh, K., & Thapar, A. (2018). *Happy UAE*. Retrieved from <https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=54383>
- Sgroi, D. (2015). *Happiness and productivity: Understanding the happy-productive worker*. Retrieved from https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/staff/dsgroi/impact/hp_briefing.pdf
- Skeels, M. M., & Grudin, J. (2009). *When social networks cross boundaries: A case study of workplace use of Facebook and LinkedIn*. Paper presented at the ACM 2009 International



- Conference on Supporting Group Work, Sanibel Island, Florida, USA.
<https://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1531689>
- Sutton, M. (2017, October 28). UAE launches world's first Happiness Policy Manual. Retrieved from <http://www.itp.net/mobile/615514-uae-launches-worlds-first-happiness-policy-manual>
- UAE Cabinet. (2018a). Prime Minister's initiatives. Retrieved from <https://www.uaecabinet.ae/en/prime-ministers-initiatives>
- UAE Cabinet. (2018b). UAE ranked 28th happiest country in the world. Retrieved from <https://uaecabinet.ae/en/details/news/uae-ranked-28th-happiest-country-in-world>
- Vision 2021. (2010). *UAE Vision 2021*. Retrieved from <https://www.vision2021.ae/en/uae-vision>
- Wright, T. A., & Bonett, D. G. (2016). Job satisfaction and psychological wellbeing as nonadditive predictors of workplace turnover. *Journal of Management*, 33(2), 141-160.
- Zakaria, S. (2017, March 19). Residents celebrate happiness with Dubai Canal parade. *Khaleej Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/nation/happiness-times/residents-celebrate-happiness-with-dubai-canal-parade>