

Happy Employees in Indian IT Firms: A Review

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Abstract-

Today the Western world is caught up in a culture of happiness, but it wasn't always so. It was only in the 18th century that the values of the Enlightenment ushered in the notion that happiness was the attainment of a worthy life. Since then the pursuit of happiness has gained momentum and spread to every aspect of behaviour, from religion and politics to work and parenting. The transition from a largely manufacturing to a white-collar economy played a role, providing more settings in which managers could see happiness as a business advantage. In order to improve the levels of employee engagement, companies are providing substantial support for employees' physical, emotional and mental wellbeing.

An employee's level of choice and control in their workplace impacts on their level of engagement. An engaged employee has a greater degree of control over where and how they work. This includes the ability to work from different places. Employees should also have access to privacy when they need to concentrate, or break away from teams. Workers also want to be able to change their settings, such as adjusting the height of their desks. The bigger amount of choices you give employees to work, the happier they are, and the more productive and the more engaged they are.

The need of the hour is to utilize a firm's resources in manner that has significant impact on the firm's productivity. Firm's should not only undertake financial responsibility, but also undertake initiatives to nurture employee happiness. Most firms practice some form of employee engagement activities with the broad goal of contributing to the well-being of its employees. Engaging in employees' problems and treating them as one's own are pivotal to success in business. Employees have to be treated as individuals as they are the driving force of the company.

This trend is seen across industries, manufacturing sector is no exception to this. The purpose of this article is to compare and contrast the various Employee engagement activities taken up by five ITES firms having its presence in Pune. Each firm represents different range of turnovers to reflect industry wide perspective.

Keywords: Happiness Index, Happy Employees, ITES, Employee Engagement

1. INTRODUCTION

As one of the fastest growing economies in the world, India presents unique challenges both to domestic businesses and the vast range of multinational corporations eager to be part of its success story. The rapid growth and evolution of India's economy has put its employment market under stress. Massive demand in key sectors, such as information technology, and the drive to deliver ever-higher quality levels of staff to meet global requirements have created severe competition for its best and brightest. Companies are on the lookout for talent once again and employees now have more options to explore. At the same time, there is a clear need to boost productivity of individuals, companies and the country as a whole. That's forcing all organizations to take a hard look at what it takes to retain and motivate, as well as attract talent. The purpose of the present study is to compare the various HR initiatives taken up by ITES firms in an attempt to nurture happy employees.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 The History of Happiness

Today the Western world is caught up in a culture of happiness, but it wasn't always so. It was only in the 18th century that the values of the Enlightenment ushered in the notion that happiness was the attainment of a worthy life. Since then the pursuit of happiness has gained momentum and spread to every aspect of behavior, from religion and politics to work and parenting.

It's important to trace this steady encroachment of the happiness imperative because it reminds us that today's values are not givens in the human condition. Culture reflects choices, and new choices can change it. It's also important to recognize that any societal choice has both good and bad consequences. When the goal becomes

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happiness, the idea arises that unhappiness is to be avoided in ourselves, our families, and our workplaces. Emotional states short of bliss become sources of anxiety and are even diagnosed as pathologies. That may lead to choices that aren't for the best and, paradoxically, make a lot of people more miserable.

During the 19th century, although the commitment to happiness in general did not escalate, there were important applications to facets of daily life. The new middle-class work ethic came close to arguing that work should be a source of happiness. There was some complexity here: Horatio Alger stories of the beauties of work also pointed to higher earnings and social mobility – not just intrinsic happiness – as rewards. But it was convenient for a rising class to believe that working people had no reason not to be happy and that laziness and bad habits disrupted not only performance but also contentment.

The happiness surge applied even more clearly for family life. Now that the family began to play a decreasing economic role, as jobs moved out of the home, it took on new emotional responsibilities. Wives and mothers were urged to maintain a cheerful atmosphere in order to reward their hardworking husbands and produce successful children.

The cultural commitment to happiness prompted new efforts to associate work with happiness, through experiments in human relations techniques or just piped-in music. It inspired new workplace standards that instructed white-collar employees and salespeople in the centrality of cheerfulness. It spawned new commercial empires such as the Walt Disney Company, whose corporate motto became “make people happy” and whose employees convinced customers that they were already happy simply because they were in a Disney setting. It prompted “happy meals.” It spurred an advertising executive, Harvey Ball, to create in 1963 the yellow smiley face.

The happiness imperative also spread to childhood, another area where cultural norms have become so powerful that it may be hard to imagine historical contrast. Traditionally, childhood and happiness were not generally associated. Again, this does not mean that past children were less happy, but it does mean that their happiness was not obligatory, often not vividly remembered in adulthood, and certainly not any parent's responsibility.

2.2 Some Key Events in History

- 1776: U.S. Declaration of Independence declares that all men have a right to “the pursuit of happiness”.
- 1926: The song “Happy Birthday” is composed.
- 1963: Smiley face is invented; annual licensing fees exceed \$50 million by the decade's end.
- 1977: McDonald's introduces the Happy Meal.

The transition from a largely manufacturing to a white-collar economy played a role, providing more settings in which managers could see happiness as a business advantage. Consumerism was central. All sorts of advertisers (a newly distinct profession) discovered that associating products with happiness spurred sales. This is what most clearly explains why the intensified happiness culture of the mid-20th century has, in the main, persisted to the present day.

The historical evolution of our happiness culture also suggests limitations. We have seen that the translation of happiness norms into family and work expectations produces frustration and disappointment when experience contradicts cultural hyperbole. When too much is expected, less actual satisfaction may result.

2.3 Happiness Index – The Idea

The World Happiness Report of 2016 highlights the link between employees' happiness and their work environment. The differences between the countries are governed by factors such as GDP per capita, healthy years of life expectancy, social support, trust, perceived freedom to make life choices and generosity. A regular paycheck is not enough to encourage the employees to work harder. Employees are motivated by flexible work schedules, health insurance, wellness programs and community development. All these benefits make employees happier, content, healthier and more productive. It creates an environment where positive attitudes are cherished and ideas are open for discussion. The workplace becomes engaging, effective and better.

One out of three employees in 17 of the world's most important economies is disengaged at work. According to a study of 12480 workers in 17 countries, workplace and worker engagement influences employee satisfaction. There is a clear relationship between workplace satisfaction and the level of employee engagement. Employees who are highly satisfied with various aspects of their workplace also demonstrate higher levels of engagement.

Globally, only 13% of workers are highly engaged and highly satisfied with their workplace. Conversely, 11% of workers are disengaged and dissatisfied.

2.4 Happy Employees – The Concept

Fisher (2010) discusses the definition and measurement of happiness at work and its antecedents and consequences. She notes in particular that definitions of happiness at work “refer to pleasant judgments (positive attitudes) or pleasant experiences (positive feelings, moods, emotions, and flow states) at work”. Fisher emphasizes further that there is a critical distinction between happiness defined as a set of attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction, commitment) and happiness as a hedonic state. Thus, happiness can be defined on one hand in terms of cognitive appraisals of needs and wants, referred to by Fisher (2010) as “cold cognitions,” or on the other hand in terms of an emotional state of mind. In this respect, Fisher discusses seven proxies for happiness at work that have been the subject of ongoing research in organizational behavior: (1) job satisfaction, (2) organizational commitment, (3) job involvement, (4) engagement, (5) thriving and vigor, (6) flow and intrinsic motivation, and (7) affect at work.

Fisher makes a clear distinction between happiness related constructs at different levels of analysis. In this respect, she identifies three levels: (1) transient (or within-person), (2) personal (or individual differences), and (3) unit level³; she points out that happiness definitions vary qualitatively between levels. Happiness, especially at the transient level, is an ephemeral variable, varying from moment to moment throughout the day. In terms of the causes of happiness at work, Fisher (2010) notes that this is a function of the work environment, employees’ personal proclivities, person-environment fit, and volitional behavior (e.g., an employee’s attempts to increase his or her happiness).

10 recommendations for creating a happy workplace

1. Create a healthy, respectful, and supportive organizational culture.
2. Supply competent leadership at all levels.
3. Provide fair treatment, security, and recognition.
4. Design jobs to be interesting, challenging, autonomous, and rich in feedback.
5. Facilitate skill development to improve competence and allow growth.
6. Select for person-organization and person – job fit.
7. Enhance fit through the use of realistic job previews and socialization practices.
8. Reduce minor hassles and increase daily uplifts.
9. Persuade employees to reframe a current less than ideal work environment as acceptable.
10. Adopt high-performance work practices.

An employee's level of choice and control in their workplace impacts on their level of engagement. An engaged employee has a greater degree of control over where and how they work. This includes the ability to work from different places. Employees should also have access to privacy when they need to concentrate, or break away from teams. Workers also want to be able to change their settings, such as adjusting the height of their desks. The bigger amount of choices you give employees to work, the happier they are, and the more productive and the more engaged they are."

3. HR INITIATIVES NURTURING HAPPINESS AMONGST EMPLOYEES

In order to improve the levels of employee engagement, many of these ITES firms provide substantial support for employees' physical, emotional and mental wellbeing, she says. Employees' physical wellbeing is, for example, supported by workspaces with good quality air flow, suitable temperatures and that incorporate trends such as office equipment that supports good posture. For mental wellbeing, workspaces are designed to allow for creativity, concentration and thinking. Workspaces should also support the employee's emotional wellbeing. Employees are made to feel that they matter to their team and that their work is valued.

3.1 Persistent

Gamification: Gamification is fast becoming mainstream and is helping hundreds of organizations improve morale, productivity, and top lines.

Employee Engagement Strategy: “Without people, there would be no Persistent. People are our most valuable asset and as such we invest a lot towards keeping them happy, engaged and excited at the workplace” says Sameer Bendre - CPO Persistent Systems. Employee engagement mechanisms are dynamic and have a cool

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factor at Persistent Systems. Employees are kept engaged via social networking, which is continuous as well as technology driven.

Socially yours: Persistent has devised mechanisms which mirror engagement styles of social networks. E.g. generating employees' feedback through a system that allows them to express their likes or dislikes. Similarly, Persistent employees place mood indicators on intranet pages to understand employees' emotions. If an employee shows negative mood on a regular basis, it will serve as an alert to the HR team to reach out and understand the employee's problem. This becomes an interesting way to address employees' morale issues.

3.2 Infosys

Petit Infoscion Day: Employees are invited to bring their kids to work on a Saturday. The entire development centre is decorated with a theme. The guests are received with a red carpet welcome and chocolate/ candy are distributed at the reception. Employees dressed as Donald ducks and Mickey Mouse, receive the kids. There were stalls with small games organized on the roads for the family to spend some time and have fun. Dormitories were set up for the kids to take some rest but one can hardly find kids resting with so much activities happening around them.

Bubble: An in-house social networking portal like Facebook set up by Infosys. It enables a healthy and quick interaction amongst employees. The company also plans to host talk shows where top management would interact with the employees. It helps employees connect to their colleagues, seniors, subordinates and top management.

3.3 Tech Mahindra

Josh: It is a team of enthusiastic associates of TechMahindra who take up the responsibility of making a difference through various events involving aspects of fun, talent and social welfare. Their various activities are for Enhancing employee bonding, Showcasing talents of Tech Mighties in various extra-curricular activities like sports, art, music, dance, etc.,

Supporting various social welfare organizations and causes to spread awareness on various social issues, and Helping to conduct organizational events and ensure employee participation. Some of the initiatives under their roof are:

Navratna: Through this online portal, associates willing to share their expertise can register as a Navratna (Guru) and let the Shishyas (Seekers of knowledge) connect with them to learn the skill that they are masters in.

Samanvay: This initiative aids in enabling families bond with the organization through learning interventions. These include programs like Transition into adolescence for Children, Dynamics of Relationships & Spiritual Development for Spouses & Parents.

Ekatvam: It is TechM's Annual Associate Event which serves as a platform for Associates to showcase their talents in the fields of art, music, dance & sports and celebrate with their families.

Let's Talk: The in-house psychological counseling service offered to all associates and their immediate family members to cope with stress-related issues, emotional difficulties, critical life events and other personal concerns. The objective is to promote the overall mental and emotional well being of Associates and their families.

All Hands Meet: These are planned interactions between senior leaders and Associates to communicate strategic priorities, share updates & insight into the business performance.

Tech Mate: Is the online internal newsletter which acts as a news capsule for the entire organization sharing achievements, wins, events and leadership talks to the associates.

3.4 Tata Consultancy Services

Maitree: Maitree (which means friendship) is one of the oldest employee engagement programmes at the company. Maitree was started to support the spouses of the TCS employees who often had to settle in other countries outside India in a totally new environment and culture. Culture sensitization is one of the key objectives of the initiative.

PEEP: Proactive Employee Engagement Programme (PEEP) focuses on one-on-one interactions between junior and senior employees. The concept enables employees to interact with each other irrespective of their designations and hierarchies in the organization.

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PROPEL: It was launched at TCS in early 2000s to promote the culture of Share-Care-Grow. It is a revolutionary team activity that facilitates the exchange of ideas and helps in immediate problem - solving. The fun format of the initiative also encourages bonding and self-development among TCS associates. PROPEL stands for: Professional Excellence, Role Enhancement, Owning TCS Culture, Personal Growth, Employee Involvement and Learning. It's an all-encompassing approach to find solutions. PROPEL is a platform and a tool to help bring about change in the organization. It connects with the TCS belief of "Let us make it a joy for all our stakeholders". It helps build a culture of collaboration, creativity and also networks of relationships.

3.5 Cybage

Cybage's Employee focus: Happy employees perform better at work! Cybage organizes the following employee engagement activities regularly throughout the year for greater productivity and to achieve a higher retention rate.

Inter Department Sports Tournaments: Cybage organizes Sports Tournaments throughout the year between the various departments of the company. The sports activities are usually Football, Cricket, Volleyball, Table Tennis and Snooker.

Musical Nights: An enchanting night of all kinds of music for the employees and their families ensures utmost relaxation. The employees can visit different stalls & just unwind to good music.

Tambola: The engrossing game of Tambola is held for the employee's regularly. Employees are captured in this game of luck that also brings about a sense of community.

Cultural Activities: The company organizes cultural activities during the year for the employees to showcase their dancing, singing and other artistic skills.

NGO Volunteering Activities: Cybage Asha adopts Villages – Karna wadi in Maharashtra, Bhor taluka. They take over infrastructure development and awareness programs in the village.

4. AN ITES SURVEY

The authors conducted a sample survey at these 5 ITES firms. The questionnaire was a combination of Oxford Happy Questionnaire and Employee Engagement questions. No definite conclusions may be drawn from the Survey. However below mentioned are a few snapshots of the Results of the Survey.

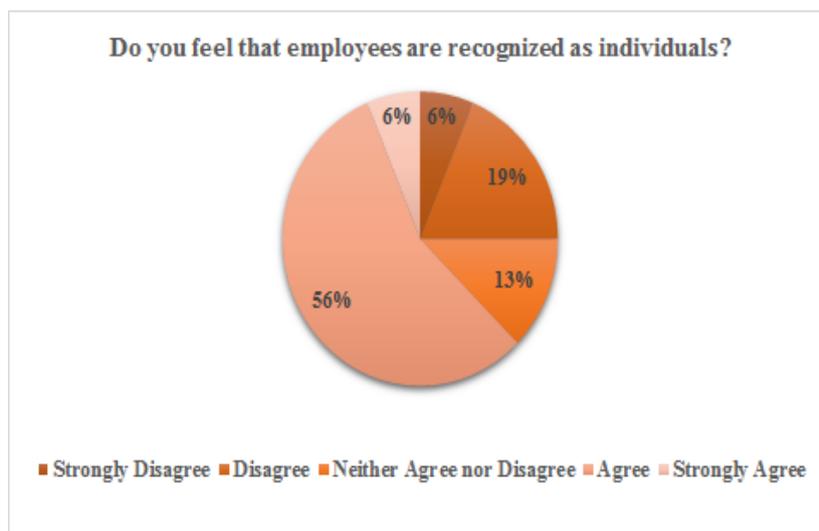


Figure 1. Employee Feelings

The above pie chart indicates that the firm does recognize the employee as an individual, thereby valuing the contribution or value addition made by the him/her.

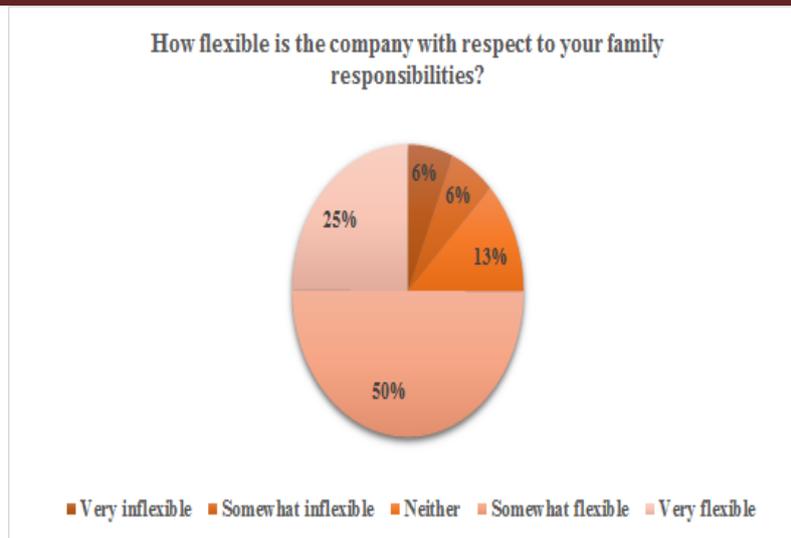


Figure 2. Companies Flexibility toward Employee Family

The above pie chart is representative of the fact that the firm takes into consideration the family obligations of the employee. This in turn results in better engagement of the employee. The family members often applaud and appreciate such an approach from the company.

Employee engagement is often intertwined with employee satisfaction. The above pie chart is indicative that most of the employees are neutral towards this aspect. Hence, firms need to work a little more on this aspect.

The role of employee engagement or employee happiness is in bridging the gap between what the employee does and what the employee aspires. The chart is partially indicative of the same.

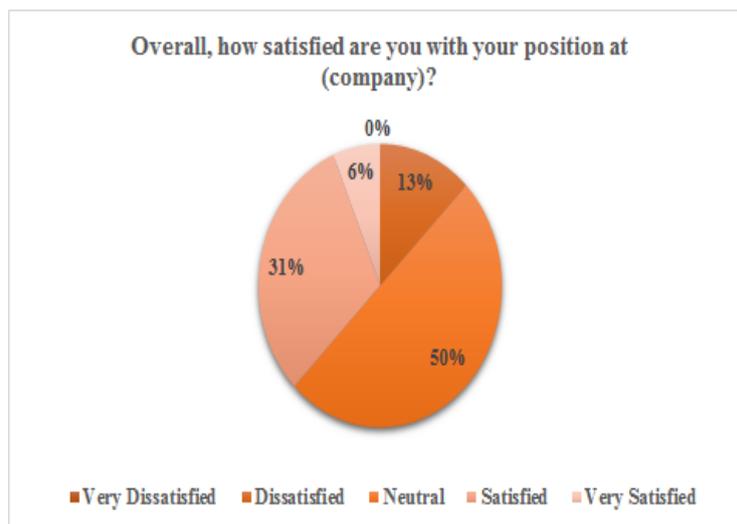


Figure 3. Satisfaction of Employee

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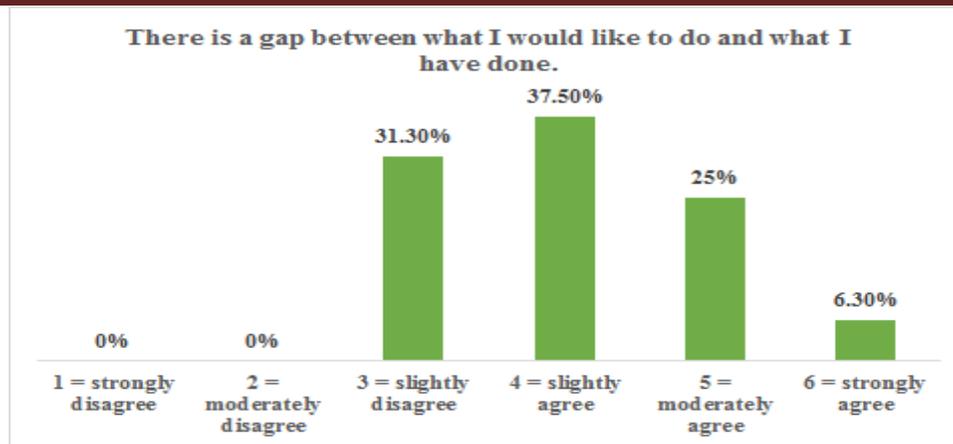


Figure 4. Comparison of personnel liking and actual work done

5. CONCLUSION

ITES firms like Persistent, Cognizant, Accenture, TCS etc. have been game changers in the field of business and management in India. The HR initiatives taken up by them to foster employee engagement have resulted in creation of happy employees.

Engaging in employees' problems and treating them as one's own are pivotal to success in business. Employees have to be treated as individuals as they are the driving force of the company. They have to be given attractive benefits plans. These benefits are an investment to the future of the company. The benefits plans may start out small and grow with the company catering to various needs such as assistance in buying a house, health, life and disability insurance. The conclusive purpose in starting a business is to do what you love and that is exhibited perfectly through employee satisfaction.

Instead of thinking about designing programs to solve a problem, employers should consider how to make everyone happier, healthier and more productive. The goal is of creating an environment in which people's positive attitudes are cherished. Thereby, making life in the workplace more fun, more effective and better.

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