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## Leadership and its Influence on Happiness at Work: A Narrative Literature Review

El liderazgo y su influencia en la felicidad en el trabajo:  
una revisión narrativa de la literatura

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### Abstract

This article describes the relationship between happiness at work and leadership through a narrative review of the literature available in the Scopus and Web of Science databases. It is included general debates, review of previous studies, analysis of state of the art, and research perspectives. The objective is to expand the discussion of the existing relationship between these two variables and their influence on organizational performance. Different types of leadership that have been positively related to happiness at work were identified, such as transformational, altruistic, servant, authentic, and influential leadership. Based on the analysis of the available literature, it is possible to conclude about the causal relationship between both approaches, especially in those that leadership emphasize the worker and its performance. The main aim is to impact organizations through human talent management, and contribute to the formation of transformational, ethical, altruistic, inspiring, authentic, and service-oriented leaders,

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who impact their feelings and attitudes, as well as their performance.

**Keywords:** Happiness at work; Leadership; Positive leadership; Performance.

## Resumen

El presente artículo describe la relación entre felicidad en el trabajo y liderazgo, a través de una revisión narrativa de la literatura disponible en las bases de datos Scopus y Web of Sciences, incluyendo debates generales, revisión de estudios previos, análisis de estados del arte, y perspectivas de investigación, con el objetivo de ampliar la discusión de la relación existente entre estas dos variables y su influencia en el desempeño organizacional. Se identificaron diferentes tipos de liderazgo que han sido relacionados positivamente con la felicidad en el trabajo, como son transformacional, el altruista, el de servicio, el auténtico y el influenciador. A partir del análisis de la literatura disponible, es posible concluir sobre la relación causal ambos enfoques, sobre todo en aquellos ejercicios de liderazgo que tienen énfasis en el trabajador y su desempeño. Se busca incidir en las organizaciones desde la gestión de talento humano, y contribuir a formar líderes transformacionales, éticos, altruistas, inspiradores, auténticos y de servicio, y que impacten sus sentimientos y actitudes, así como su desempeño.

**Palabras Clave:** Felicidad en el trabajo; Liderazgo; Liderazgo positivo; Desempeño.

## 1. Introduction

Happiness at work is a concept that has recently gained attention as an important topic for the human resources field in organizations. In fact, for Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) happiness at work is the “Holy Grail” of organizational behavior research. This means that a happy worker could deliver contributions efficiently, innovatively, and creatively, also generating greater stability and lower turnover, which has also become a concern in high-performing companies.

Undoubtedly, the leader and their leadership style play an important role in organizational performance and survival. Likewise, leadership types that focus on people, such as transformational, authentic, and creative leadership, are considered to have a greater impact on happiness at work (Salas *et al.*, 2018). The leader, in the long run, is one of the main responsible for the job design, indicating to the collaborator what

to do, how, and with which means. Leaders must constantly verify the competencies and skills of their collaborators, obtaining the maximum benefit for the organization and enhancing the individual. The concept of leadership has been widely studied for its intervention in the development and evolution of the individual within the organization, as well as in their perception of their work, attitude, and feelings towards it.

In this sense, it is considered important to analyze the relationship between these two variables, that have to do with employee and organizational performance. Companies with high sense of leadership understand that they must be able to attract, enhance, and retain talent, focusing their efforts on strengthening competencies required for long-term sustainability, in a rapidly changing environment. Thus, the central objective of this work is to expand the discussion of the relationship between happiness at work and leadership, and the influence of such a relationship on organizational performance. Therefore, we seek to answer the question: What is the relationship between leadership and happiness at work, as determinants of employee performance in organizations?

The relationship between leadership and happiness at work has not been a recurrent topic in literature reviews. From the search conducted for this paper, no documents were found that account for such a relationship. Instead it was identified some review papers related to: measuring happiness at work (Barros-Justo *et al.*, 2018; Sender *et al.*, 2021); literature review studies on definitions, causes, and consequences of happiness at work (Awada and Ismail, 2019; Gyeltshen and Beri, 2018); future research directions on happiness at work (Salas-Vallina *et al.*, 2018); and a literature review on the relationship between stress and happiness at work (Kubátová 2019). In fact, according to Erazo and Riaño (2021) the future research agenda involves making theoretical contributions and cross-sectional research on the associations between happiness and organizational performance.

In this research, happiness at work will be valued as a dependent variable of the type of leadership applied in the organization. That is, the type of leadership can influence

**Table 1. Prisma statement**

Identification	124 articles identified: Scopus® y WoS®	14 additional article records, identified through other sources
	112 articles after removing duplicates	
Screening	112 articles reviewed	33 articles excluded
Eligibility	79 full-text articles were evaluated for eligibility.	42 full-text articles excluded (disciplinary incompatibility)
Included	37 studies included for narrative	
<b>Source:</b> Authors' construction based on Liberati <i>et al.</i> , 2009.		

the level of happiness that employees have in their work position, and likewise in the results obtained.

The present paper offers a narrative review of the literature that aims to contribute to the understanding of happiness at work, a crucial aspect for organizations and their employees (Dutschke, 2013; Delgado-Abella and Vanegas-Garcia, 2013; Erazo and Riaño, 2021). The document identifies the relationship between the type of leadership and happiness at work as determinants of employee performance in organizations, based on the available literature. It was built by exploring and describing the different theories that explain leadership and its types in relation to happiness at work.

This article has implications for different academic and organizational stakeholders interested in studying and managing happiness at work from a leadership perspective. They must be able to broaden the discussion on this topic from the leader's perspective and their influence on internal stakeholder groups. Notably, this article contributes to the discussion of Sustainable Development Goal 8 "Decent Work and Economic Growth," which emphasizes the quality of life of individuals by providing well-paying, secure, and satisfying jobs. As well as promoting a safe and healthy work environment for all employees, which significantly contributes to the happiness and well-being of workers.

The structure of the document begins by the description of the methodology and literature sources. From the selected sources, a theoretical framework is proposed

where definitions and main theoretical approaches are reviewed. Then, through the analysis of the narrative content of the selected documents, the relationship between leadership and happiness at work is verified. Finally, a discussion and respective conclusions are presented.

## 2. Methodology

A narrative literature review study was conducted to identify relationships and emerging themes in the field of study to promote theory development (da Silva *et al.*, 2020). To do so, the scientific databases Web of Science -WoS- and Scopus were used. They are considered the most widely used databases in academic research (Macke and Genari, 2019). The search equation used in both databases included the keywords happiness, work, and leadership, in the titles of articles, keywords, and abstracts, in order to provide the broadest possible coverage of the topic. The search was filtered by publication-year, from 2017 to recent. Additionally, the publication type filter was used to include articles and reviews. The final search equation was:

(title-abs-key (happiness) and title-abs-key (work) and title-abs-key (leadership)) and (limit-to (pubstage , "final" )) and (limit-to (pubyear , 2021) or limit-to (pubyear, 2020) or limit-to (pubyear , 2019) or limit-to (pubyear , 2018) or limit-to (pubyear , 2017)) and (limit-to (doctype , "ar") or limit-to (doctype , "re" ))).

The selection of publications followed the guidelines of PRISMA (Liberati *et al.*, 2009), and the results are presented in Table 1.

From the eligible documents, it was necessary to discard some that did not fit the objective of identifying the existing relationship between happiness at work and leadership. Others dealt with topics of limited interest for the purposes of this document, such as stress management in healthcare personnel (Audu and Coleman, 2019), description of joy (Hahn *et al.*, 2021), happiness through spiritual practices (Maham *et al.*, 2020; Hassan *et al.*, 2021), satisfaction in surgical apprentices according to practice models (Shah *et al.*, 2018), perception of professional success according to gender (Cho *et al.*, 2017), religious and spiritual reflections (Köse, 2020), and literary analysis (De la Arada *et al.*, 2016). In a minimal proportion, some articles presented access limitations.

For the analysis of the resulting documents, the narrative literature technique was used. This does not require a rigorously structured approach (Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010; Ferrari, 2015) such as that proposed by systematic literature reviews (Al-Tabbaa *et al.*, 2019). Narratives follow a freer, iterative, and unstructured style with cumulative results, including general debates, review of previous studies, analysis of state-of-the-art, future research perspectives, and proposing alternative solutions to various issues (Ferrari, 2015; Juntunen and Lehenkari, 2021).

The method proposed by Ferrari (2015) and Juntunen and Lehenkari (2021) has been followed: determination of search strategy, selection of inclusion/exclusion criteria, development of the narrative discussion (exposition, discussion, and synthesis of the literature), and conclusions. This narrative aims to answer the research question: What is the relationship between leadership and happiness at work as determinants of employee performance in organizations?

### 3. Theoretical framework

#### 3.1. Happiness at work

The study of happiness at work has gained importance in recent years with the aim of improving the well-being of individuals in organizations. It has been studied by different

authors from two perspectives: hedonic and eudaimonic (Salas and Fernández, 2017; Erazo and Riaño, 2021). The concept of happiness at work can be understood as a set of experiences of positive emotions that are expressed by workers in business environments (Tkach and Lyubomirsky, 2006).

Fisher (2010) defines happiness at work in terms of happy feelings in three dimensions: towards the work itself, the characteristics of the job, and the organization as a whole. The author proposes an integral measure of happiness at the individual level, which can include three crucial attitudes for organizations: commitment, job satisfaction, and affective organizational commitment. These attitudes create a suitable atmosphere at work and are essential in contexts where the processes of knowledge generation, acquisition, and combination are important (Salas *et al.*, 1996). The authors refer to job satisfaction as an attitude of happiness at work that can determine reduced absenteeism, improved job performance, positive mood at work, improved work efficacy, cooperation, creativity, and results. Positive emotions facilitate learning and teamwork.

Salas *et al.* (2018) provide a measurement scale that includes Fisher's dimensions: the work itself (referring to affective involvement and feelings at work), job characteristics (including evaluative judgments of job characteristics such as salary, supervision, and career opportunities), and the organization as a whole (which refers to feelings of belonging to the organization). In addition, this broad and three-dimensional construct captures both hedonism and eudaimonia as well as activation and pleasure (Salas *et al.*, 2020).

#### 3.2. Hedonic and eudaimonic perspective

Different authors have studied happiness at work from two perspectives: hedonic and eudaimonic (Erazo and Riaño, 2021). The hedonic perspective focuses on pleasure, traditionally known in literature as subjective well-being, while the eudaimonic perspective centers on personal growth and self-actualization, seeking meaning in life. In the same line, Salas *et al.* (2020) refer



to hedonic happiness as pleasant feelings and favorable judgments, and eudaimonic happiness as feelings of growth and morally correct attitudes. Some authors mention that the hedonic perspective has received greater attention in the literature, although available literature includes both hedonic and eudaimonic components.

### 3.3. Leadership

As mentioned earlier, happiness at work includes a set of experiences of positive emotions (Tkach and Lyubomirsky, 2006). These positive experiences can indeed be influenced, as they occur in a complex context such as the organizational one. This can be explained through concepts such as organizational culture, which is defined by Olga Lucia Anzola (in Mendoza and Ortiz, 2006) as “a set of social practices, material and immaterial, that account for the characteristics that distinguish a community since they establish a common affective atmosphere and a shared cognitive framework”. Also, as stated by Aroca *et al.*, (2018) in terms of a set of values, norms, and behaviors of the members of an organization.

In the organizational culture, sub-variables such as leadership play a role in mediating these perceptions and behavior patterns, influencing relationships between individuals, task performance, and behaviors within the organization. Therefore, it is assumed that happiness at work could depend on the types of leadership employed by the leaders.

Organizations are formed by people who must align themselves with the purpose of achieving common objectives. For this to happen, it is necessary to form organizational structures directed by individuals with particular knowledge and skills. These structures allow leaders to influence others to achieve what has been proposed. These individuals who contribute, from management, to impact behavior of human resources, have the challenge of doing so positively to generate appropriate levels of performance in them. Hence, the significance of the study of leadership in organizations “as a way of understanding the executives’ behavior and their influence on collaborators” (Mendoza *et al.*, 2015, p. 2).

According to Loaiza and Pirela (2015, p. 4), leadership is defined as the ability to direct people towards the achievement of goals, developing potential, gaining trust and loyalty, obtaining efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity. Leadership is considered a process of influence to achieve organizational goals through changes in the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of others, and it can occur through modeling, advising or suggestion, persuasion, and coercion processes (Loaiza and Pirela, 2015).

The various theories highlight several leadership styles that have been developing for decades, such as those proposed by Lewin (1939): the authoritarian (the leader has all the power to make decisions and subordinates obey), the democratic (type of leadership that is based on collaborators participating as members of a group), and the laissez-faire (the leader does not exercise a function and allows the group to take initiative). These typologies have been revisited in more recent studies such as Bass (1998) and Frago (2010). The literature also includes types of leadership such as transactional, which refers to the exchange relationship between the leader and follower to satisfy their own interests. Also the transformational or transformative leadership, where the leader motivates people to do more than they expect, resulting in changes in groups, organizations, and society (Bass, 1998).

The leader promotes and creates happiness in the personnel when working to create motivation, awareness, and dedication in their subordinates, and is involved in transparent two-way communication, creating a good environment (Pangarso *et al.*, 2019). The concept of leadership has been extensively studied at the organizational level, and the literature describes different types with specific characteristics.

### 3.4. Types of Leadership

Based on the selected literature, the following typologies of leadership are presented below:

- Ethical leadership: is defined as those behaviors and interactions of the leader that are considered morally acceptable, as well as the promotion of

these towards their followers through the exercise of leadership (Correa *et al.*, 2018).

- Transformative leadership: transformative or transformational leadership where the leader moves the follower beyond their own immediate interests, through idealized influence, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration (Bass, 1998).
- Service leadership: the main motivation of leaders is serving others and helping them grow, improve, and progress (Alahbabi *et al.*, 2021).
- Participatory and committed leadership: a leadership style that inspires, strengthens, empowers, and connects followers (Schaufeli (2015), and committed leadership is firmly rooted in the established theory of self-determination (Salas *et al.*, 2021).
- Inspirational leadership: It focuses on how leaders drive followers to actively participate (Bass, 1998). Inspirational leaders generate positive attitudes at work as well as confidence in achieving goals (Chienwattanasook and Onputtha, 2022). It not only demonstrates respect and fair behavior but also brings energy, positivity, and motivation to its followers (Salas *et al.*, 2020).
- Authentic leadership: It is concerned with influencing a group to perform towards the achievement of goals, taking into account values such as integrity, honesty, authentic and balanced treatment, and a relationship based on transparency (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008).
- Altruistic leadership: it is focused on human beings. it transcends immediate personal interests in search of a higher final value. Altruism refers to the “enduring tendency to think about the well-being and rights of others, feel concern and empathy for them, and act in a way that benefits them” (Salas and Alegre, 2018, p.3). It has also been evidenced that altruism is present in various leadership styles,

such as service leadership, authentic leadership, or transformational leadership (Brown and Treviño, 2006).

## 4. Narrative analysis

### 4.1. Relation between happiness at work and leadership

As initially stated, the purpose of this paper is conducting a narrative literature review is to examine the relationship between happiness at work and leadership. To do so, the content of the articles that contain this relationship is reviewed. It is found that regarding the leader’s practices (Salas *et al.*, 2021), these should be aligned with the human resource management practices to increase employees’ performance. However, it is the leader who is in direct contact with the worker, and therefore, the responsibility largely depends on them and their management style. The leader is an essential element for the employees’ well-being and significantly influences their lives (Harris and Kacmar, 2006).

It is recognized that happiness at work is also a research topic that involves human talent management, seeking the well-being of employees. Research in the area has mainly followed the conceptualization of well-being, focusing on three dimensions: happiness, health, and social well-being. Happiness is related to positive attitudes such as job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment. The health dimension reflects physical and mental health. The social well-being refers to interactions at work, including social support, trust, and equity (Salas *et al.*, 2021).

It is clear from the above that the two concepts have great importance in resource management, due to their direct influence on employee well-being and performance. Upon examining the relationship between them, it is found that different types of leadership are related to happiness at work, as shown by Salas *et al.* (2017). Leadership maintains a positive relationship with happiness at work, where transformational leadership could improve feelings of job engagement, satisfaction, and commitment to the organization, in

relation to the three dimensions proposed by Fisher (2010) resulting in a higher-order construction of happiness at work.

In other studies (Salas and Alegre, 2018), the extent to which altruistic leadership contributes to happiness at work is examined. The hypothesis behind altruistic leadership is the direct and positive effect on happiness at work, empirically verified with Spanish financial services employees. The results showed that the shared characteristic of altruism is what significantly impacts the happiness at work of these employees. Likewise, in another study related to healthcare workers (Salas and Fernandez, 2017), it was concluded that inspirational leadership positively affects happiness at work.

Similarly, Alahbabi *et al.* (2021) confirm in their research the hypothesis that servant leadership has a significant effect on employee happiness. In other words, the authors deduce how the characteristics of the servant leader make employees happier and more satisfied with their work.

Another type of leadership that is considered influential in happiness at work is authentic leadership. Semedo *et al.* (2019) suggest that authentic leaders play an essential role in creating a positive and attractive organizational context. In other words, employees' affective connection with the organization they work for makes their followers happier. According to Gavin and Mason (2004) employees feel more affectively committed to the organization when they perceive certain characteristics in their leaders: self-awareness, relational transparency, internal moral perspective, and balanced processing of information.

Regarding this, Fisher (2010) suggests that moving away from the work itself to consider other job attributes, there is evidence that leader behavior (appropriate and inappropriate) is related to employee happiness. Demmy *et al.* (2002) determined that work conditions, and particularly leadership style, explain part of job satisfaction. Similarly, Bass (1998) argued that leadership processes include an important emotional component, suggesting that leaders can affect followers' happiness.

Bani *et al.* (2022) also argued that happiness at work is an important driver of employee innovative behavior, so organizations should facilitate processes that lead to happiness at work. The same authors suggest that relationships with supervisors based on respect and trust allow employees to feel more valued, secure, and better understood, playing an important role in employee happiness and engagement.

Pangarso *et al.* (2019) conducted a study to determine the factors of employee happiness in banks in Indonesia. They analyzed five factors of happiness (job inspiration, organizational values, relationships, quality of work life, and leadership). They concluded that job inspiration is the most relevant factor. Similarly, Dutschke *et al.* (2019) proposed five factors for happiness in work design, including self-realization, teamwork and organizational factors, goal achievement, leadership, sustainability, and work/family balance, and linked the impact of leaders and leadership styles as influencers on employee well-being.

#### 4.2. Complementary relationships between leadership and happiness at work

In the literature available, other subjects were identified repeatedly mentioned by different authors, which complement and strengthen the study of the relationship between happiness at work and leadership. These are:

- Research in the healthcare field: For Salas *et al.* (2017), it is a particularly interesting area to study. Currie and Lockett (2007) indicate that there is weak evidence of transformational leadership in public services, and consider that there is a need for leadership approaches that are sensitive in a context of significant professional and moral concerns, such as the healthcare field. On the other hand, Harolds (2020) provides insights on leaders in this sector, regarding the importance of demonstrating excellent listening skills, recognizing followers as individuals to create a culture of mutual respect with all members of the healthcare system, and increasing job satisfaction.

**Table 2. Relationships between leadership styles and happiness at work**

Type of Leadership	Relationship between leadership and happiness at work	Authors
Transformational Leadership	Positive	Salas-Vallina <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Bass, 1998.
Altruistic Leadership	Positive	Salas-Vallina & Alegre, 2018.
Servant Leadership	Positive	Alahbabi <i>et al.</i> , 2021.
Authentic Leadership	Positive	Semedo <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Gavin & Mason, 2004.
Abusive Supervision Leadership	Harmful	Fisher, 2010.
Exchange Theory	Positive	Bani <i>et al.</i> , 2022.
Influential Leadership	Positive	Dutschke <i>et al.</i> , 2019.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

- Well-being: Mohd *et al.* (2020) revealed the relationship between authentic leaders and their direct influence on job well-being, through non-financial rewards and meaningful work. Marescaux *et al.* (2019) consider happiness as one of the types of well-being, taking into account three approaches: happiness, health, and social support. Salas-Vallina and Alegre (2018) also argue that leaders have an impact on positive employee attitudes, especially altruistic ones, as they are more sensitive to followers' needs.
- Job satisfaction: According to Salas *et al.*, (2017), job satisfaction is part of the attitudinal concepts that best represent positive attitudes in the workplace. Locke (1976) and Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) define job satisfaction as a positive emotional state resulting from the evaluation of one's job or work experiences, which has traditionally been related to high job performance. However, most attitudinal concepts are limited in explaining positive attitudes in the workplace, and only the concept of happiness attempts to broadly cover the territory of happiness in the workplace.

Based on the previous analysis, the relationships found between types of leadership and happiness at work are synthesized in Table 2.

## 5. Discussion

The mentioned types of leadership are considered positive due to the results they generate. They also maintain a causal relationship with happiness at work. Although leadership styles that focus on people have a greater impact on happiness, and affects the performance of workers, it is recognized in the literature that there are other influential factors such as job satisfaction and well-being, which would be advisable to delve into, as well as the different strategies or initiatives associated with the leader's task of providing happiness at work.

One of the limitations of this document is that only Scopus and WoS databases were used, which, despite their importance, resulted in excluding other sources that may be of interest. Similarly, the objective of the study deals with general and global topics. The concepts studied have been researched mainly in sectors such as health and finance, in European and Asian territories. On the other hand, happiness at work is also closely related to other concepts such as job satisfaction and well-being. It is also necessary to verify the variables studied in organizations focused on different economic activities. Finally, contributions are needed to fill the theoretical gaps present in Latin America regarding the topics raised. Therefore, future research on happiness at work is suggested to deep into complementary factors such as job well-being, organizational climate, and, in general, other complementary topics addressed in human resources



management. In particular, the discussion on positive psychology, and specifically, healthy organizations should be addressed. Likewise, the development of particular research, such as sector studies and / or specific geographic scope is suggested.

## 6. Conclusions

This narrative literature analysis seeks to contribute to organizations by providing relevant and up-to-date information to understand the type of leadership practiced by leaders in different management areas, mainly in relation to human resources, given their ability to exercise positive leadership through the formation of intra-organizational leaders. The results of the literature review make it possible to verify the positive relationship between happiness at work and leadership, and the discussion of such relation was expanded with the contribution of several authors who explain how leadership styles exert a marked influence, and to what extent, on happiness at work, and consequently, on organizational performance.

Leadership and happiness at work are managed from the human resources area in organizations. From there, a positive type of leadership must be developed that satisfies the needs of the organization and workers, contributing to generating positive attitudes, and impacting not only the worker's quality of life but also excellence in their performance. For this, it is necessary to analyze and understand the characteristics of the type of leadership that the organization wants to have and integrate it with collaborators. As outlined, depending on the type of leadership, an impact is generated on the worker. The most mentioned types of leadership are transformational, altruistic, ethical, authentic, inspiring, and service-oriented, which focus on the followers' needs, care for the common good, and act in a way that benefits everyone (Salas and Alegre, 2018).

Finally, as outlined in the introduction, this article has implications for academics and business leaders who wish to deepen their understanding and management of leadership in relation to happiness at work, from the perspective of the leader, their style, and their impact on employees. Additionally,

this paper provides conceptual and relational elements around Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) in terms of providing improvements in employment and its conditions, which significantly contributes to the happiness and well-being of workers.

## 7. Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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