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# Exploring the Interplay between Happiness and Employee Wellbeing: A Comprehensive Review

Nurulizwa Rashid<sup>1</sup>, and Samer Ali Al- Shami<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka, Fakulti Pengurusan Teknologi dan Teknousahawanan, Centre of Technopreneurship Development, 75450 Ayer Keroh, Melaka, Malaysia, <sup>2</sup>Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka, Institut Pengurusan Teknologi dan Keusahawanan, Centre of Technopreneurship Development, 75450 Ayer Keroh, Melaka, Malaysia

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# Abstract

Happiness in the workplace is essential for fostering a positive and productive environment, making it a key focus for organizations seeking to enhance employee well-being. This paper aims to explore the relationship between happiness and employees' well-being, highlighting the critical role these concepts play in professional settings. The motivation behind this study lies in the significance of understanding the multifaceted nature of happiness and its implications for individuals' overall well-being, particularly in their work lives. The methodology employed for this research involved conducting a comprehensive literature review to gather relevant scholarly articles and studies. The findings revealed that while authentic happiness theory focuses primarily on subjective feelings of happiness, well-being theory incorporates multiple dimensions, including positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. The contribution of this study lies in synthesizing and comparing these two theories, highlighting their similarities and differences. Additionally, key factors influencing happiness, such as positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment, were identified and discussed. This paper provides a holistic perspective on happiness and well-being, emphasizing the importance of considering various elements to achieve a comprehensive understanding of human flourishing, particularly within the workplace. The insights gained from this research can inform future studies and interventions aimed at promoting happiness and well-being among individuals and within organizational settings.

Keywords: Happiness, Employee Wellbeing, Literature Review, Work Life Balance.

# Introduction

Happiness in the workplace is a critical factor that can significantly impact employee productivity and organizational success. Research has shown that happy employees tend to have more successful career paths, higher job satisfaction, and greater motivation to excel in their work, leading to lower turnover rates (Gray et al., 2019). In addition, organizations with

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happy employees experience higher rates of employee retention, which can ultimately lead to increased profitability and decreased operational costs (Barba & Hammond, 2019).

Employers often expect their workers to maintain a high level of performance and productivity while also seeking to achieve their organizational goals through productive and motivated workers (Usai, Orlando, & Mazzoleni, 2020). However, it has proven to be a difficult task for most employers to maintain happiness in the workplace. Despite the belief that happy employees can increase organizational productivity, companies have not found a perfect formula to improve employee happiness (Mousa, Massoud, & Ayoubi, 2020). Additionally, organizations often prioritize employee productivity over the ultimate goal of a good life, which is happiness (Bibi et al., 2022).

It is widely acknowledged that employees are the backbone of any organization (Compton & Hoffman, 2019). Ensuring their happiness and satisfaction with their workplace and work itself can yield benefits not only for employees, but also for the organization as a whole (Achor, 2011; Ravina-Ripoll, Nunez-Barriopedro, Evans, & Ahumada-Tello, 2019). Employee happiness can be defined as a state of holistic well-being, encompassing both doing well and being well, and feeling a sense of authentic pride and self-esteem in one's achievements (Gavin & Mason, 2004). Happiness at the workplace can be described as the extent to which a person enjoys their work and overall life, or their subjective well-being at work (Diržytė, Kačerauskas, & Perminas, 2021).

Organization with happy employee outperform their counterpart with 37% in productivity (Barba & Hammond, 2019). Happy employees are 50% more successful and 88% more loyal to their organizations ("Happiness and productivity in the workplace," 2013). In light of the increasing importance of happiness, organizations started to focus on this variable and listed it as an organizational objective aiming to make employees happier and achieve the high organizational productivity. This is because happy employees are more productive and have more commitment as well as satisfaction with their jobs (Marescaux, De Winne, & Forrier, 2019; Tanwar, 2019). Nevertheless, despite the increase attention toward happiness of employees, there is no consensus on what happiness is and how it is related to employees (Ravina-Ripoll et al., 2019; Zhao & Pan, 2019). This because the concept of happiness is complex and a broad view held by considering multiple theories. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the relationship between happiness and employees wellbeing.

#### **Literature Review**

#### Hedonism Theory

The hedonism theory holds that happiness is a matter of subjective feeling, stating that a happy life maximizes pleasure while minimizing pain. This theory has its roots in ancient Greece, founded by Aristippus of Cyrenehas but has its modern conceptual roots in Bentham's utilitarianism (Weijers, 2012). The Hedonism theory is in this research perhaps the least applicable when focusing on people living in poverty but forms a base of how individuals perceive happiness. "It holds that happiness is a matter of raw subjective feeling. A happy life maximizes feelings of pleasure and minimizes pain." (Vitrano, 2020). Happiness in this case can be seen as the consideration between pleasure and pain. There are two constraints that have to be taken into account: first, the perception of pain and pleasure differs individually and therefore when applying the theory and measuring pain and pleasure, the possibility of

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subjective perception arises, taking into account the different perception of pain and pleasure between the researcher and the researched. Second, the consideration of pain and pleasure doesn't take into account the timeline of a subject's life. "When we wish someone a happy life (or a happy childhood, or even a happy week), we are not merely wishing that they accumulate a tidy sum of pleasures, irrespective of how this sum is distributed across one's life-span or its meaning for the whole (Velleman, 1991). We can imagine two lives that contain the same exact amount of momentary pleasantness, but one life tells a story of gradual decline (ecstatic childhood, light-hearted youth, dysphonic adulthood, miserable old age) while another is a tale of gradual improvement (the above pattern in reverse)." (Seligman & Royzman, 2003).

# **Desire Theory**

The desire theory is somewhat more specific, filling in the gap of subjectivity that the Hedonism theory doesn't cover. The desire theory says happiness is feeding desires. "Desire theories holds that happiness is a matter of getting what you want with the content of the want left up to the person who does the wanting (Griffin & Hamlin, 1986). As the desire theory takes into account the subjectivity individually, it is a more complete theory. Nevertheless, it doesn't take the trade-off between pain and pleasure into account, which with reason defines happiness by the Hedonism theory. An incompleteness of the desire theory would be that when for example an individual's desire would be chocolate, giving that individual an unlimited amount of chocolate wouldn't be the cause of a happy life. One way to get around this incompleteness would be to limit a desire to what is actually worthwhile. "One move to deflect this objection is to limit the scope of Desire theory to the fulfillment of only those desires that one would have if one aimed at an objective list of what is truly worthwhile in life" (Seligman & Royzman, 2003).

# **Objective List Theory**

The Objective list theory finds its origin as well as the Hedonism theory in ancient Greece within the work of Socrates and Meno and was recently given shape by Sen and Nussbaum in 1985. The theory opposes both the Hedonism and Desire theory by stating that happiness is found regardless of emotions, feelings, desires. According to the Objective list theory, happiness is the achievement of certain things that are objectively considered 'worthwhile'. "It holds that happiness consists of a human life that achieves certain things from a list of worthwhile pursuits: such a list might include career accomplishments, friendship, freedom from disease and pain, material comforts, civic spirit, beauty, education, love, knowledge, and good conscience" (B. M. E. P. Seligman & Royzman, 2003). A limitation to this theory is that it doesn't consider any feeling as a part of happiness whereas happiness is an emotion and feelings should be considered when it comes to happiness. Nevertheless, the theory takes away the subjectivity that the Desire theory and especially the Hedonism theory

# **Combination of Theories: The Authentic Happiness Theory**

The three aforementioned happiness theories offer distinct perspectives, each with their own merits and limitations. Therefore, these theories can complement each other, compensating for the individual constraints of each one. While Hedonism theory is incomplete due to its reliance on subjective perception, it complements Desire theory, which considers the fulfillment of desires as a key contributor to happiness, regardless of the level of pleasure or pain involved (Seligman & Royzman, 2003). The Authentic Happiness theory incorporates all

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three theories as its foundation. It posits that there are three types of happiness: The Pleasant Life, which focuses on pleasure; The Good Life, which emphasizes engagement; and The Meaningful Life, which concerns serving and belonging to something larger than oneself. While the first two types are subjective, the third type has an objective element. The Authentic Happiness theory allows for a "Full Life," which meets all three criteria for happiness (B. M. E. P. Seligman & Royzman, 2003).

The table 1, summarizes key findings related to happiness in the workplace from various authors and studies. It highlights that happy employees tend to have more successful career paths, higher job satisfaction, and greater motivation, leading to lower turnover rates. Organizations with happy employees experience higher productivity, and employee happiness is crucial for organizational success. However, maintaining happiness in the workplace remains a challenge for employers, and there is no consensus on the concept of happiness and its relation to employees. Despite the increasing attention towards employee happiness, organizations often prioritize productivity over happiness. Overall, the table underscores the importance of employee happiness for individual well-being and organizational success.

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#### Table 1

Summary of the Key Findi	ngs Related to Happiness	in the Workplace
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Authors	Year	Key Finding
Gray et al.	2019	Happy employees have more successful career paths, higher job satisfaction, and greater motivation, leading to lower turnover.
Barba & Hammond	2019	Organizations with happy employees experience 37% higher productivity.
Usai, Orlando, & Mazzoleni	2020	Maintaining happiness in the workplace is a challenging task for employers.
Mousa, Massoud, & Ayoubi	2020	Companies have not found a perfect formula to improve employee happiness.
Bibi et al.	2022	Organizations often prioritize employee productivity over happiness.
Compton & Hoffman	2019	Ensuring employee happiness and satisfaction is crucial for organizational success.
Achor	2011	Happy employees exhibit higher productivity, commitment, and job satisfaction.
Ravina-Ripoll et al.	2019	Happy employees are more successful and loyal to their organizations.
Gavin & Mason	2004	Employee happiness involves holistic well-being, pride, and self-esteem in achievements.
Diržytė, Kačerauskas, & Perminas	2021	Happiness at the workplace is subjective well-being and enjoyment of work and life.
"Happiness and productivity"	2013	Happy employees are 50% more successful and 88% more loyal to their organizations.
Marescaux, De Winne, & Forrier	2019	Employee happiness leads to higher productivity, commitment, and job satisfaction.
Tanwar	2019	Happy employees are more productive and satisfied with their jobs.
Zhao & Pan	2019	There is a lack of consensus on the concept of happiness and its relation to employees.
Ravina-Ripoll et al.	2019	There is no consensus on what happiness is and how it relates to employees.

# Relationship between Happiness and the Hedonism

The relationship between happiness and the Hedonism, Desire, and Objective list theories has been a topic of interest and debate among researchers. Eloy (2019) delves into these theories and explores how they relate to the concept of happiness as shown in Figure 1. Hedonism theory suggests that happiness is primarily a subjective experience centered around maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. It focuses on the pursuit of immediate gratification and individual preferences. In contrast, Desire theory posits that happiness is achieved by fulfilling one's desires, allowing for subjective variations in what brings happiness to different INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES Vol. 14, No. 8, 2024, E-ISSN: 2222-6990 © 2024

individuals. This theory recognizes the importance of personal goals and aspirations in achieving happiness.

On the other hand, Objective list theory takes a more objective approach, asserting that happiness is attained by achieving certain worthwhile objectives in life. It emphasizes the significance of external factors such as career accomplishments, relationships, health, and personal growth in determining happiness. Unlike the Hedonism and Desire theories, Objective list theory considers happiness as something that can be objectively measured and pursued.

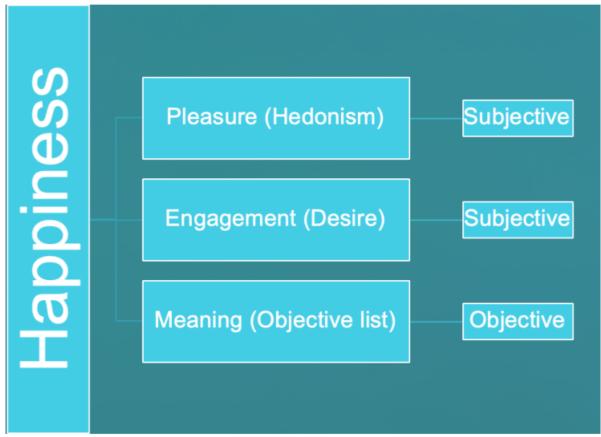


Figure 1. The relationship between happiness and the Hedonism, Desire and Objective list theory (Eloy, 2019).

# The Authentic Happiness Theory and the Well-Being Theory

In 2011, Seligman made a distinction between authentic happiness and well-being. He stated that authentic happiness theory is one-dimensional: "it is about feeling good and it claims that the way we choose our life course is to try to maximize how we feel. Well-being theory is about all five pillars, the underpinnings of the five elements is the strengths. Wellbeing theory is plural in method as well as substance: positive emotion is a subjective variable, defined by what you think and feel. Meaning, relationships, and accomplishment have both subjective and objective components, since you can believe you have meaning, good relations, and high accomplishment and be wrong, even deluded. The upshot of this is that well-being cannot exist just in your own head: well-being is a combination of feeling good as well as actually having meaning, good relationships, and accomplishment. The way we choose our course in life is to maximize all five of these elements" (Gander, Proyer, & Ruch, 2017).

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The five pillars of well-being are structured in the PERMA-model as can be seen in figure 2 below, which states that well-being is the combination of 5 elements (Zhou, Wu, Filep, & Weber, 2021).

# Introducing a New Theory of Well-Being PERMIN Engagement Positive Engagement Positive Relationships

Figure 2. The PERMA-model (Seligman, 2018).

# a) Positive emotions

This would be the most straight-forward element with regard to the connection with happiness. It focusses on the mental perspective. "It is the ability to remain optimistic and view one's past, present, and future from a constructive perspective" (Trundle & Hutchinson, 2021).

# b) Engagement

Engagement is the element of activity, moreover the activities in which we reach a flow state which absorbs us in the activity we are engaging in. "Activities that meet our need for engagement flood the body with positive neurotransmitters and hormones that elevate one's sense of well-being. This engagement helps us remain present, as well as synthesize the activities where we find calm, focus, and joy" (Trundle & Hutchinson, 2021).

# c) Positive relationships

Positive relationships are the connections we have with the people around us. Our animal nature requires us to bond with others. "We thrive on connections that promote love, intimacy, and a strong emotional and physical interaction with other humans. Positive relationships with one's parents, siblings, peers, coworkers, and friends is a key ingredient to overall joy (Phoenix, Jack, Rosenbaum, & Missiuna, 2020). Strong relationships also provide support in difficult times that require resilience" (Pasc. When we don't have these connections with one another, we become isolated. "Our pain centers become activated when we are at risk of isolation. From an evolutionary perspective, isolation is the worst thing we could do for survival. These activation centers are like fire alarms in the body, discouraging people to continue feeling this pain, and ideally, reconnect socially with someone or a group. We need, neurologically, to know that we belong to a group; it helps us to feel safe and valued, and has done so for millions of years" (Pascha, M. 2019).

# d) Meaning

Meaning, as a key element of well-being, gives us direction and purpose in life. It motivates us to invest our time, energy, and resources in activities that are meaningful to

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us, helping us feel fulfilled and satisfied. Maslow's pyramid of needs, also known as the pyramid of happiness, offers a useful framework for understanding the different stages of human development and the needs that must be met in order to achieve happiness and well-being (Rojas, Méndez, & Watkins-Fassler, 2023). The pyramid consists of five stages, with self-actualization at the top. This stage represents the ultimate goal of human development, where individuals are able to realize their full potential and achieve their dreams. The lower levels of the pyramid include physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, and self-esteem needs. These lower levels represent the more basic needs that must be met in order for an individual to feel secure and satisfied. While Maslow's theory has been criticized by some, it aligns well with other contemporary wellbeing models such as the PERMA model, which emphasizes the importance of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment in achieving wellbeing (Farmer & Cotter, 2021). However, it is important to note that well-being is not a linear process, and individuals may move back and forth between different stages of development throughout their lives.

Measuring happiness is a complex and subjective process that involves various factors that can influence a person's perception of their own well-being. It is important to consider the individual's expectations, goals, and personal values when assessing their level of happiness. For instance, a person who values financial stability and security might consider themselves happy if they have a well-paying job and a comfortable life, while another person who prioritizes personal relationships might feel happiest when surrounded by loved ones. Additionally, the level of uncertainty and control a person feels over a particular outcome can impact their happiness. If someone feels that they have little control over a situation or that the outcome is highly uncertain, they may be less likely to experience happiness, even if the outcome turns out to be positive.

Comparisons to other people's results can also play a role in determining happiness. If someone is constantly comparing themselves to others and feels that they are falling short, they may be less likely to experience happiness even if they have achieved a great deal of success. It is worth noting that happiness is not just a state of mind, but also a physiological and psychological state that is impacted by various environmental factors such as stress, sleep, and nutrition. Therefore, a comprehensive assessment of happiness should take into account both the individual's subjective experience and their physical and mental health as in figure 3.

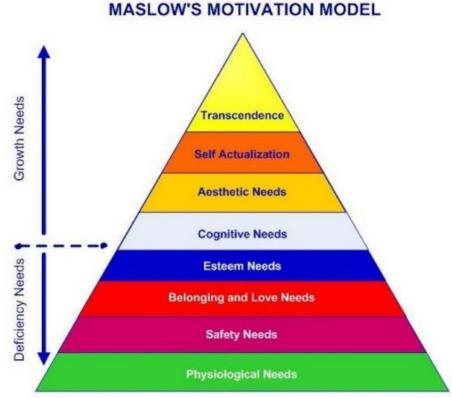


Figure 3: Maslow's Pyramid of needs (Maslow, 1943).

# e) Accomplishment

Accomplishment is closely related to meaning whereas having goals & ambitions and reaching those is how we give meaning to what we do. Still there is a distinction between the purpose of what we do and meeting the goals we want to achieve. As a base framework the authentic happiness theory and the well-being theory will be the common theme throughout the research. This because they combine previous theories, they are based on recent research and for the well-being theory in particular recent research shows the following: "Each of the elements of PERMA correlated moderately highly (range .37 to .79, mean = .61) with each other, concluded from these two findings: that PERMA does not yield a new type of well-being, and PERMA does not offer any insights beyond subjective well-being" (Goodman, Disabato, Kashdan, & Kauffman, 2018).

# **Research Finding**

As shown in Table 2, the studies discussed in the table provide valuable insights into the application and contribution of theories related to authentic happiness and well-being. Authentic happiness theory, as outlined by Seligman, focuses on maximizing personal feelings of happiness and well-being. This theory highlights the importance of subjective well-being and the pursuit of positive emotions. On the other hand, well-being theory expands beyond one-dimensional happiness and emphasizes five pillars: positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. This comprehensive approach recognizes the subjective and objective components of well-being and highlights the significance of factors such as relationships, engagement in meaningful activities, and the pursuit of goals.

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The table also highlights the interconnections between these elements. Positive emotions contribute to an optimistic outlook on life, while engagement in activities leads to a state of flow and promotes well-being. Positive relationships provide support and connection, while finding meaning in life gives direction and purpose. Accomplishment, closely related to meaning, involves setting and achieving goals.

The PERMA model integrates these elements and underscores their correlation with subjective well-being. The studies suggest that by nurturing positive emotions, engaging in meaningful activities, fostering positive relationships, finding meaning in life, and achieving goals, individuals can enhance their overall well-being.

These findings have significant implications for the application of positive psychology and well-being interventions. By incorporating strategies to promote positive emotions, encourage engagement, foster positive relationships, support the search for meaning, and facilitate goal attainment, individuals and communities can cultivate greater well-being. Moreover, these theories contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of well-being, taking into account both subjective and objective aspects.

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#### Table 2

Application and Contribution of Theories Related to Authentic Happiness and Well-Being

Key Findings	References
Authentic happiness theory is one-dimensional, focused on feeling good and maximizing personal feelings.	Seligman, 2011
Well-being theory encompasses five pillars: positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment.	Seligman, 2011
Well-being combines subjective elements (positive emotion) and objective components (meaning, relationships, accomplishment).	Seligman, 2011
Positive emotions involve maintaining an optimistic perspective on past, present, and future experiences.	Trundle & Hutchinson, 2021
Engagement refers to activities that lead to a state of flow and provide calm, focus, and joy.	Trundle & Hutchinson, 2021
Positive relationships are crucial for overall joy and provide support and resilience.	Phoenix, Jack, Rosenbaum, & Missiuna, 2020
Meaning gives direction and purpose in life, motivating individuals to invest in fulfilling activities.	Rojas, Méndez, & Watkins-Fassler, 2023
Accomplishment is closely related to meaning and involves setting and achieving goals.	N/A
PERMA model integrates the five elements of well-being: positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment.	Zhou, Wu, Filep, & Weber, 2021
PERMA elements correlate moderately with each other, suggesting they contribute to subjective well-being.	Goodman, Disabato, Kashdan, & Kauffman, 2018
Maslow's Pyramid of Needs aligns with contemporary well- being models, emphasizing the importance of various factors in achieving well-being.	Farmer & Cotter, 2021

Happiness and well-being are influenced by various factors that contribute to a fulfilling and meaningful life. Positive emotions play a crucial role in enhancing happiness, and individuals can cultivate feelings of joy, gratitude, and serenity through practices such as mindfulness and expressing gratitude. Engaging in activities that provide a sense of purpose and fulfillment is another key factor. When individuals experience a state of flow, where they are fully absorbed in an activity, they can enhance their overall well-being. Positive relationships are essential for well-being as they foster a sense of belonging, love, and connection. Building and maintaining healthy and supportive relationships with family, friends, and colleagues can greatly contribute to happiness. Finding meaning in life is also fundamental to well-being. This involves discovering a sense of purpose and aligning one's actions with personal values and beliefs. Engaging in activities that contribute to a larger cause and reflecting on personal values and life goals can bring a deeper sense of fulfillment.

Accomplishment is another factor that contributes to happiness and well-being. Setting and achieving meaningful goals provides a sense of satisfaction, self-efficacy, and fulfillment. It is

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important to set realistic and attainable goals and celebrate progress along the way. By addressing all these factors, individuals can experience greater levels of happiness and overall well-being.

It is worth noting that these factors are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Cultivating positive emotions can enhance engagement, positive relationships, and a sense of meaning and accomplishment. Similarly, fostering positive relationships and finding meaning in life can contribute to positive emotions and a sense of engagement. By adopting a holistic approach that addresses these factors, individuals can proactively enhance their happiness and well-being, leading to a more fulfilling and meaningful life.

In conclusion, understanding the factors that contribute to happiness and well-being empowers individuals to take proactive steps in their pursuit of a happy and meaningful life. By incorporating practices that foster positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment, individuals can enhance their overall well-being and experience a greater sense of fulfillment and satisfaction.

# Conclusion

The relationship between happiness and well-being is multi-dimensional and influenced by various factors. The authentic happiness theory and well-being theory provide valuable frameworks for understanding and enhancing one's overall well-being. Positive emotions, engagement in meaningful activities, positive relationships, finding meaning in life, and accomplishing goals all contribute to a greater sense of happiness and fulfillment. These factors are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, emphasizing the importance of adopting a holistic approach to well-being. By understanding and nurturing these elements in our lives, we can cultivate a deeper sense of happiness and lead more fulfilling lives. It is through a balanced integration of these factors that we can strive for optimal well-being and a meaningful existence.

# **Future Research**

Future research in the field of happiness and well-being should focus on several key areas to advance our knowledge and inform practical applications. Longitudinal studies that track individuals over extended periods can provide valuable insights into the dynamics of happiness and well-being, uncovering the factors that contribute to long-term flourishing. Additionally, investigating the influence of cultural and contextual factors on well-being can help us understand the universality and cultural specificity of happiness. Exploring the impact of technology on well-being is another important avenue, considering the pervasive presence of digital technologies in our lives. Research in this area can guide the development of strategies to promote healthy technology usage and mitigate potential negative effects. Moreover, continued investigation into evidence-based interventions and positive psychology approaches can contribute to the development of effective strategies for enhancing well-being. Targeted research on specific populations, such as children, adolescents, older adults, and marginalized communities, can shed light on unique challenges and opportunities for promoting happiness and well-being. By addressing these research areas, we can deepen our understanding of well-being and develop practical interventions that empower individuals and communities to lead happier, more fulfilling lives.

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#### **Ethical Considerations**

This study is voluntarily participation and the respondents agreed to take part in the study. Information gathered during this study is confidential.

#### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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