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Pham Xuan Hau

RANKING CRITERIA OF UNIVERSITY LECTURERS' HAPPINESS INDEX IN HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

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Abstract

Happiness is the final goal targeted by every nation, community, and individual. It is the new pattern of economic development. However, happiness is a fuzzy concept, and much contextually depends. This study was conducted to rank the criteria of lecturers' happiness index in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Based on the data from the in-depth interviews with 20 experts, Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) was applied. The research results show that the lecturer's happiness measurement model consists of three levels. Level 2 includes five criteria with the priority orders as follows: 1) physical and spiritual health (50.9%), 2) employment and income (25.5%), 3) self-actualization (13.9%), 4) social networks (6.2%) and 5) family happiness (3.5%). Further ranking findings at level 3 confirm the highest share of non-material components in each factor. These findings are important for planning the key strategy to promote lecturers' happiness to reach the goal of "happy school" in Vietnam.

Keywords: *AHP, happiness, lecturers, Vietnam*

1. Introduction

A happy life is always pursued by people in the world without distinguishing their locations and ethnics (Compton, 2005). Happiness is the common goal of all mankind, not just a nation or individual (Ameriks and Clarke, 2000). This topic has got great interest from scholars and practitioners from various fields such as philosophy, psychology, sociology and especially economics which has only focused on economic growth for many decades. Happiness has nowadays become a new economic development pattern

(Tideman, 2004; Diener, 2009; Kristoffersen, 2010; Kahneman and Krueger, 2006).

Many studies have theoretically and empirically proven the benefits of happiness. Happy people enjoy healthier and longer life with more productive and better earnings (Diener and Chan, 2011; Sachs et al., 2013). However, the concept of happiness is fuzzy and multi-dimensional. It is often referred to as "utility" (Tian and Yang, 2007), "subjective well-being", "life satisfaction" (Diener, 2006), "emotional well-being", and "positive effects"

(Bradburn, 1969; Fordyce, 1988). This concept has not generally got unanimity in its definition and measurement (Diener, 2009; Camfield and Skevington, 2008; Kern et al., 2014). Various approaches, either uni-dimensional or multi-dimensional perspectives, individual or community levels with proper criteria, have been applied to match the research objectives and contexts. The terms of “happiness”, “subjective well being”, “satisfaction”, “utility” and “welfare” can be used interchangeably (Easterlin, 2001).

Lecturers’ stress is among the serious problems encountered by higher education (Cartwright and Cooper, 2002; Sellahewa and Samarasinghe, 2021). In Vietnam, teaching is highly respected and the consequence is great pressure on the involved people (Phuong et al., 2021). A huge amount of workload is the teacher’s burden to create and transfer knowledge to learners. The lecturers’ happiness is therefore critical because it leads to the elimination of stress and job pressure. The knowledge transferred from lecturers to learners shall be effectively and proactively facilitated (Hanh and Weare, 2017; Tadić et al., 2013). Moreover, the lecturers’ happiness also contributes to the success of a happy school which is targetted by international as well as local education (Gián et al., 2021; Salmon, 2016). Therefore, this topic has got great interest from the reseacher community (Lavy and Bocker, 2018; Takayanagi, 2016).

This study aims to develop specific criteria to measure the happiness of university lecturers in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and evaluate the importance of these criteria to provide the management executives and policy makers the insight in

making the strategy to enhance the lecturer’s happiness with the expectation to push the efficient education and reach the aim of the happy school.

2. Literature review

2.1. Happiness theories and definitions

Yang (2020) implied the origin of happiness theory in ancient Greece. Traditional happiness theories focus on three major aspects: 1) cognitive 2) rational and 3) theological, while modern happiness emphasizes the fields of psychology, sociology and economics. In the view of ancient Greek and Roman philosophers, happiness and material well-being are completely separated. Happiness does not include material dimensions, even though welfare is seen as desirable and essential conditions for a good life (Vivenza, 2007).

Eudaimonic happiness theory became popular in the 18th century. It is nowadays a framework for a happy and good life definition (Bruni, 2007). This approach considers happiness as a psychologically well-being (Ryff and Singer, 2008) or freedom (Waterman et al., 2010), with a particular emphasis on friendship and civil life.

The hedonic happiness proposed by Kahneman et al. (1999) referred to happiness achieved through experiencing pleasure and enjoyment. Happiness is subjective well-being, including life perception, life satisfaction and positive feelings.

Researchers on happiness have recently integrated Maslow’s theory of needs pyramid (1943, 1954) into the framework of happiness analysis, showing the prioritized order of individual needs when aiming for happiness. The core idea of this theory is that needs are irreplaceable

and structured in a hierarchy consisting of primary and secondary levels, in which the first priority is primary ones. Relating to income and happiness, this theory implies that income is an important criterion for happiness before reaching a certain income threshold (Drakopoulos and Grimani, 2013).

Based on diversified happiness theories, its definition is proposed. Tian and Yang (2007) defined happiness as a utility when approaching this concept economically. Meanwhile, psychologists see it as subjective well-being. The Oxford English Dictionary describes happiness as a stage of feelings, expressing joy or contentment. Campbell et al. (1976) have clarified this concept by adding cognitive happiness, which is people's satisfaction with life. Kimball and Willis (2006) summarized happiness as a composition of two elements: 1) short-term happiness, which depends on newly received information about life satisfaction, and 2) long-term happiness, which is a utility function. Veenhoven (1991) added a way to determine happiness, expressed through the extent to which an individual assesses the quality of his or her life. According to the conceptual referent theory of happiness, individuals evaluate happiness based on thoughts rather than feelings (Rojas, 2005). Usually, individuals rely on two sources of information to justify their happiness: 1) personal self-perception and 2) peer comparison. Thus, happiness is a relative concept, which does not depend on the objective but the subjective comparison, associated with life satisfaction and subjective well-being (Diener, 2006; Bradburn, 1969; Fordyce, 1988; Veenhoven, 1991).

2.2. Related empirical evidence

Research on happiness and happiness index in the world has been initiated since the 50s and 60s of the twentieth century (Ngoc Van and Pham Thi Thuy, 2017). The last decade has witnessed a national interest in happiness, with a milestone of the 2012 world happiness report (Helliwell et al., 2012). With the encouragement from the OECD, most member countries measure happiness every year and put this at the heart of policy design. OECD (2013) conducted a survey of individuals by assessing people's life satisfaction in 34 OECD member countries on a scale of 0 to 10 for 11 factors: housing, income, employment, community, education, environment, engagement, health, family, safety, and work-life balance. Similarly, Sachs et al. (2018) used a 10-point scale to rate people's satisfaction in 156 countries based on eight criteria: GDP per capita, years of healthy life compared with life expectancy, social support, freedom of life choice, generosity, perception of corruption, positive and negative responses. The Kingdom of Bhutan uses nine aspects of life to build a national happiness index measurement system, including living standards; psychological life; health; time consumption; education; diversity and openness in culture; good governance; community strength; diversity and change of ecological environment (Center for Bhutan Studies and GNH Research, 2015). In general, each set of happiness measures includes different aspects, but the key components of the happiness index can be divided into two main groups. The first group includes: mental health, physical health, family experience, education, gender, and age. The second group includes

income, employment, community and government management (Nguyen Duc Tuyen, 2014). On the basis of national happiness measures, researchers calibrate the scales to serve the specific objective of each study. To construct the happiness index of university lecturers in Guangdong province, China, Chen and Duan (2017) used a survey dataset of 625 faculty members from 17 colleges and universities in the region. The authors used the AHP technique to rank the criteria constituting the happiness index. The happiness measurement model is measured at three levels. Level 2 includes objective and subjective happiness. At level 3, there are 10 criteria evenly distributed into two factors: subjective happiness and objective happiness. Chen and Duan's Teacher Happiness Index (2017) is a measure of an individual's social and economic status, an alternative to the quality-of-life index. Research results show that objective happiness (0.75) has a higher weight than subjective happiness (0.25). This finding is quite similar to Maslow's tendency to integrate the hierarchy of needs into the framework of happiness analysis. Humans achieve happiness when certain physiological needs (0.51) and safety needs (0.26) are met. Yang (2020) has focused on subjective factors, expressing individual's point of view and satisfaction when evaluating the model of human happiness. The author gives five criteria to measure level 2 of the happiness model including material and mental health, family, work and income, personal values and relationships between people. Bayesian and AHP models are applied to student and faculty survey data set in Tianjin, China. Research findings implied that work and

income factors accounted for the highest proportion in the happiness index.

In Vietnam, Nguyen Duc Tuyen (2014) studied some definitions of happiness in general and family happiness in particular in the world, summarizing three definitions commonly used by researchers such as: (1) indicated emotions, joy, euphoria, pleasure for a short time; (2) implies the satisfaction, or satisfaction of human life needs; (3) refers good quality of life. Hoang Minh Hai (2017) has detailed how to measure the happiness index based on indicators of subjective happiness of individuals on the basis of measuring people's satisfaction by asking for the most basic element of happiness. The level of happiness is measured through composite indicators such as satisfaction with economic conditions material life - natural environment, satisfaction with family - social relations; and self-satisfaction. Dang Thi Hoa (2017) provides empirical evidence on the happiness concept of ethnic minorities in Son La province, Vietnam, when analyzing happiness from the following angles: economic material; family, community and social relations; and individual attributes in the study. The results show that despite the material difficulties, ethnic minorities still consider the value of mental happiness to be very important, and decisive to their thoughts and beliefs about the value of present life. In contrast, Phan Thi Mai Huong (2014) shows that work and material life of the family are the two drivers of the satisfaction with the life of farmers when conducting research on the perceived subjective happiness of farmers based on a survey of 427 farmer households in six communes in Hung Yen, Son La, Binh Dinh and Thai

Nguyen, Vietnam. The author has considered the level of satisfaction with life in general and with different aspects such as work, family relationships, personal health, family living conditions, capacities and own position. It can be said that studies on the topic of happiness in Vietnam provide insight into each field and social group in

Vietnam. However, sound knowledge on this topic in the field of education is essential to achieving the goal of a happy school. This study expects to build a systematic index to measure the happiness of university lecturers based on the indicators synthesized from the literature survey detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Happiness criteria

Criteria	Indicators	Source
Physical and spiritual health (C1)	Spiritual needs (C11)	Yang (2020)
	Material needs (C12)	Chen and Duan (2017)
	Leisure time (C13)	
	Preference (C14)	
	The stand of Mood (C15)	
Family happiness (C2)	Family sense (C21)	Yang (2020)
	Relationship with family (C22)	Chen and Duan (2017)
	Marital status (C23)	Phan Thi Mai Huong (2014)
	Children education (C24)	Hoa (2017)
Employment and income (C3)	Teaching satisfaction (C31)	Yang (2020)
	Research evaluation (C32)	Chen and Duan (2017)
	Social needs (C33)	Phan Thi Mai Huong (2014)
	Wage (C34)	
	Incentives (C35)	Dang Thi Hoa (2017)
	On the job training (C36)	
	Administrative system evaluation (C37)	
Self-actualization (C4)	Remuneration satisfaction (C38)	
	Peer comparison (C41)	Yang (2020)
	Self confidence to the set targets (C42)	Chen and Duan (2017)
	Personal capacity (C43)	Dang Thi Hoa (2017)
Social networks (C5)	Future expectation (C44)	Hoang Minh Hai (2017)
	Self esteem needs(C51)	Yang (2020)
	Being supported upon adverse impacts (C52)	Chen and Duan (2017)
	Friendship needs (C53)	Hoang Minh Hai (2017)
	Relationship with colleagues(C54)	
Trust (C55)		

3. Research method

The in-depth interview data of 20 experts have been used for Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) in this study. This technique combines the objective and subjective aspects in a logical hierarchical framework, providing an intuitive, common-sense approach in evaluating the important order of criteria and sub-criteria via pair comparison (Donegan et al., 1992).

Partovi and Burton (1992) confirmed the role of AHP as a tool for solving complex and unstructured multi-attributed decision-making problems. Ny Dick and Hill (1992) described it as a methodology to rank alternatives based on the judgment of decision-makers about the criteria weight of each alternative. DiNardo et al. (1989) clarified it as a hierarchical analysis by members of the decision-making team by breaking down the decision problem into several levels and following a step-oriented process.

Saaty (2000) implied four basic principles when modeling AHP: 1) analyze

and establish hierarchies, 2) calculate priorities, 3) synthesize 4) measure inconsistency. A hierarchical structure begins with a goal, which is analyzed through major criteria and sub-criteria, and the final hierarchy often includes selectable alternatives. The hierarchical model in this study has been built based on the literature review summarized in Table 1. The evaluation process has applied a pairwise comparison matrix with a 9-point scale, determining the weights based on the eigenvectors corresponding to the largest one. The consistency is then checked. Finally, all the weights are summed up to make the best option. In order to calculate the weight of each criterion in the model, a pair of measurement scales is compared (Saaty and Vargas, 2012).

Table 2 indicated the paired comparison applied in AHP (Saaty, 2008). A scale of 1-9 is proposed for qualitative data to quantify the preference of criterium or sub-criterium over another, creating the hierarchy between criteria that make up the goal.

Table 2. The fundamental scale of 1-9 in AHP

Ranking	Description	Interpretation
1	Equal importance	Two activities are equally important to the goal
2	Between 1 and 3	Two activities are equally to moderately important to the goal
3	Relative importance	One activity is moderately favored to another
4	Between 3 and 5	One activity is moderately to strongly favored over another
5	Much importance	One activity is strongly favored over another
6	Between 5 and 7	One activity is strongly to very strongly favored over another
7	Very much importance	One activity is very strongly favored over another
8	Between 7 and 9	One activity is very strongly to extremely favored to another
9	Extreme importance	One activity is extremely favored to another

Source: Saaty (2008)

Reciprocal matrices have been conducted as a guideline for data collection as illustrated in Table 3. Saaty (1995) described the

reciprocal matrices of each two alternatives as inputs for calculating the weights of happiness indicators in the integrated index.

Table 3. A typical of reciprocal matrix

Importance																		
C1	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1/2	1/3	1/4	1/5	1/6	1/7	1/8	1/9	C2

Source: Satty (1995)

The reciprocal matrices can be started from the goal (highest level) to the sub-criteria (lowest level) or vice versa. The weights of criteria and sub-criteria are calculated via AHP logarithm with the following steps:

- Normalize the reciprocal matrices.
- Calculate the consistency ratio (CR)

of experts' judgements.

The criteria's priorities are calculated by averaging the row values of the normalized matrix. In practice, the bridging relationship in pairwise comparisons have not been able to establish. For instance, C1 is ranked higher than C2; the same principle

is found with C2 and C3, but C1 is not the better one when compared with C3. The inconsistency is a practical problem and can be acceptable if not exceeding 10% (Saaty and Vargas, 2012: 23-40).

CR is calculated by dividing the consistency index (CI) and random index (RI). RI is a function of n, as mentioned in Table 4.

CI is used to evaluate the reciprocal matrices as stipulated in (1)

$$CI = \frac{\lambda_{max} - n}{n - 1} \quad (1)$$

λ_{max} is calculated by averaging consistency vectors.

Table 4. Random index

n	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
RI	0	0	0.58	0.9	1.12	1.24	1.32	1.41	1.45	1.49	1.51	1.54	1.56	1.57	1.58

Source: Satty and Vargas (2012)

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Data description

The in-depth interview data of 20 experts satisfied four criteria: (i) have knowledge and experience in the field (ii) be willing to participate in the interview (iii) have time to participate in the interview and (iv) have communication skills. The individual discussions of 20 experts in education and happiness have been conducted by the authors to rank the criteria

in the hierarchical model of measuring lecturers' happiness.

Table 5 summarized the participant's information. The proportion of males and females in the surveyed sample did not reveal much difference. The majority are in the age group of over 50 (55%) with a master's degree or higher, well meeting the criteria of knowledge and experience in the field of education and happiness.

Table 5. Sample description

Description		Quantity	Percentage
Gender	Male	11	55
	Female	9	45
Age	30-39	3	15
	40-49	6	30
	>50	11	55
Education	Master	12	60
	PhD	8	40

4.2. Happiness model of university lecturers

The research results in Table 6 show that the lecturer's happiness measurement model consists of three levels. Level 2 includes five criteria with the priority orders as follows: 1) physical and spiritual health (50.9%), 2) employment and income (25.5%), 3) self-actualization (13.9%), 4) social networks (6.2%) and 5) family happiness (3.5%).

Health is an important criterion associated with happiness. This finding confirms the result that has been discovered by previous studies (Chen and Ji, 2006). In particular, compared with physical criteria, spiritual health attributes play a more important role. This finding is quite similar to the study of Dang Thi Hoa (2017). Happiness is inversely proportional to working time. Specifically, people with long working hours have lower levels of happiness (Beja, 2018). The results of this study have contributed to further confirmation of Beja (2018) when finding the priority of the criteria related to leisure and free time in level 3 of the model of measuring lecturers' happiness. However, a

long working time is one of the conditions for lecturers to gain experience and professional development, helping them to improve their professional status. To balance these criteria, schools should design leisure activities combined with professional work by organizing tourism conference - a form of conference combining tourism and relaxation.

For income and employment criteria, satisfaction with teaching takes the highest weight. This finding is also supported by Bota (2013). The individual's positive feelings towards employment and the working environment are fundamental to happiness development (Mehta, 2012). In particular, salary and administrative factors play a very small role. This result is quite interesting because it is different from previous studies (Phan Thi Mai Huong, 2014). However, this result is theoretically explainable because each individual has his own concept of happiness to refer to (Rojas, 2005). For some individuals, a high salary can be a source of happiness. However, there are also teachers who feel happy with students' progress and achievements or when they themselves have the opportunity

to advance in their career development path. Personal values and social relationships are also criteria that contribute to happiness. This finding is also quite similar to Bishay (1996). The priority hierarchy of three criteria: personal values, social relations, and family happiness in level 2 of the teacher happiness measurement model is quite similar to Maslow's (1954). Personal value is the highest level in Maslow's pyramid because people with personal values can enjoy life in all aspects, are independent thinkers, and

are not affected by the common culture. In addition, social relations are also an important factor constituting human happiness. This study's finding adds further evidence to the theory of happiness. Besides, family is always considered as a traditional factor in creating happiness. One of the reasons for this is that the family is seen as a source of basic needs for each individual, both material and spiritual (Merz et al., 2009). In particular, family harmony is a highly prioritized factor in the 3rd level of the happiness model.

Table 6. Ranking results of lecturers' happiness index

Level 2	Weight (%)	Level 3	Rank	Weight(%)
Physical and spiritual health (C1)	50.9	Spiritual needs (C11)	2	24.6
		Material needs (C12)	5	4.1
		Leisure time (C13)	1	49.4
		Preference (C14)	4	6.8
		The stand of mood(C15)	3	15.1
Family happiness (C2)	3.5	Family sense (C21)	3	12.8
		Relationship with family (C22)	1	55.9
		Marital status (C23)	2	25.7
		Children education (C24)	4	5.7
Employment and income (C3)	25.5	Teaching satisfaction (C31)	1	37.8
		Research evaluation (C32)	2	24.3
		Social needs (C33)	3	14.6
		Wage (C34)	8	2.4
		Incentives (C35)	6	3.8
		On the job training (C36)	4	10.1
		Administrative system evaluation (C37)	7	2.5
		Remuneration satisfaction (C38)	5	4.6

Level 2	Weight (%)	Level 3	Rank	Weight(%)
Self-actualization (C4)	13.9	Peer comparison (C41)	1	60.2
		Self confidence to the set targets (C42)	2	21.2
		Personal capacity (C43)	3	11.5
		Future expectation (C44)	4	7.1
Social networks (C5)	6.2	Self esteem needs(C51)	1	39.4
		Being supported upon adverse impacts (C52)	5	3.2
		Friendship needs (C53)	3	14.5
		Relationship with colleagues(C54)	4	6.9
		Trust (C55)	2	36.1

5. Conclusion

This study has applied AHP technique to build a hierarchical model to measure the happiness of university lecturers in Ho Chi Minh City based on the in-depth interviews of experts in the field of education and happiness, with integrated material and non-material criteria. Research findings have determined the priorities of criteria/sub-criteria in the happiness measurement model.

The research findings have provided empirical evidence for constructing a ranking index for happiness criteria. They are useful for future studies with a larger survey to represent and generalize the university lecturers. Policy implications for human resources management at universities are made so that a happy environment can be created and nurtured through the focused improvement of psychological, social, and economic factors.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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