

Are You Happy at Work?



In psychology, the good life is often conceptualized across three dimensions: the happy life, the meaningful life, and the psychologically rich life. A happy life brims with *hedonic* well-being, hallmarks of positive emotions and satisfaction. A meaningful life fosters *eudaimonic* well-being, a sense of meaning and purpose. A psychologically rich life is one filled with novelty,

curiosity, and perspective-changing experiences.

Given that most people spend a significant portion of their lives at work, the connection between our professional lives and our well-being is noteworthy. In a recent study, Hannes and Baumeister (2025) explored what insights the science of the good life can offer for understanding occupational well-being by applying the tripartite framework to the domain of work. Their research was conducted with 678 employees in Germany, ranging in age from 18 to 67 (average age: 44.94), across various industries (for example, public administration, healthcare).

Findings revealed that, just as with the good life more broadly, *satisfaction*, *meaningfulness*, and *psychological richness* are key contributors to the overall quality of work life.

Job satisfaction

This dimension includes both cognitive and affective components. It refers to the extent to which individuals experience positive emotional states (for example, pleasure and joy) from their work, as well as how satisfying they appraise their work to be.

Job satisfaction can be measured using questionnaire items such as:

- *I feel fairly well satisfied with my work.*
- *Most days, I am enthusiastic about my work.*
- *I find real enjoyment in my work.*

Work meaningfulness

This dimension refers to the extent to which people experience their work as important, meaningful, and having a purpose – in particular, in terms of positive contributions to society and others' well-being.

Work meaningfulness can be measured using questionnaire items such as:

- *The work that I do is important.*
- *I have a meaningful job.*
- *What I do at work makes a difference in the world.*

Work psychological richness

This dimension refers to the extent to which one's work is characterized by complex, novel, interesting, and perspective-changing experiences.

Work psychological richness can be measured using questionnaire items such as:

- *I have a lot of interesting experiences at my work.*
- *My working life consists of rich, intense moments.*
- *I have a lot of stories about my work to tell others.*

Optimal work settings

According to Zacher and Baumeister (2025), there are six key features (“the elite 6”) that are powerful contributors to a good working life across all three dimensions of job satisfaction, work meaningfulness, and work psychological richness.

Perceived contribution - Perceived contribution, or *task identity*, refers to “the opportunity to recognize the contribution of one's tasks to the overall product or service.” As research has demonstrated, the employees perceived contribution is positively related to occupational well-being outcomes, including job satisfaction and meaningfulness. “Employees relish understanding their place in the big picture,” write the authors.

Participation - When people feel informed about developments within their organization, when they believe that their ideas are heard and considered – It can promote a sense of coherence and belonging to the group. This, in turn, can positively affect their work well-being. In fact, employees perceived participation in an organization's decision-making has been found to positively correlate with job satisfaction and negatively correlate with feelings of alienation in the workplace.

Development opportunities - When employees have opportunities to participate in training and development activities, they increase their chances of learning new skills, improving their performance, and receiving promotions. Moreover, such opportunities for self-development are

also associated with greater levels of job satisfaction, work meaningfulness, and work psychological richness.

Supervisor support - The extent to which individuals feel like their supervisors are supporting them on various levels (for example, emotional, instrumental, and informational) is linked to job satisfaction, meaningfulness, and psychological richness. Receiving supervisor support helps employees feel integrated into a “desirable social system.”

Coworker support - Similarly, supportive interactions with colleagues positively contribute to occupational well-being. While previous research demonstrates a link between support and job satisfaction and work meaningfulness, the authors postulate that these interactions in themselves can constitute as sources for psychological richness. Or perhaps, as the authors write, “feeling supported emboldens one to tackle new and diverse challenges.”

Job engagement - This reflects how much employees invest in their cognitive, affective, and physical energy into their work performance. According to Zacher and Baumeister (2025), the more people perceive their work as satisfying, meaningful, and psychologically rich, the more inclined they may be to fully engage and invest themselves in their roles.

Work-related stressors

Often, our work lives can also involve various aversive, stress-inducing factors that undermine well-being. Among the work stressors that Zacher and Baumeister (2025) considered in their research were:

- *qualitative workload* – how cognitively complicated and overwhelming tasks are
- *quantitative workload* – time pressure and regulation overload
- *work interruptions* – how frequently one encounters obstacles while performing work tasks
- *environmental stressors* – noise, hygiene, temperature, comfort
- *supervisor/coworker undermining* – perceived hostility and criticism from supervisors or colleagues directed at oneself that hinders goal attainment
- *job insecurity* – perceived risk of losing current employment
- *working hours* – average hours spent at work

For job satisfaction, the study found negative associations with most stressors except for *working hours*, suggesting that when one enjoys work, longer hours may not necessarily undermine job satisfaction. For work meaningfulness, the stressors showed no association and were largely unrelated. Higher *workload* and longer *work hours* had small associations with meaningfulness, suggesting that when individuals find their work meaningful, they may be more willing to take on challenging tasks and invest more time. For psychological richness, the authors found positive and



significant correlations with all work stressors: more stress, more psychological richness. This finding highlights psychological richness as an aspect of occupational well-being that remains unaffected by work-related stressors.

Implications

Insight into what makes any organization a fulfilling place to work, and what promotes employee well-being carries significant implications. First, they provide individuals with valuable reference points for understanding how their work contributes to or detracts from their overall well-being. For example, if employees feel dissatisfied, these insights can help explain why; and, importantly, empower them to seek conditions that support their happiness. Second, such knowledge equips managers with a clearer sense of what interventions can enhance job satisfaction, meaningfulness, and psychological richness among their teams.

“Creating a supportive environment in which employees understand how their specific jobs contribute to the big picture, in which they can share ideas, suggestions, and other information with superiors and fellow employees, and where they have ample opportunities to learn and develop may be especially effective for making them regard their work as satisfying, meaningful, and psychologically rich—and ultimately for encouraging them to fully invest themselves into their work role,” conclude the authors.

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