

Hope and Optimism: How They Differ in Job Satisfaction During The COVID-19 Epidemic

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Abstract

Purpose: Due to COVID-19, Malaysian employees faced uncertainty in many aspects of life, particularly job security, adapting to new work conditions, and job loss affecting job satisfaction. Therefore, promoting optimism and hope is essential for employees to thrive in a rapidly changing environment. The purpose of this study is to discuss the importance of hope and optimism on employee's job satisfaction.

Theoretical Framework: The study provides a literature review on the topics of hope, optimism, and job satisfaction. The hope and optimism are crucial characteristics that have the potential to affect an employee's productivity, which in turn affects the work's overall outcome. Businesses that demonstrate optimism and hope can ensure that their employees are satisfied with their jobs, thereby enhancing organisational performance. Although hope and optimism are frequently used interchangeably, they are distinct due to their individual characteristics. Optimism is the conviction that, despite adverse conditions, things will ultimately improve. Hope, on the other hand, fosters the conviction that despite life's obstacles, an individual can flourish.

Design/methodology/approach: This research is descriptive in nature. The literature review in that article will emphasise the differences between hope and optimism in employee job satisfaction.

Findings: The current study confirms that hope is a significantly more beneficial trait for an individual than optimism. Hope is essential to achieving job satisfaction because employees with high levels of hope will have multiple goals and the capability to achieve them.

Research, Practical & Social implications: During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential to recognise that optimism and hope are cognitive traits that protect and aid employees in coping with their daily challenges. In contrast to optimism, however, hope can help employees better adapt to the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to job satisfaction.

Originality/value: This research topic is unique in that it makes a contribution to the field of psychological well-being, and it also has the potential to influence workplace practises and policies.

Keywords: Hope, optimism, job satisfaction, COVID-19, employees, mental health

1. Introduction

In December 2019, the first reported case of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) were found in Wuhan, China (Lee, 2020). As a precautionary measure against the rapid propagation of the disease, the government of Malaysia issued the Movement Control Order (MCO) (Pang et al., 2022; Wider et al., 2023). According to Vyas and Butakhieo (2020), starting December 2019, the widespread coronavirus has prompted the majority of public and private entities around the world to and restrict face-to-face interaction travel in order to avoid the transmission of diseases (Rodzi, 2021). Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, a large number of employees are not permitted to work as usual, resulting in anxiety over job security, difficulty in adapting to new work routines, and even job loss (Bendezú et al., 2023). Consequently, work from home (WFH) has become a strategic concern for many businesses, enabling employees to perform their jobs remotely and assuring the company's continuous

sustainability (Tripathy & Rohidas, 2021). In this circumstance, personnel must continue working in the company or organisation while adhering to government-established health regulations (Ardi et al., 2021). However, previous research indicates that this has an effect on employee job satisfaction and mental health (Trilla, 2020). In contrast, during the COVID-19 epidemic, optimism and hope are essential for employees to maintain a dominant position in a fiercely competitive work environment, hence achieving job satisfaction (Avolio, 2005).

The hope and optimism that employees have is a disposition that drives individuals toward job accomplishment; it is not a fixed quality like a personality trait, but it is an essential aspect that may boost performance when examined and developed (Luthans, 2002). In addition, optimism and hope are essential qualities that contribute to the overall outcome of a workplace and an employee's good behaviour inside the company (Newman et al., 2014). As a consequence, companies may boost their productivity and assure worker happiness by encouraging an attitude of optimism and hope in the workplace (Luthans et al., 2007). In the present study, the emphasis will be on the distinctions between hope and optimism, as well as the role hope and optimism play in job satisfaction during the COVID-19 epidemic.

2. Literature Review

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is described as a sense of accomplishment or contentment received from one's employment (Achmad et al., 2023; Hamian et al., 2020). In contrast to Locke (1976), who defined job satisfaction as the positive sentiments an employee has while evaluating his or her professional or personal experience, Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller (2012) identified job satisfaction as an attitude variable. Thus, job satisfaction is a crucial component in the lives of individuals, particularly employees, because it has a significant impact on the mood and behaviour of the individual at work (Elnaz et al., 2017). According to Robbins and Judge (2012), job satisfaction places an emphasis on employee emotions and will entail pleasant and good emotional circumstances achieved from work experiences (Locke & Henn, 1986). Therefore, from a psychological perspective, PPC and work satisfaction are associated (Podsakoff et al., 2000; Yoon & Suh, 2003). For instance, workers will be happier at work if they feel their abilities are being put to good use. This is because an employee's level of pleasure with his or her employment is a reflection of his or her emotional investment in and enjoyment of the many aspects of his or her work (Spector, 1997).

Particularly among workers, the development of the COVID-19 pandemic has raised concerns about job satisfaction (Nguyen & Uong, 2021). This is due to the fact that, in the present day, a great number of businesses are encountering challenging circumstances to retain their quality, not only from the firm sector, but also the degree of employee job satisfaction and how to continue to survive the threat of this COVID-19 problem (Torales et al., 2020; Zainal et al., 2022). Not a few people have lost their jobs as a result of this pandemic, and many more have had to change their schedules to work at home (Howe et al., 2021). Employees must continue working despite the possibility of this illness, which increases their mental and emotional loads. Therefore, the employees require psychological assistance in order to obtain workplace satisfaction (Wang & Lin, 2014). For instance, nurturing hope and optimism can operate as cognitive elements in defending against and assisting with the reduction of work stresses, resulting in job satisfaction at the workplace.

According to Nguyen and Uong (2021), psychological capital, such as self-efficacy, resiliency, hope, and optimism, has a beneficial impact on employee work satisfaction. However, optimism influences work satisfaction the most. In my opinion, this might be attributed to the fact that exercising optimism can assist people increase their productivity. Possessing optimism can enable employees continue to work hard during the COVID-19 epidemic, despite facing challenges, accept reality with composure, and build their next work plan without grief or despair. Aside from this, together with optimism, hope will also encourage people to be engaged in their work and devise effective methods for achieving workplace success (Luthans et al., 2007; Nguyen & Uong, 2021).

Hope

According to research, hope may be described as a positive emotion and a state of motivation that organically incorporates thoughts about oneself and one's own activities in relation to the achievement of desired results (Bailis & Chipperfield, 2012). According to Snyder et al. (1991), these beliefs, as expressed in Snyder's famous

theory of hope, comprise a successful sense of agency, which refers to the motivation necessary to achieve objectives, and pathways, which refers to the methods of achieving goals. Additionally, hope is often seen as a stable individual distinction. People with high hope, as opposed to those with low hope, consider other pathways and convince themselves more frequently that they can and will achieve their goals. Thus, Individuals are motivated to take action and work toward their goals in the face of setbacks because of the hope that they will eventually succeed (Luthans & Youssef, 2004), as opposed to blind optimism (Luthans et al., 2007).

As was mentioned earlier, hope is a positive state of motivation that is based on a perceived level of inner achievement. It consists of willpower, a form of energy, and a path that is directed toward achieving a goal (Snyder et al., 1991). According to previous research, hope is particularly crucial in the current work and career climate, which is characterised by high rivalry and uncertainty, especially during the COVID-19 epidemic (Rivera et al., 2021). A high degree of hope can assist employees in dealing with psychological suffering and overcoming obstacles at work in a more positive manner, and it can inspire their pursuit of professional progress (Snyder et al., 1991). Thus, the negative effects of work discontent may be mitigated, leading to greater job satisfaction (Rand et al., 2020). Aside from this, When one has hope, they are more likely to feel energised and motivated to work toward their goals, which in turn fosters agency thinking, a belief in their own abilities to succeed, and pathway thinking—all of which are crucial psychological resources for healthy human development across a wide range of life domains (Hirschi, 2014). During the COVID-19 epidemic, for instance, employees often struggle to maintain a healthy work-life balance, resulting to low job satisfaction since they may be required to work from home and manage household difficulties at the same time. Thus, having hope might assist individuals in thinking positively and having goal-oriented aspirations.

Optimism

Optimism is the degree to which individuals expect future results to be positive and negative consequences to be avoided (Seligman, 1991; Bailis & Chipperfield, 2012). There are several types of optimism, such as acquired optimism (Seligman, 1991), dispositional optimism (Carver & Scheier, 1985), and situational optimism. Despite the fact that both hope and optimism contain good aspirations for the future, only optimism is precisely defined in these words. Individuals shift from the positive pole, optimism, to the negative pole, pessimism, when their anticipation of favourable outcomes decreases and their expectation of unfavourable outcomes increases (Bailey et al., 2007). For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when employees are unable to motivate themselves to avoid job loss, they will feel hopeless and may even commit suicide because they begin to believe that events are beyond of their control. Moreover, optimism is commonly viewed as a quality or characteristic that individuals possess to varied degrees (Rand et al., 2020). Consequently, it is a rather durable and advantageous component of how individuals handle a variety of circumstances. The term "optimistic" has also been used to indicate particular perceptions, such as little risk, or self-evaluations, such as good aptitude, that are excessively positive or exaggerated relative to objective standards. Although such impressions may be incorrect, they can calm people's fears and uncertainties in a tough circumstance and motivate them to continue pursuing their objectives (Chang, 1998).

As previously said, optimism may be defined as the general anticipation of future positive results and the capacity to deal with adversity and stressful life situations while maintaining a balance between the negative and positive feelings that these events may elicit (Nes et al., 2009; Carver et al., 2010; Hanssen et al., 2015; Radcliffe & Klein, 2002). Additionally, research indicates that optimism is adversely associated with anxiety and sadness (Biron et al., 2020). In the context of the COVID-19 epidemic, optimists are more likely than pessimists to manage external disruptions like as job instability, resulting in greater work satisfaction. A study revealed, for instance, that when nurses are optimistic, it results in greater work satisfaction and a lesser intention to leave (Hu et al., 2022).

Hope versus Optimism

Arslan et al. (2020) observed that increased coronavirus stress reduces optimism, resulting in psychological issues. In addition, Yildirm and Arslan (2020) found that optimism plays a significant role in the restoration of mental health and general happiness during the preliminary stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. As an adaptive mechanism for stress recovery, hope was also linked to reduced pandemic stress and enhanced well-being (Gallagher et al., 2021). Genc and Arslan (2021) conclude, based on these data, that coronavirus stress is

associated with a lower degree of hope and optimism, and that employees may face numerous obstacles in the process of developing hope and optimism.

In spite of this, Long et al. (2020) asserted that hope is more significant than optimism for supporting an individual's psychological health, which leads to greater work satisfaction. This is owing to the fact that individuals with higher hope tend to employ more adaptive coping mechanisms when confronted with difficult life circumstances than those optimists (Yidirim & Arslan, 2020; Satici, 2016; Folkman, 2013). Hope also enables individuals to inspire others to modify their connection with negative thoughts and emotions by concentrating on the positive, so enhancing their capacity to deal with difficult life situations, such as the COVID-19 epidemic (Long et al., 2020). In addition, Yidirim and Arslan (2020) and Snyder et al. (2006) asserted that hopeful adults' stress reactions to coronavirus may help them become proactively engaged in their goal pursuits because they are more likely to be positive and productive in stressful situations. For example, when confronted with anxiety over job security during a pandemic, hopeful adults are more likely to be positive and productive than those who are not hopeful. Thus, a sense of hope preserves the psychological health of troubled adults and mitigates the harmful consequences of such stressful situations on work satisfaction.

Despite research indicating that optimism also had a mitigating role in offering an adaptive pathway for coping with stressful life situations, resulting in enhanced psychological well-being and increased work satisfaction, it was observed that hope had a distinct indirect influence on employees' performance through their job expectancy (Wong & Lim, 2009). Moreover, although both hope and optimism have a significant effect in subjective well-being, which may influence job satisfaction, Wider et al. (2022) found that hope is more essential than optimism as a coping strategy for sustaining life satisfaction in individuals. This is corroborated by research by Karaman et al. (2020), which indicates that hope has a large indirect effect on an individual's happiness. This suggests that a high level of hope might result in greater work satisfaction than optimism.

The Importance of Hope and Optimism

Weiss and Cropanzano's (1996) affective event theory underlined that emotional situation encountered in the workplace have a significant effect in the emotional behaviour and attitudes of workers. In addition, a persistent and continual maintenance of positive emotional reactions is essential for enhancing performance and so fostering work satisfaction (Armin, 2021). According to Romeo and Cruthirds (2006), employees' optimism and hope decrease their bad behaviours and raise their good ones. Optimistic workers are less likely to experience stress on the job and are less likely to be considering a career change (Avey et al., 2009). Chen and Lim (2012) observed that a person with positive psychology is a great prospect in terms of their ability to acquire work, and that once recruited, this skill served as the basis for remarkable performance on the job. Positive psychological capital, such as hope and optimism, has been linked favourably to organisational success in a number of other research; this includes organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), perceived performance, and most crucially, work satisfaction (Avey et al., 2006; Lee & Choi, 2010; Luthans et al., 2005).

Influence of Hope and Optimism on Job Satisfaction during COVID-19 pandemic

Hope and optimism are cognitive elements preserving and reducing life pressures in employees' lives, namely job satisfaction (Belen & Belen, 2019). Furthermore, optimism and hope may be viewed as the primary means of adjusting to traumatic life events by having faith in a better future, and as such, they can serve as a bridge between various conceptions (Brooks et al., 2020). In many respects, optimism and hope are still comparable in the sense that both hope and optimism include anticipating a favourable outcome in the future (Cabras & Mondo, 2017). However, these elements are unique from one another due to their own characteristics (Scheier & Segerstrom, 2010). While optimists may have faith that their dreams will come true, they may not have the resources to work toward those dreams (Kardas et al., 2019). In addition, hope is more narrowly focused on the actualization of one's desired outcomes and one's confidence in one's own abilities to bring those outcomes about than is optimism. (Kwok & Gu, 2017).

Researchers found that workers who had higher hope were more productive (28% more likely) and happier (44% more likely) at work (Bistricky et al., 2020). In addition, studies show that while optimism and hope both help reduce depression, hope is more effective than optimism. (Luthans et al., 2007). Moreover, according to research

by Genc and Arslan (2021), coronavirus stress had an indirect impact on employees' subjective well-being via their feeling of hope and optimism. Genc and Arslan (2021) also found that people with a high degree of stress owing to coronavirus will exhibit reduced optimism and hope, resulting in diminished subjective well-being. Then, Cannas et al. (2019) stated that when employees have low subjective well-being, their job satisfaction will be low. In conclusion, when there is a lack of hope and optimism, subjective well-being and work satisfaction are negatively affected.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, optimism and hope have a significant impact in the job satisfaction of employees, especially during the COVID-19 epidemic. Nonetheless, both facets are distinguished by their own characteristics, such as optimists' concentration on the quality of future results and hope's emphasis on the direct fulfilment of personal objectives. Thus, we may infer that although optimism might help individuals get through the tough period of the COVID-19 epidemic, it is only a yearning for a better future, without a specific objective and motive. On the other hand, hope is a crucial factor in directing job happiness, as individuals with high hope will have several goals and the ability to articulate them effectively. Despite the fact that both hope and optimism are cognitive characteristics safeguarding and assisting employees in reducing their life stresses during the COVID-19 pandemic, research indicates that hope is more effective in doing so (Genc & Arslan, 2021). Moreover, hope can help employees adjust in a better way to the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting to job satisfaction, when compared to optimism (Rand et al., 2020). However, it is worth to note that this study only examined the effects of optimism and hope, two positive psychology concepts, on job satisfaction during the COVID-19 endemic. It does not, however, include other potential positive psychology factors that may influence job satisfaction. Further research should investigate the contribution of additional positive psychology constructs, such as gratitude, resilience, and self-compassion, to job satisfaction in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of positive psychology on job satisfaction during this ongoing endemic.

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