


Chapter 18

Unhappy at Work: The Era of the Dis-Employee

Cynthia M. Montaudon Tomas

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2595-6960>

UPAEP Universidad, Mexico

Anna Amsler

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3183-0878>

Independent Researcher, Mexico

Ivonne M. Montaudon-Tomas

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5794-7762>

UPAEP Universidad, Mexico

Yvonne Lomas Montaudon

Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico

ABSTRACT

This chapter analyzes unhappiness at work in an era in which employees across the globe are publicly demonstrating they are not content with their positions, their leaders and managers, the type of job they perform, or certain work-dependent conditions. The main ideas that explain why employees are not finding joy and happiness at work are described. Job unhappiness is the most common term that is used to describe the phenomenon in which people start rethinking their jobs. Through a literature review, different perspectives about unhappiness at work were collected to present a general overview of what this phenomenon means and the characteristics of employees who are no longer engaged in their jobs.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-9172-0.ch018

INTRODUCTION

Work is the most important human action. In fact, it is work that defines us as human beings. Numerous things have changed in the workplace in recent years, especially the level of employee engagement and the emotions that are at play at work. The great resignation, among other talent-driven movements, has shown a crucial aspect of work: employees are not happy. They are displeased, and strong negative emotions such as anger and drama are settling in the workplace.

Happiness may be not only a consequence of personal and organizational success but also a cause of it. Happy employees help create positive work environments and joyful relationships with clients and coworkers, helping organizations outperform the competition. Happiness in the workplace is based on how satisfied people are with their work and also their lives (Wesarat et al., 2014), and a realistic perception of their expectations about work and how these expectations are being met (White, 2017).

Unhappiness has been analyzed from multiple perspectives in the workplace, and although some of the conditions that occur in organizations sometimes overlap, they have been called by different names, including employee dissatisfaction, angrynomics at work, organizational cynicism, negativity in the workplace, toxic workplaces, workplace drama, and toxic positivity. In the background section, these different ways of understanding the roots of unhappiness in the workplace are explained.

The era of the “dis-employee” is introduced as a phase in which employees are portrayed as miserable workers in a new drama playing at the workplace. Different adjectives that describe unhappy employees are presented to explain the current emotions and feelings in the workplace in order to better understand the idea of dis-employees, specifically the use of the prefix “dis.”

Tables are used to introduce characteristics for being unhappy at work, why employees might be unhappy, and reactions from employees when they are no longer happy on the job. Finally, some ideas about how unhappy workplaces can be fixed and certain leadership styles that foster a joyful working environment are included. The objective is to help managers better understand the causes of unhappiness at work in order to develop adequate policies and strategies to turn the problem around.

METHOD

The method selected was the literature review, including classical theories of motivation and engagement at work, as well as up-to-date newscasts and managerial publications about current talent-driven movements in the workplace. The chapter presents a collection of characterizations to better understand unhappiness at work, as well as specific behaviors of unhappy employees.

BACKGROUND

Different Ways to Understand the Roots of Unhappiness in the Workplace

For decades, it has been demonstrated that employees in every type of work are dissatisfied and discouraged regardless of their position and the type of work setting. Working conditions are not more exciting, rewarding, or fun than 250 years ago (Bakke, 2005). It is not a matter of where people work;

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