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A study on happiness at work, the society of performance and tiredness

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in measuring, analyzing, and understanding happiness using a variety of resources and techniques. Especially in the business sphere, where happiness at work can be defined as a state of mind that gives employees more than economic reasons to carry out their daily tasks. This study aims to investigate, through bibliographical research, within a qualitative approach, the characteristics of today's society focused on performance and productivity but sickened by the weight that toxic positivity causes. The general objective of this study is: to understand how happiness has become a weight in organizations and its influence on society of performance and fatigue. The specific objectives are the following: to know the difficulties faced by employees to achieve high performance/performance; identify at what point positivity can become toxic within the work environment; to investigate what the current literature brings about the themes of happiness at work, performance society, and tiredness. In the end, the research shows that it is urgent to (re)learn the art of attention, listening, silence, stopping, and giving "space" not to fall into the "gears" of consumption and production so that the human being does not have only one purpose for living: operating at maximum output.

Keywords: Happiness at work; Performance; Toxic Positivity; Business; Fatigue

1. Introduction

To reflect on how the concept of work has taken a prominent place in human history is to consider that this position has been present since the earliest civilizations, such as hunting, fishing, and agriculture for subsistence, and the servile relationship in the Middle Ages, to the current society that is marked by globalization and industrialization. According to Neves (2019), work is currently perceived as one of the main instruments with which man interacts in the social environment and with his time. [1]

The justification for this bibliographical and documentary research on happiness at work, toxic positivity, the society of fatigue, and quiet quitting is due to the increasing studies on these topics and the consideration of it as a matter of public health. As companies that focus on actions aimed at the health of their employees grow or emerge, occupational diseases also increase. In January 2022, there was a landmark and transformation in the list of occupational diseases, as the World Health Organization (WHO) recognized burnout syndrome as an occupational disease and defined it as health problems that were acquired after consecutive exposures to risk factors within the work environment, affecting the worker physically and psychologically. [1]

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It is considered important to address these socially inserted themes that success and productivity are synonymous with lack of time, high demand from companies, and high delivery rate in a short period of time by employees, leading to exhaustion.

The objective of this study is to investigate, through a literature review, within a qualitative approach, the characteristics of the current society focused on performance and productivity, but sickened by the weight that toxic positivity has taken into organizations. Despite difficulties such as insecure organizational climates, psychological pressures, harassment, etc., the collaborating person is expected to remain motivated, engaged, productive, and happy.

Due to the scarce material on the subject, it was aimed to investigate and correlate the themes, in order to bring considerations and studies to academia and society, as it is considered that despite being relevant content, it is still little debated within organizations since companies expect the salary offered to be sufficient for the collaborator to maintain his high performance and that the actions taken are sufficient to contribute to and promote happiness at work.

The general objective of this study is to understand how happiness has become a burden in organizations and its influence on the performance and exhaustion of society. The specific objectives are as follows: to understand the difficulties faced by collaborators in achieving high performance/performance; to identify at what point positivity can become toxic within the work environment; to investigate what the current literature brings about the themes of happiness at work, performance society, and exhaustion.

This work is organized into four topics. The first is the introduction, in which a brief context was elaborated and the research objectives were presented. In the second topic, the theoretical foundation was developed based on theoretical discussions developed with authors who deal with the same theme developed here. In the third topic, the methodology adopted for the development of the work was presented and in the fourth and final topic, the final considerations were discussed.

2. Material and methods

For the purpose of this study, a qualitative research approach was chosen in order to gain a deeper understanding of the subject being studied, thereby allowing for the acquisition of more up-to-date information regarding the theoretical framework used. Minayo (2010, cited in „ Matos & Nascimento, 2017) defines qualitative research as a study method focusing on people's stories, personal relationships, perceptions, and opinions about their history and history the interpretations they make about it. [2]

In other words, this method seeks to study the processes that are present in society and are still little known. Data and information were gathered through research of materials published in books, articles, dissertations, and theses published in the last 5 (five) years, from 2017 to 2022, on the topics of happiness at work, performance society, toxic positivity, and Quiet Quitting.

Within the theoretical discussion developed here, it is possible to highlight the contributions of the following authors: Han (2015), Neves (2019), Petersen (2021), Sindique (2021), Almeida (2022).

3. Literature Review

Considering the research objectives presented, the concepts of happiness at work, toxic productivity, and its consequences within the professional scope will be discussed below. Reflecting on the second theme society of performance and tiredness (exhaustion) and, soon after, the third theme, quiet quitting.

3.1. The Happiness at Work and the Toxic Productivity

"Work hard and you will succeed." This phrase is often heard in everyone's professional journey as many people and companies still believe that work is the key to happiness and that this is the reward for success. Epicurus and Aristotle considered happiness to be the most important thing in the world, and the philosopher Epicurus already said: "It is necessary to practice from an early age what brings happiness, for with it we have everything, and whoever lacks it, will do everything to acquire it". [3]

Psychologist Abraham Maslow (1943) developed the hierarchy of human needs, also known as the "Happiness Pyramid". In this structure, health and well-being are in "Security" and are one of the basic needs for a human being to

achieve happiness. His fundamental work was published in the same year in a well-known scientific article titled: "A theory of human motivation." [4], [5]

According to Neves et al (2018), work has become essential for human integration in society and for any other human activity. It is an activity loaded with meanings in the construction/reconstruction of identities and in the definition/redefinition of life norms. [6]

Regarding the historical context of work, the authors Benfatti and Dantas (2017), state that work has been present in various periods in the development history of human beings and consider that since prehistory, man performed a labor activity by practicing hunting and fishing for survival. The authors conclude that the meaning of work has always been associated with a painful, punishment, suffering, etc. activity, as the origin of this word was associated with the Latin verb "ripaliare", which meant to torture on the "tripalium", which was a punishment instrument that replaced the cross of Christianity, in other words, there were transformations in the concept of work and the sense attributed to it throughout history and the authors reached the conclusion that work is an indispensable reference for the subjects influencing their identity and the way they are socially inserted. This important exercise, today, is the main means of survival and demands more and more of the worker's time. [7]

According to Maio (2016, p.02), "Motivated and satisfied employees are the key to a successful company", that is, motivated and satisfied employees contribute and become more productive within organizations, resulting in healthy people within healthy organizations, which tend to be more creative, sociable and productive. [8]

But, after all, what is happiness at work? And, what actions are necessary for the employee to achieve this happiness? The authors Limongi-França and Zaima (2002 cited by Maio, 2016, p. 05) state that the happiness of the worker and the consequent success of the organizations are based on the guarantees that the company provides to its employees, in other words, these organizations that have the ability to meet the needs of their employees are more likely to have happier workers and therefore, more successful. [8]

[...] best working conditions, providing them with good working conditions, fair compensation and benefits, challenging tasks, and a management style that ensures people's participation and development by involving them and committing them to the team's goals, always taking into account well-being for and during work. [8]

According to Byung-Chul Han (2015 cited by Almeida, 2021), a society of exhaustion is a society that manifests itself as tired and values ephemerality, restlessness, and hyperactivity. The productive individual is one who can handle multiple tasks simultaneously and self-exploits, believing this to be their self-realization. This person overvalues freedom to the point of becoming its slave, becoming only the owner of themselves and resulting in serious pathological neural fatigue caused by the conjectural idea implanted within society. [9]

Speaking about this means of survival increasingly demands the worker's time is to speak about data brought by the International Stress Management Association (ISMA-BR) (2022) and the World Health Organization (WHO) (2022), which respectively present Brazil as the country with the 2nd highest number of people affected by burnout syndrome, the most anxious country in the world, and the country with the 5th worst depression index. [1]

Dolan (2015, cited by Campos, 2017) states that experiences of satisfaction and purpose lead to and direct happiness, so bringing this phrase to the organizational context, it is important to understand that actions, gifts, and awards are important, but the challenges at work, having knowledge of the meaning of one's work, being recognized for it, and perceiving its impact on people, are factors that outweigh financial salary. [10], [11]

When addressing the current society when the global pandemic arrived, it was noted how it influenced mental health in many countries. Well-being was negatively influenced by the fact that one could not go to work and the concern for individual health was at high risk. In the first year of the pandemic, the number of absences caused by illnesses such as depression and anxiety increased by 33.7% compared to 2019, according to data from the National Confederation of Financial Institutions (CNF) published in July 2021. [12]

According to the World Health Organization, in 2019, Brazil is the most anxious country in the world, the 5th worst in the depression index, and the 2nd with the highest number of people affected by burnout syndrome. If we translate the word burnout from English, it means to burn out, to carbonize. In the French language, the translation of the word burnout means exhaustion and is defined by the WHO as access to a state of continuous stress that a person has in their work environment, this excess usually comes from a high workload, high demand for responsibilities, harassment from managers, etc. Exactly what happens every day, more and more, with many more people who live the agony of

professional life pressures. Now exacerbated by the tension of the pandemic, hybrid work, fear of unemployment, and the constant search for success that ends up leading to the emptiness of the senses. [1], [13]

The corporate world sells the idea that in order to "get there," you have to run, compete, not sleep, because the world has become popularized by the phrase: "Work while they sleep," and only portrays that we are watching or experiencing the consequences of this thinking. The reality that a person goes to sleep and wakes up working has been affecting mental health and performance. The thin line between personal and professional has been crossed many times, fostering what has been called "toxic productivity."

What usually happens from this extreme dedication is an increase in anxiety, depression and burnout, physical and mental exhaustion that makes good work impossible, absences for health reasons, decreased creativity, and therefore innovation. The myth of productivity is that we have been taught since we were young that hard work is the secret to success. "We were raised to believe that if we worked hard enough, we could beat capitalism and meritocracy," say Petersen and Corrêa (2021), authors of "I can't stand it anymore." [14]

So, according to Petersen and Corrêa (2021), we have convinced workers that poor conditions are absolutely normal and that rebelling against it is a sign of a spoiled generation. In many ways, "toxic productivity" is just a new term for workaholic. According to the author, toxic productivity is essentially an uncontrollable desire to be productive all the time, at any cost. It is the need to go beyond at work or at home, even when this is not expected of you. And the way that many people have been doing this, without resting or evaluating processes, is unsustainable. It all started with the culture of agitation, of always being connected and succeeding with the motivational idea of staying connected, engaged, and achieving unattainable goals even when it affected health. [14]

And thus, the culture of toxic work was born with longer hours, and intense self-criticism played into our need to meet high standards. The pandemic certainly fed into this predominant culture; the excess of work disguised as success.

3.2. Society of Performance and Fatigue (Burnout)

According to Han (2010 cited by Almeida, 2021), a concept called "performance society" is presented, where a society is marked by an excess of positivity and absence of negativity that is always interested in maximizing and producing. However, the theme of performance does not leave out its duties, so this process results in the production of a series of psychological diseases that arise from this "paradoxical freedom" of the individual. This is because the subject of performance does not suffer from an external constraint that obliges him to work, but he exhaustively submits himself to work. He is always seeking his "happiness" at all costs. This high level of happiness performance is what leads to exhaustion. [9]

Our competitive and productivity-oriented society is affecting the individual on a global scale. According to Han (2015 cited by Costa & Noyama 2017), it is possible to interpret generalized discomfort as an inability to manage negative experiences in a time characterized by excessive positivity and the universal availability of people and goods. Stress and exhaustion are not only personal experiences but also social and historical phenomena. The author also states that we should free ourselves from the concept of Foucault's "disciplinary society," because compared to the current society, that thought did not present a thought of seeking economic growth and cost reduction. [15]

It can be said that the 21st century has become a "performance society," where individuals no longer submit to disciplinary institutions and appear as entrepreneurs of themselves or "performance subjects" and production. [16]

According to Almeida (2021), one can find a "wave" in the current society of "Yes, we can!" that predominates and expresses itself, mainly in the valorization of proactivity, and, in turn, transforms those who do not fit into this perspective as failures and unproductive. [9]

For Han (2015 cited by Palma & Herculano, 2022), the society of fatigue is related to the individual's selfishness that expresses itself as "freedom," but that places this in a position centered solely on oneself, as a self-owning person, who values having more than being and thereby self-exploits, that is, he believes that he needs to "keep up" with everything and that his "success" depends solely on him, thus generating frequent anguish in this individual who always puts himself in a position that he could "give more," "do better," and "he needs to work harder" to achieve his goals. For Palma and Herculano (2022, p. 15), becoming self-owning "leads to serious pathological neuronal fatigue caused by the conjunctural idea implanted within society." [17]

Han (2015, cited by Costa & Noyama, 2017, p. 43) states:

The explorer is both the explored. Aggressor and victim can no longer be distinguished. This self-referentiality generates a paradoxical freedom that, due to the coercive structures that are inherent to it, turns into violence. The psychic illnesses of the performance society are precisely the pathological manifestations of this paradoxical freedom. [15]

Given the above, it is important to highlight that in the performance and fatigue society, there is the presence of acceleration of historical processes and the proliferation of sounds, messages, the explosion of stimuli and communications, especially from commercial marketing, cell phones, with all their applications, with the uninterrupted information we receive through social media, and that causes depression, difficulties in attention and hyperactivity syndrome. [9]

Therefore, we emphasize that, according to Han's analysis, the excessive positivism of society is not a virtue, as it limits our ability to recognize our limitations, inherent to the human condition. There is merit in seeking joy in imperfection, recognizing oneself as limiting, and incomplete is a wise attitude towards the challenges posed by reality. Failure exists and we can also learn from it.

3.3. Quiet Quitting

The trend of quiet quitting has been gaining popularity in response to the exhaustion induced by the pandemic. The idea that is spreading globally on social media that millions of people are not going above and beyond at work and are only fulfilling the description of their job they are being paid for, without performing any additional tasks or participating in extra activities at work, maybe growing.

This is a problem because most current jobs require some level of extra effort to collaborate with coworkers and meet customer needs. Diving deeper into the concept, what is happening is that exhausted, overworked, and burnt-out working-class people are reclaiming and refusing jobs, and working conditions no longer sustainable. The notion of quiet quitting suggests a norm where people are forced to perform additional, often undesirable, tasks outside of their job scope and where not doing this extra activity is seen as a way to "quit" their job. We still do not know if Quiet Quitting is a fad or a trend, however, the studies analyzed in this research present a very close conception for a deep, prolonged, and widespread dissatisfaction of the workforce.

First, not recognizing performance, feeling disrespected, and not feeling loved are clear expressions of universal needs, both at work and at home. The fundamental cause of dissatisfaction for those who are actively disengaged is, therefore, that their needs at work are not being met. Zenger and Folkman (2022) state that Quiet Quitting and Great Resignation (great resignation) are the result of feelings of devaluation and underestimate that managers who balance the achievement of results with concern for the needs of others have the lowest percentage of quiet dropouts. [18]

Second, a toxic culture and lack of opportunities to learn and grow indicate a lack of alignment with the core values that are common to most employees, especially the Gen Z and Millennial generation. It is unlikely to predict a long-term relationship at the workplace with someone whose values do not match or clash with the organizational values.

Third, the lack of professional achievement and work meaning points to a lack of connection to the organization's purpose, which inevitably leaves employees confused and disengaged, wondering why they are part of this organization. In other words, it decreases their sense of belonging and overall interest and commitment to it.

When employees feel that their organization helps change the world for the better, actively caring about issues that are important to them, it brings meaning and purpose to their work, and they are fulfilled by the contributions they are making to the company as well as society (DiPietro et al., 2020).

4. Conclusion

How to deal with this reality? How to learn to manage and control the infinite stimuli that affect people, from communication to the internet? How to be able to "disconnect"? The question is: do we want to be part of a society that moves towards people who feel overwhelmed and exhausted, where creativity is suffocated, and where there is a lack of time and energy for personal life? It is urgent to (re)learn the art of attention, listening, silence, stopping, giving "space" and not falling into the "gears" of consumption and production so that the human being does not have only one purpose in life: to operate at maximum performance.

This pursuit, instead of making people better and happier, makes them succumb in the daily life, where they are so concerned with excelling in everything that they don't even know "why" or "for what" they act that way. Giving the

impression that they must always make more effort to be, increasingly, better at everything. Social networks make things worse. The best in someone else's life is shown on Instagram and LinkedIn, and every day we are affected by this comparison. The effect is like a snowball.

Companies are becoming more competitive, margins are tighter and require greater efficiency. All areas now have objectives and indicators verified and invoiced in real-time. This research highlights that in order not to be lost in the sea of commitments, the modern man must start to understand what is really important. Measuring oneself by other people's standards increases the risk of frustration and, in addition, the risk of spending time and effort on things that are not a priority.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors assure that there is no conflict of interest with the publication of the manuscript or an institution or product mentioned in the manuscript and/or important for the result of the presented study.

Statement of informed consent

The present study did not involve people in a case study or similar research, having only restricted itself to a literature review.

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