



## ABSTRACT

In his "Encyclopaedia of Psychology" the philosopher and psychoanalyst Umberto Galimberti defines happiness (*felicità* in Italian, *Glückseligkeit* in German and *bonheur* in French) as a "condition of well-being of considerable intensity, characterized by the absence of a state of dissatisfaction and the pleasure connected to the realization of a desire [...] Together with the concept of happiness as pure and mere satisfaction of desires, another conception which involves the idea of a collective, social and cultural happiness in the context of human relations has been now affirming". Like Galimberti, other scholars have been involved in the problem of defining the construct of happiness and putting it in a functional relation with other constructs such as economic well-being, social status, age, etc.

Thanks to sociologists and psychologists who have collected data of this kind, some economists have started global investigations aiming to verify the effective relationship between well-being, especially material well-being, considered as a possession of material goods, and level of happiness (both perceived, that is to say measured using indicators of self-assessment, and factual, that is to say using for example, the impact of degrees of depression and suicide in population). These studies have generally disconfirmed the assumption that the increase of wealth, both for Nations and in people, for example thanks to free market, is sufficient to guarantee a proportional increase in happiness or at least no decrease at all, both for Nations and people. To that fact, several studies (cfr. Bruni & Porta, 2004, 2006; Eurostat-Eurobarometro, 1975-1992) report that despite of a considerable increase of per capita incomes, average satisfaction reported by European people was in 1992 basically the same as twenty years earlier. Very similar results are also reported in USA research. Myers and Diener, for instance, have found that the relationship between income and happiness is not linear. As Inghilleri (2003) claims, happiness seems to be lower for very poor people, but at reasonably sufficient levels of income economic availability does not seem capable to increase satisfaction in life proportionally. In particular, as it can be read in De Biase<sup>1</sup>.

Urani claims that poverty causes unhappiness especially for those who compare their own lives with that of those who have higher income. This kind of comparison, as sustained also by Festinger (1954) in his Theory of Social Comparison, leads to frustration more easily. Thus, it is not poverty that causes pain and sorrow but what is perceived as inequality and injustice by making comparisons with people perceived as similar.

Based on these studies as well as on others (see Toppa, 2007), the present research project aims at studying the two constructs well-being and happiness in different professional families (for example: doctors, university professors, clerks, workers, computer scientists, etc.). The project focused on the North of Italy and was based on the hypothesis that the level of identification with our work, social prestige, stability, etc. influences the personal feeling of well-being and by extension our happiness.

Such kind of research will be conducted in two stages. One has mainly a qualitative address. The other has mainly a quantitative address. In the first stage, different samples will be drawn (according to the number of professional families considered) using probabilistic methods. Samples will be administered an ad hoc questionnaire in order to measure the typical variables of this kind of survey (personal details, income, possession of material goods, sense of well-being, happiness, etc.). In the second stage, interpersonal interviews or focus groups will be properly carried out in order to investigate other aspects of personal well-being and happiness. These aspects could range from identification with work, subjective representations of well-being and happiness, and other things of the kind.

### KEY WORDS:

HAPPINESS, WELL-BEING, QUALITY OF LIFE AND WORK

### PAROLE CHIAVE:

FELICITÀ, BENESSERE, QUALITÀ DELLA VITA E DEL LAVORO

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<sup>1</sup> <http://blog.debiase.com/stories/2005/07/21/economiaCrescitaFelicitàEB.html>,

## STATE OF THE ART STATO DELL'ARTE

At the beginning of 2007, happiness was one of the most cited topics. This has occurred in two different ways:

- The Economist, one of the most Anglo-Saxon authoritative magazine, dedicated its first issue of the year to the relationship between happiness and Economics (December 2006 – January 2007, Happiness and Economics. Economics discovers its feelings. Not quite as dismal as it was, pp. 33-35).
- Hollywood produced the film "The pursuit of happiness" with actor Will Smith and by Italian director Gabriele Muccino.

As Toppan claims (2007, p. 69, *La felicità è misurabile?*), the topic of happiness has always been the focus of human thoughts and has fluctuated between utopian attraction and sellers' opportunism.

For some years now many psychology and human science scholars have been studying this area: Daniel Kahneman, psychologist and Nobel Prize in Economics in 2002, Martin Seligman, psychologist, famous especially for the construct of both learned helplessness (a psychophysical condition that conduce to apathy, faraway from happiness) and positive psychology (a branch of Social Psychology which studies factors allowing both people and groups to prosper their state of happiness), Ed Diener, psychologist, researcher of the Subjective Well-Being and Ruut Veenhoven, sociologist, director of both the World Database of Happiness and of the Journal of Happiness Studies. These people have delivered many accurate and scientifically reliable studies regarding the relationship between richness, consumption, ownership of material goods, possession of money and, level, quality and intensity of both well-being and status satisfaction.

These studies show that, for example, in April 2007, Deutsche Bank published a survey conducted in 22 countries worldwide, called "The happy variety of capitalism" aimed at measuring the degree of happiness. The methodology took into consideration only objective, material and quantifiable parameters (e.g. per-capita income, birth rate, level of education, employment, corruption, etc.), until coming up with ten indicators of the happy society. The Deutsche Bank researchers noticed that in western society, there are three kinds of Capitalism:

1. Happy
2. Less happy
3. Unhappy

The happy capitalism characterizes The United States Of America, Australia, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Holland, Finland, New Zealand and United Kingdom. The less happy capitalism characterizes Germany, Spain, France, Belgium and Austria. Italy would be considered according to these data an unhappy capitalism (as Greece and Portugal).

We would like to underline that in these data there is no mention neither to the richness of social relations nor to the identification between personal identity and professional identity.

Eurostat-Eurobarometro's survey shows that in the period between 1975 and 1992, happiness has stayed the same despite an increase in per-capita income.

Comparative studies on satisfaction and happiness conducted on people with similar characteristics indicate that:

- employed people are happier than unemployed ones (Clark & Oswald, 1994; Gerdtham & Johannesson, 2001);
- the guarantee of a work makes people less stressed and happier;
- people that can rely on a stable family are happier than divorced/separated ones (Gerdtham & Johannesson, 2001).

To the emblematic question: "Does money make people happy?", the most likely answer today is: "Yes, but...". In other words, money makes people happier but not proportionally. In fact, as Luigino Bruni (University of Bicocca) asserts: "To have higher income seems to make people unhappier". However, this is not predictable because of the numerous variables (e.g., working status, freedom (Sen, 2000), equality, associative life and interpersonal relationship (Field, 2004) that are considered in the process. That is: relational goods, not-for-consumption goods (Seligman, 2002; Diener & Seligman, 2004).

Specifically, in our country and moreover, in our Veneto Region, one of the richest areas in Italy, are people happy? The results of Toppan's (2007) survey shows that the most decisive factors affecting happiness are:

1. mobility intensity and dimension, especially if associated with job requirements;
2. social relationships' nature and quality;
3. couples' lives and well-functioning family life.

These results reveal the conceptual difference, proposed by Veenhoven (2001), between the term "happiness" (subjective life pleasure) and the term "success" (referred to getting richer).

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAMME AND THE DUTIES OF THE RESEARCH UNIT: RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS AND HYPOTHESES DESCRIZIONE DEL PROGRAMMA E DEI COMPITI DELL'UNITÀ DI RICERCA: ASSUNZIONI ED IPOTESI DI RICERCA**

The assumption made is that concepts such as well-being and happiness change according to the typology of employment. To that fact, the literature shows that work influences people happiness in different ways. With the term "happiness" we mean, according to Veenhoven (2001), the degree in which a person evaluates his/her current life as positive overall. As we said above, unemployment affects the perception of life satisfaction, even if some authors (cfr. Böckerman & Ilmakunnas, 2005) reveal that it does not influence happiness. People who are satisfied with their job and their environment (e.g., ergonomic/structural factors, relationships, etc.) are inclined to produce more and better than people dissatisfied with their job. Indeed, people dissatisfied with their jobs are more inclined to spend time managing work issues (dysfunctions, conflicts, etc.) than working well and in a satisfactory way.

Considered this way, work becomes more a source of distress rather than eustress. Moreover, assuming that work contributes to development and maintenance of both personal and professional identity, it is possible to think that a stable identity, also composed by positive working self-images, can contribute to perceived well-being and so on the route to the feeling of happiness. In particular, we are not referring to retributive aspect of work but to the content of the work itself. Herzberg (1968) affirmed the existence of two different factors influencing work motivation and satisfaction. He theorized on the one hand the existence of "hygiene factors" (e.g., retribution, relationship with colleagues, benefits, work condition, etc.) and on the other hand, that of "motivator factors" (e.g., achievement, responsibilities, social recognition, etc.). Hygiene factors would help to avoid dissatisfaction but they can not motivate employees; motivator factors, on the contrary, influence attitude toward the own job and productivity. They are also expression of the development and self-achievement of a worker. Motivator factors are the ones we would like to study striving to investigate happiness and well-being constructs in some specific professional families.

## **OBJECTIVE OF RESEARCH OBIETTIVO DELLA RICERCA**

The present research aims at studying the two constructs of well-being and happiness in different professional families (for example: doctors, university professors, clerks, workers, computer scientists, etc.), particularly in the North of Italy. The main aim of the study is to come to a sort of photography of the state of well-being and happiness of some professional families on the basis of such characteristics such as sex, age, geographical provenance, etc. For example, as reported by Booth & Van Ours (2007), a difference in the perception of their own happiness exists between males and females. This difference depends (amongst others) on the number of hours worked in a day. Blanchflower & Oswald (2007) have found that the trend of happiness has got a U shape: it reaches its minimum when people are in their middle-age. The last objective of this research is to understand what is the proportion of influence of work on happiness.

Theodosiou (<http://www.physorg.com/news70814635.html>), University of Aberdeen (UK), claims that it is almost accepted that European workers are getting more and more stressed by time limits. Since work is particularly important for us, satisfaction derived from work is one of the factors that greatly affect our sense of happiness.

## **SAMPLE CAMPIONE**

The sample on which the research is going to be carried out will be drawn from working populations. Sampling method will be a probabilistic one. Stratification will be obtained on the basis of parameters such as sex, level of studies and income. This will be done in order to allow generalization of results. Starting from workers' lists in a certain sector, stratification parameters will be defined (sex, level of studies, income, etc.). From each layer, a random sample will be drawn. The bigger the sample is the greater its probability of being representative. Indeed, random variables tend to have the same distribution in the sample and in the population. Once a proper sample has been drawn, research tools can be administered.

## **METHODS METODOLOGIA**

As reported by some authors (see Veenhoven, 2001), physiological indicators of people's well-being and happiness do not exist and probably will never exist. In addition to that, behaviour cannot always be considered a valid and reliable indicator of happiness. Observing the behaviours of people in order to establish their levels of happiness can be a very misleading operation. For example, even if we observe people smiling, this does not necessarily mean that they are happy. It is undoubtedly more useful to ask people different kinds of questions such as direct, indirect, single, and multiple questions or other kinds of questions. And this remains true even if questions are often variously biased (Veenhoven 1984; 2001). For example, questions could measure different constructs or deal with subjects people do not grasp or on the contrary know too well. The study will follow a typical psycho-social approach of data collection (an ad hoc questionnaire constructed based on the literature and on indicators researchers intend to investigate in population). This questionnaire will be made following the typical steps of constructing a tool of this kind (Manganelli Rattazzi, 1990; Zammuner, 1998; Bosco, 2003). It is necessary for the questionnaire to be easy to manage both in the stage of administration and in the stage of feedback. It should also allow an easy construction of the database which will be the starting point for proper statistical analysis (Barbaranelli, 2007). Statistical analysis will include techniques which are suitable to operate statistical comparisons between different groups (according to sex, professional family, age, etc.), such as t-test, Analysis of Variance and Structural Equation Modelling. Data will be treated according to research hypothesis.

Together with this quantitative investigation, a qualitative study (using interpersonal interviews or focus groups) will be carried out. This second stage of research will strive to deepen different aspects of well-being and happiness such as representations of people asked about this kind of topic. Interpersonal interviews and focus groups will be constructed according to related literature (Zammuner, 2003; Sartori, 2007).

## **EXPECTED RESULTS RISULTATI ATTESI**

This research aims to getting to a clear understanding of the differences between the various professional families considered with regards to happiness. How much does happiness depend on doing a job? How much on having a regular job? These are just some of the questions the research will try to address. In particular, referring to the last three points of the framework, we want to specify what follows:

1. with regards to mobility intensity and dimension, especially if associated with job demands: this aspect deserves to be examined carefully given that it may be in relation with individual and social subjective well-being;
2. with regards to social relationships' nature and quality: expectations are that the degree of perceived sense of community of people affect significantly perception of happiness;
3. with regards to couples' lives and well-functioning family life: family remains in present liquid society (Bauman, 2000) a factor of duration and stability, especially when it comes to the sense of identity. Indeed, even with increased fatigue, it contributes to the sense of continuity, and thus to the sense of satisfaction and well-being.

Results of the present research can appear a step forward which can be considered interesting in the framework of the relationship among professions, jobs and social perceptions. These aspects play a crucial role in vocational and training actions. Organizations could find it particularly useful to refer to our results in order to elaborate guidelines for more adequate training courses for their personnel. These guidelines could consider well-being and happiness as important factors of productivity.

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