

The UAE has been highlighting happiness on all fronts, and its dreams of being an economic powerhouse is accompanied by plans of being one of the five happiest countries in the world by 2021. Are businesses simply adopting the state policy for progress?

The late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan used to say, “My wealth is the happiness of the people.”

“We are at the beginning of a path along which we learn every day to achieve prosperity and happiness of human beings,” said His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai. HE Uhoud bint Khalfan Al Roumi, Minister of State for Happiness and Quality of Life, says that happiness has been the foundation and building block of the UAE since its formative years. To cement the policy further, the National Charter for Happiness and Positivity was adopted on the International Day of Happiness in 2016.

Ever since, people and businesses have been trying to increase the happiness capital through initiatives such as the first Customer Happiness Summit & Awards, to be held in Dubai in October; and a Happiness Bus, which roamed the city’s landmarks, giving high fives and spreading smiles amongst people. And it is paying off. In a report released in March, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network’s annual World Happiness Report found that the UAE was the happiest country in the Arab World for the fourth consecutive year. A new report by the credit ratings agency Moody’s predicts that the UAE will register a GDP growth of 2.1 per cent in 2018 and 3.9 per cent in 2019.

Al Roumi told the Dubai Forum for Government Best Practices 2017 in November, “Now, in any policy we ask, ‘How can we include happiness in that?’”

Businesses are possibly asking themselves the same thing. Nisha Jagtiani, Group Director and Chief Happiness Officer at Landmark Group, says, “Happy employees, as stated by an Oxford study, are six times more energetic, and they take lesser sick leave, with their productivity being much higher. Happy employees are much more creative, innovative and entrepreneurial, which lead to



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its tenacity and financial offer”. But then it did not work out. He says, “While there was a degree of excitement about a new challenge after five years in one agency, my move was largely financially motivated. In less than six months, I realised that it wasn’t a good reason to move and soon missed what I had at in my previous company.”

What put him off was that the new agency’s structure was less organised; hierarchies were only loosely followed; learning and growth were less of a priority; and processes were not consistently applied. “There was no focus on doing things better and furthering the ‘thinking’ within the agency. And all I could think about was going back to a place where the focus on growth and people is strong. I realised that my career and learning were more important than inflated salaries and that I needed to feel proud of working for my employer,” he says.

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sustained profitability in any business over a period of time.”

DOES HAPPINESS COST MONEY?

The jury is out on whether an organisation with unfriendly practices can attract and retain the best employees simply by paying them more. Studies have shown that money matters, but only to a point. Most employees prefer things that come for free, such as respect, politeness, and pride.

Zeeshan Ali Merchant, Senior Manager, People Team, OMD, tells 999 that he had moved to another agency “because of

After her third child was born, Layal Takieddine was filled with a working mother's anxiety: how to juggle a job and bring up young children? As head of a marketing firm in Dubai, she had a portfolio of challenging assignments, goals to meet, and people to manage. "I shouldn't have worried. Our company proved more than accommodating, allowing me to have flexible hours, in order to meet the expectations placed on me both at work and at home," she tells **999**. "I was very grateful when the opportunity to come early and leave early was proposed. This meant, I could still be the mother I want to be for my children without having to compromise on my career and the enjoyment I derive from it. I feel that I have the best of both worlds," she adds.

Takieddine's experience highlights the dawn of new workplace ethics in the UAE. Putting employees first has become a policy with forward-thinking organisations, like her company Omnicom Media Group MENA (OMD) in Dubai, which has been ranked amongst the top three best workplaces in the UAE, in a study released in April by the US-based Great Place to Work Institute, a global research training and consultancy firm.

Working as a positive experience for the workforce is proven by the Gallup World Poll report, released on May 1.

The UAE ranked amongst the highest in terms of employees satisfied with their jobs. The survey covered 128 countries and the UAE garnered 69 per cent of adults who said that they had good jobs. The UAE ranking in the list was higher than Russia, Singapore, and even Sweden.

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DR KIRIN FIONA HILLIAR

Psychologist
LifeWorks Foundation, Dubai



WHAT MATTERS THE MOST?

Why do employees want happiness at work? Isn't money for work enough? The answer comes from Dr Kirin Fiona Hilliar, Psychologist, LifeWorks Foundation, Dubai, who tells **999**, "A person's happiness is fundamentally influenced



by how much they enjoy their work. When working full-time, we spend about one-third of our lives at work – we spend more time with our work colleagues than with our family. Jobs and companies should, therefore, be looked at from the perspective of not just whether they add to our career trajectory, but whether they have a positive or negative impact on our health and well-being."

Conventionally, an office – which no dictionary will tell you – is the place where every day is a battle with deadlines and profit margins. In one country, work-related suicides hover around 3,800 a year; in another, overwork kills 600,000 every year; and, in yet another country, a labour report showed that 35 per cent people blame their jobs for degenerating physical or emotional health, and 42 per cent say that work affects their personal lives.

So, what has changed? Vineetha Mathew, Founding Partner, Sustainable Mindz, a Dubai-based expertise centre for sustainability and corporate responsibility strategies in the Gulf and MENA region, tells **999**, "Forward-thinking businesses are

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VINEETHA MATHEW
Founding Partner
Sustainable Mindz, Dubai

increasingly recognising that happiness translates into tangible business outcomes and has an impact on the bottom line. Workplace is one of The key pillars of corporate sustainability and is, quite often, an overlooked aspect of sustainability. Happiness contributes to the three pillars of sustainable business – people, planet, and profit. Happy and engaged workplaces have a positive impact on employees and the business.”

She adds that employees are seen as the key to creating long-term value, and successful organisations are prioritising their employees’ well-being. While many offices in several countries have opted for bright decor, free transport, and weekly get-togethers to boost staff morale, UAE employers are focusing on human values. “Happiness in the workplace comes from creating a culture that engages employees, encourages mindfulness and nurtures capabilities. Engaging and empowering



employees to help them achieve their sense of purpose, makes them happier, healthier and socially adept,” says Mathew.

WAYS TO HAVE WELL-BEING

Some organisations, such as the furniture retail outlet in Dubai, which was founded by a Swedish entrepreneur and philanthropist Thomas Lundgren, have clearly defined career paths for the staff. Several members of the company’s leadership team had begun in junior positions and were encouraged to advance through the ranks.

This creates a space in which employees do their best for the company as they improve the quality of their own lives.

The logistics company DHL has created an atmosphere of transparency, listening to employee feedback and taking suitable action, while making employees feel like a part of their successes.

Mathew says that one of the companies that Sustainable Mindz has worked with has made health and well-being a part of its daily activities, while another has created workspace that is creative and engaging.

The Great Place to Work Institute has been ranking organisations on the basis of credibility, respect, fairness, pride, and camaraderie for eight years. It released a list of the best workplaces, including in the UAE, and marked out Dubai Airport Freezone Authority for a special mention of its workplace culture, happiness programmes, and initiatives to look after its employees.

Sustainable Mindz announced its first Happiness@Work Award in April to promote positivity in the region’s workplaces. In the shortlist were SMEs, corporations, non-profit and public-sector organisations. Emirates Wildlife Society – WWF took home the Best Employee Engagement Programme, while the Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority (FCSA) won three awards, including for The Happiest Workplace of 2017.

Abdulla Nasser Lootah, Director General of FCSA, said about the awards, “These recognise not just the FCSA, but also the commitment of the UAE Government to ensuring that its employees operate in a happy environment.”

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Director General of Federal Competitiveness
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