

Using the “Happiness Window” during Tough Times

Kakul Agha

The upsurge of the pandemic during the year 2020 led to escalation in usage of social media and overindulgence in collecting or disseminating COVID19 related information through various sources. Owing to the deluge of information and misinformation, the world population is indicating mixed feelings of anxiety, stress and boredom. For this reason, people have resorted to different activities like following an exercise regime or a systematic daily set of chores that inspire them and help them in setting a new direction in their lives.

One of the biggest fears people are experiencing, is either loss of job or reduction in salary. Due to a continued drop in sales and reduced business across continents, organizations are finding it difficult to retain and pay their employees. Leading property developers in UAE have slashed the salaries up to 50 percent in an attempt to fight the pandemic impacts of slowing down of market. Another giant in the property market, decreased salaries from the Chairman till the lower ranks of management, owing to the slump in the market. Several airlines have announced 25 to 50 percent reduction in salaries for most employees. Many employees don't hesitate to put on record that they were at least happy not to be laid off, even though salary reduction was also not desirable. This phenomenon is not restricted to any region or country but seen as a world-wide practice where several firms across the globe have sliced salaries of their employees. Thai Airways, senior executives have voluntarily given up a quarter of their salaries for half the year, due to the impact of lockdown and downsized travel of passengers. International carriers that have induced salary cuts or pay freezes include Singapore Airlines, Emirates Airlines, Qantas Airways (Australia), Air New Zealand, Virgin Atlantic, Cebu Air (Philippines) and SAS (Sweden) to name a few.

The Indian subcontinent has been substantially impacted by COVID19. The Indian Express informed readers about five major firms, Uber India and South Asia, Ola, Zomato, Swiggy and Cure.fit, who announced 4400 job cuts in a month's time due to reduction in

business during lockdown. Rue, Ibrahim and Byers¹ (2016) state that insecurity at workplace means unfulfilled expectations and poor decisions eventually leading to stress, fatigue and frustration culminating to burnout. Increased fear of job loss heightens stress among employees of all ages. This appears to be true on a theoretical and practical level. On a contrast hike in salaries appears to be a positive sign, which looks unrealistic when worldwide markets are plunging. It is pivotal to mention about Asian Paints, a multinational paint company, engaged in manufacturing, selling and distribution of paints, coatings, and products related to home décor and bath fittings. The management has announced salary and annual increments to boost employee morale and commitment and has promised zero layoffs stating it is not the work culture of Asian Paints. Additionally, the firm has offered concessions to dealers, free sanitization of paint shops and medical insurance for painters, which would incur additional cost burden. The company has also relaxed payment terms to its vendors offering 45 days extension and extra support of 2 percent discount for payments made on time. The leadership and vision of the top management can be commended largely for this plan during the pandemic times. The short term benefits include an instant hike in share prices by over 2 percent and long term benefits include increased employee loyalty and commitment. Indian contemporaries like Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL), HCL Technologies, Walmart-owned Flipkart, Myntra, Johnson & Johnson, CSS Corp, Capgemini India, BSH Home Appliances, HCCB, BharatPe also chose to increase staff salaries and offer promotions and variable payouts. Interestingly the US-based IT giant Cognizant also announced an additional payment of 25 percent of the base pay for April up to the Associate level in Philippines and India which is open to monthly review to support employees realistically. These promising organizations have offered a “Happiness Window”, a novel and strange concept in the study of happiness, which has not been explored before. I conceived this idea and I am expressing this initial idea here. During yesteryears, organizations have been extra demanding from their employees in terms of productivity, effectiveness and efficiency. Probably for this reason, the happiness window works truly in granting new opportunities and extra time to renew ourselves as organizations and individuals.

On the X axis the low and high internal support factors have been placed, while on the Y axis we have low and high external support factors. There are 4 quadrants in the happiness window. Each quadrant is affected by both internal and external factors.

The support by organizations is one of the external pillars of this concept. The external ecosystem has also gotten a break from the routine and is now open to opportunities for establishing new linkages and sub-systems. New technologies are evolving and have found usage in

¹Rue, L.W., Ibrahim, N.A. & Byars, L.L. (2016), Human Resource Management, 11th Ed. McGraw-Hill Education: NY. ISBN: 9781259252181



Figure 1: Happiness Window

the organizations and novel methodologies have been devised to replace age-old techniques. All the quadrants are impacted by the external factors like the organizations intent to train and support their employees to adopt and adapt to new requirements including technologies or even reduction or sustenance of their salaries. The organizational support could be high or low, as per the situation, vision, level of impact being a particular sector, survival strategy etc. The other factors are internal. The current time gives each and every human on this planet to unwind, be more self-aware, heal and rejuvenate oneself and rebound to life in fulsome which is an internal pillar. It enables employees to work from home and use this opportunity to revive their thoughts and strengthen their relationships. For most people this may be the

first time that they have worked from home and have gotten an opportunity to spend a good amount of time with their family members especially their spouse, parents and their children. Bonding can be done over the dinner table, sharing hobbies, playing games together and so on. This is a great time to establish new bonds and strengthen existing ones. The innate ability of individuals to navigate their lives and make the best of it may be high or low, hence the person could be in any of the quadrants. Organizations that support their employees during these turbulent times have provided the happiness window (Quadrant 4) to their employees and this gesture has a long term impact on the performance and productivity of the employees, if the employees really understand how to enhance their skills and manage their time. The performance, commitment and loyalty of employees in the quadrant 4 will be highest during these times. Quadrant 3 employees will be having limited support from their organization even though they support and enable themselves largely. In conclusion the happiness window is a strategy that can be adopted by the organizational leaders and managers for their employees. Simultaneously, individuals have to adopt strategies where they can enhance the internal factors from low to high.