Do the Opportunities for Learning and Personal Development Lead to Happiness?
It Depends on the Work-Family Conciliation

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Abstract

The study shows how the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development predict five dimensions of affective well-being (pleasure, comfort, placidity, enthusiasm and vigor), and how this relationship is moderated by the perceptions of work-family conciliation. A sample
comprising 404 individuals was collected. The findings show the following: (a) both the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development and the perceptions of work-family conciliation predict affective well-being, the happier individuals being those who have high perceptions on both dimensions; (b) the opportunities for learning and personal development and the perceptions of work-family conciliation interact in predicting affective well-being; (c) the relationship between the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development and affective well-being tends to be nonlinear mainly for those with perceptions of low work-family conciliation.

*Keywords:* opportunities for learning and personal development; work-family conciliation; happiness; affective well-being; nonlinear relationships
Although the pathways to happiness vary across cultures (Diener, Oishi & Lucas, 2003; Haller & Hadler, 2006), the quest for happiness is universal. The Declaration of Independence of the United States proclaimed as a self-evident truth that the pursuit of happiness is an inalienable right that every person is endowed with. Scholars such as Diener and Seligman (Diener, 2000; Diener & Seligman, 2004) and Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz and Stone (2004) advocate the creation of national well-being accounts to complement national income accounts. From a scholarly point of view, the quest for happiness in the workplace has four major foundations: (1) happiness is valuable by itself (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003; Diener, 2000; Fredrickson, 2003; Peterson & Seligman, 2004); (2) work by itself cannot make a person happy, “but a person cannot be genuinely happy if he or she is unhappy at work” (Gavin & Mason, 2004, p. 381); (3) happiness associates with higher performance and better organizational functioning (Fredrickson, 2001, 2003; Wright & Cronpanzano, 2000, 2004; Wright, Cropanzano & Bonett, 2007; Wright, Cropanzano, Denney & Moline, 2002); (4) happiness may contribute to virtuous acts, such as forgiveness, nurturance and wisdom (Snyder & Lopez, 2002), and is a fundamental ingredient of the “good life and good society” (Diener et al., 2003, p. 405).

Therefore, it is not surprising that more and more scholars (mainly those affiliated with the positive organizational scholarship and positive organizational behavior movements; Cameron, 2007; Nelson & Cooper, 2007; Roberts, 2006) have made efforts to identify the antecedents of happiness at work, as well as the components and sources of a healthy work organization (Kelloway & Day, 2005). A healthy work organization is “one characterized by intentional, systematic, and collaborative efforts to maximize employee well-being and productivity by providing well-designed and meaningful jobs, a supportive social–organizational environment, and accessible and equitable opportunities for career and work–life enhancement” (Wilson, Dejoy, Vanderberg, Richardson & McGrath, 2004, p. 567).
This paper contributes to enrich this stream of research, answering Kets de Vries’ (2001, pp. 101-102) challenge: “Given the importance of individual psychological well-being for organizational functioning, a major item that should be on everybody's agenda in the new millennium is to create work places that are healthy – places where people feel good in their skin - places that contribute to, and reinforce, adaptive functioning”. Two aspects of organizational and individuals’ lives, as perceived by the employees, are studied: (1) opportunities for learning and personal development; (2) work-family conciliation. Both are ingredients of a healthy work organization (Wilson et al., 2004).

For the reasons developed below, we hypothesize that high opportunities both for learning and personal development and high levels of work-family conciliation associate to higher affective well being, one of the main indicators of happiness (Daniels, 2000). The opportunities for learning and personal development may increase the individuals’ sense of employability, reduce feelings of job insecurity (Benach, Benavides, Platt, Diez-Roux & Muntaner, 2000; Burchell, 1994; Stiglitz, 2002), allow people to satisfy their needs for development and personal growth, and reinforce their senses of determination, impact, competence, enjoyment and meaning at work (Kets de Vries, 2001; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Wrzesniewski, 2003), thus increasing their well being. Work-family issues are also vital to the well-being of employees (Spector, Cooper, Poelmans et al., 2004). Work-family conflict decreases career and life satisfaction, impoverishes marital adjustment, and increases unhappiness, stress, depression, anxiety, burnout, and substance abuse (O’Driscoll, Brough, & Kalliat, 2004; Aycan & Eskin, 2005; Greenhaus, Allen, and Spector, 2006). On the contrary, there is a strong theoretical and empirical basis for a positive association between a supportive work-family culture and employee well being (Mauno, Kinnunen & Pyykkö, 2005). We also hypothesize that low levels of work-family conciliation weaken the positive relationship between opportunities for learning, and personal development and affective well being. Individuals may feel uncomfortable and stressed if they feel unable to benefit from such (high) opportunities due to
difficulties in balancing work and family roles. With this in mind, the paper is structured as follows. We start by clarifying what we mean by happiness and affective well being. Next, we ground and formulate our hypotheses. After that, the method and results are presented. Next, we offer the discussion and conclusions. Limitations of the study and avenues for further research are also suggested.

Before proceeding, we clarify that an individual level of analysis is adopted. We focus on psychological climates, not on organizational climates (normally measured through the aggregation, at the organizational level, of individual perceptions). The psychological climate can be conceptualized as the “individual’s psychologically meaningful representations of proximal organizational structures, processes, and events” (Parker et al., 2003, p. 390). It enables people to interpret events, predict possible outcomes, and gauge the appropriateness of their subsequent actions. Variation in these perceptions and valuations is likely to result from differences among people, from differences in “real” situations, from the employee-situation interaction, and from perceptual biases (Brown & Leigh, 1996). Although employees in the same organization may share perceptions of the work environment, different employees can also espouse different perceptions of it and, accordingly, react differently to the same environment. Studying psychological climate seems to be an appropriate way to research well-being because, as Haller and Hadler (2006) have pointed out, it is people’s subjective perception and evaluation which are most significant for happiness and satisfaction, not so much the objective situation itself.

**Happiness as Affective Well-Being**

“Happiness” is a lay construct (Wright & Cropanzano, 2004), replete with personal meaning. It is a subjective experience, since people are happy to the extent that they believe themselves to be happy. Scholars tend to treat “happiness” as subjective well-being (Diener et al., 2003) or psychological well-being (PWB; Wright & Cropanzano, 2004). The PWB construct embraces
several components, including affective well-being (i.e., the frequent experience of positive affects and infrequent experience of negative affects), competence, aspiration, autonomy, integrative functioning and satisfaction (Daniels, 2000; Diener, 2000; Diener & Larsen, 1993; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Warr, 1994). In this paper, we focus on affective well-being (AWB). The construct is multidimensional and domain specific, and can be measured in relation to the work domain. Daniels (2000) proposed an AWB at work construct comprising five bi-polar dimensions: anxiety-comfort, depression-pleasure, boredom-enthusiasm, tiredness-vigor and anger-placidity. Measures of AWB are among the most important, if not the most important, indicators of PWB (Daniels, 2000; Diener & Larsen, 1993; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). So, it is acceptable to use the terms “happy” and “happiness” to refer to AWB.

Although happiness has been shown to exhibit consistency over time, and seems to be influenced by neurophysiological structures, personality and inheritable factors (Bouchard, Lykken, McGue, Segal & Tellegen, 1990; Haller & Hadler, 2006), this does not mean that it is immune to change. As Wright and Cropanzano (2004) stated, organizations can promote employee PWB through “situational engineering”. Promoting employees’ PWB is intrinsically good, as the Positive Organizational Scholarship framework has proposed (Cameron, 2007; Cameron et al., 2003). It seems to be a good way for promoting both individual and organizational performance. Through the impetus provided by high levels of PWB, happier employees are more easily able to “broaden-and-build” themselves (Fredrickson, 2001, 2003), becoming more creative, resilient, socially connected, physically and mentally healthy, and more effective as well (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000, 2004; Wright et al., 2002, 2007). Thus, fostering a psychologically positive workforce and work environment can also be a distinct competitive advantage for organizations and a *sine qua non* condition for building healthy work organizations (Wilson et al., 2004).
Opportunities for Learning and Personal Development, Work-Family Conciliation, and Happiness

Opportunities for learning and personal development and AWB

Positive perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development allow people to satisfy their needs for development and personal growth, and reinforce their senses of determination, impact, competence and enjoyment (Kets de Vries, 2001), thus increasing their well-being. These people perceive the job as more intrinsically rewarding and, thus, conducive to feelings of well-being (Diener & Suh, 1999; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Positive perceptions lead to an increase in the perceived meaningfulness of work (Kets de Vries, 2001; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Wrzesniewski, 2003), encouraging people to invest more cognitive and emotional resources in their work, thereby enhancing employee identification with and affective commitment to their work roles and organizations (Brown & Leigh, 1996). These effects, in turn, can lead to well-being and positive affects (Dutton, Duberich, & Harquail, 1994; Herrbach, 2006; Herrbach and Mignonac, 2004). People also develop stronger senses of job competence, self-efficacy, control and autonomy when they perceive high learning opportunities, inducing them to feel more enthusiastic and comfortable in the presence of the job requirements (Daniels, 2000; Hosen, 2003; Luthans, Youssef & Avolio, 2007; Kets de Vries, 2001; Wilson et al., 2004). Positive perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development may also increase the senses of employability and of job security and, thus, engender psychological capital (namely, self-efficacy) and PWB (Burack, Burack & Miller, 1992; Kuhnert & Palmer, 1991; Kuhnert, Sims & Lahey, 1989; Luthans et al., 2007; Wilson et al., 2004). On the contrary, perceptions of lack of opportunities for learning and personal development weaken the senses of determination, impact, competence, control/autonomy, enjoyment and meaning at work, thus lowering AWB (Wilson et al., 2004). Such an absence may also decrease individual sense of employability, leading them to anticipate job insecurity, which, in turn, may cause health problems, ill-being and poor quality of life (Benach et al., 2000; Burchell, 1994; Cheng & Chan, forthcoming; Ferrie, 1999, 2001; Mauno, Kinnunen, Makikangas & Natti,
From this we derive our first hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1**: employees with perceptions of high versus low opportunities for learning and personal development experience higher AWB.

*Work-family conciliation and AWB*

Work-family issues are vital to the well-being of employees (Spector et al., 2004). Work-family conflict decreases career and life satisfaction, impoverishes marital adjustment, and increases unhappiness, stress, depression, anxiety and substance abuse (O’Driscoll et al., 2004; Aycan & Eskin, 2005; Greenhaus et al., 2006; Mauno et al., 2005; Karofsky, Millen, Yilmaz, Smyrnios et al., 2001). Therefore, the perceptions of lack of work-family conciliation can lead to poor quality of life and lower levels of AWB. They may induce employees to feel a lack of organizational support, generating lower AWB (Deborah, Michelle, & Linda, 1993; Richardsen, Burke, and Mikkelsen, 1999; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Ter Doest & De Jonge, 2006). Employees can also lose the sense of meaningfulness at work (Richardsen et al., 1999). On the other hand, when they perceive work-family conciliation, they feel supported by the organization and tend to develop higher well-being (Mauno et al., 2005). They engage more strongly in work and family roles, meet their needs in both of them, experience less stress when participating in both roles, obtain high self-esteem from the competence they achieve in their family and working lives, and reach higher AWB levels (Kinnunen, Mauno, Geurts, & Dikkers, 2005; Marks & MacDermid, 1996; Mauno et al., 2005). Hence:

**Hypothesis 2**: Employees with positive perceptions about work-family conciliation experience greater AWB.

*Interaction effects*
When people perceive positive opportunities for learning and personal development but feel difficulties in reconciling work and family roles, it is likely that they experience stress, discomfort, fatigue, little time for rest and restore energies, low vitality and low well being (Rego & Cunha, 2007a; Deborah et al., 1993; Daniels & Guppy, 1994; Fairbrother & Warn, 2003; Peterson and Seligman, 2004). They may feel that: (a) they cannot benefit from the opportunities for learning and personal development due to work-family conflict; (b) if they invest in taking advantage of such opportunities, the conciliation of work and non-work roles becomes more difficult; (c) if they favor non-work issues, they lose opportunities for personal growth. The opportunities for learning and personal development may develop the employees’ self-efficacy and promote PWB (Luthans et al., 2007), but the difficulties in balancing work and non-work roles may decrease their resiliency (Luthans, Vogelgesang & Lester, 2006), another important dimension of psychological capital, also associated with PWB. In other words: the opportunities for personal growth may be viewed as positive if individuals perceive work-family conciliation, but less positive or even negative in the absence of such conciliation. Thus, we hypothesize that the perceptions of work-family conciliation interact with the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development, in such a way that:

\textit{Hypothesis 3:} when the perceptions of work-family conciliation are low versus high, the positive association between the opportunities for learning and personal development and AWB decreases.

\textbf{Method}

\textit{Participants and Procedures}

A convenience sample of 446 individuals from 133 organizations operating in Portugal was collected. They were young graduate engineers participating in a course in ethics and deontology. The course is compulsory for graduates who wish to become members of the Ordem dos Engenheiros (the national engineering society). Individuals were invited to participate in the study.
before the beginning of the course. Engineers with an organizational tenure of less than six months were not considered for further analysis, as this was the minimum time we considered necessary for people to gain a reliable impression of their organizations. This is a pragmatic criterion and a conservative one as well, considering that other researchers have employed a shorter time as exclusion criteria (e.g., Avis, Kudisch & Fortunato, 2002; Litwinenko & Cooper, 1997). Thus, data regarding 42 individuals were dropped from the study. From the remaining 404 (121 organizations), 27.3% were female. Mean age was 27.9 years (standard deviation: 4.7) and mean organizational tenure was 2.2 years (sd: 2.8 years). 84% were unmarried and 16% married. Individuals held degrees in civil, electronic, telecommunications, agricultural, chemical, mechanical, software and environmental engineering, and they worked in a wide range of industries (e.g., engineering consulting, metallomechanics, water management and treatment, construction, telecommunications, transportation, manufacturing, chemicals, and the automotive industry). Respondents’ answers were anonymous and it was assured that there were no right or wrong answers.

**Measures**

*Opportunities for learning and personal development.* Perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development were measured with the four six-point Likert items used in previous studies by Rego and Cunha (2007a) for measuring the perceptions of what Kets de Vries (2001) labeled “authentizotic organizations”. The items are: (1) “People feel that they can learn continuously”; (2) “People can apply their creativity and imagination to the benefit of the work and the organization”; (3) “People feel that important responsibilities are assigned to them; (4) People feel that they can develop their potential.” Respondents were asked to report the degree to which the statements were false (1) or true (6). Cronbach Alpha is 0.76.
Affective well-being. We measured AWB with the instrument validated by Daniels (2000), measuring the five dimensions mentioned above. Each dimension includes six items, three of which express the frequency of negative affect, and three the frequency of positive affect. We invited participants to think about their feelings over the last three months in the organization, and to answer on a seven-point scale ranging from never (1) to always (7). A confirmatory factor analysis tested the five-factor model identified by Daniels (2000). Considering the unsatisfactory fit indices (e.g., RMSEA: 0.12; GFI: 0.71), standardized residuals and modification indices were analyzed for locating the sources of misspecification (Byrne, 1998; Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998). After deliberate consideration based on both techniques, 14 items were removed (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). A well-fitted 16-item model emerged (Table 1). All reliabilities are higher than 0.70. This model is similar to the one identified in previous studies by Rego and Cunha (2007a, 2007b). Four other models were tested. The single-factor model merges all items in the same factor. The two-factor model (Russell, 1980) comprises the pleasantness–unpleasantness (pleasure + comfort + placidity) and arousal (enthusiasm + vigor) factors. The three-factor model (Daniels, 2000) considers joy-sadness (comfort + pleasure), placidity and arousal (enthusiasm + vigor). The four factor model (Daniels, 2000) considers pleasure, comfort and placidity separately, and merges enthusiasm with vigor. Only the five-factor model fits the data satisfactorily (Table 1).

Table 1

Confirmatory factor analysis for AWB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Five-factor model</th>
<th>Four-factor model</th>
<th>Three-factor model</th>
<th>Two-factor model</th>
<th>Single-factor model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affective well-being</td>
<td>(0.90)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unpleasantness-pleasantness</td>
<td>(0.87)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Joy-sadness</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.78)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depression-pleasure</td>
<td>(0.79)</td>
<td>(0.79)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Depressed (r)</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.81</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheerful</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.71</td>
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<td>0.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anxiety-comfort</td>
<td>(0.71)</td>
<td>(0.71)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anxious (r)</td>
<td>Worried (r)</td>
<td>Tense (r)</td>
<td>Anger-placidity</td>
<td>At ease</td>
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<td>0.55</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Anger-placidity</strong></td>
<td>(0.74)</td>
<td>(0.74)</td>
<td>(0.74)</td>
<td><strong>At ease</strong></td>
<td>0.73</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0.62</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low-high arousal</strong></td>
<td>(0.85)</td>
<td>(0.85)</td>
<td>(0.85)</td>
<td><strong>Boredom-enthusiasm</strong></td>
<td>(0.86)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.84</td>
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<td>0.76</td>
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<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.74</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tiredness-vigor</strong></td>
<td>(0.72)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.41</td>
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<th>7.7</th>
<th>8.6</th>
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<td>Chi-square/df</td>
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<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>RMSEA</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goodness of fit</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted goodness</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative index</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental index</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Completely standardized solution | (r) Reverse-coded items. | In brackets and bold: Cronbach Alphas

**Work-family conciliation.** Perceptions of work-family conciliation were measured with three six-point Likert items used in previous studies by Rego and Cunha (2007a). The items are: (1) “This organization helps employees to reconcile work and family life”; (2) “The organization acts in order to allow people to reconcile work with their family responsibilities”; (3) For advancing in the career, one needs to sacrifice family life (reverse-coded)”. Cronbach Alpha is 0.81.

**Common Method Variance and Independence between Cases**

Because all measures were collected using the same survey instrument, we explored the extent to which common method variance is a concern (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). We
estimated a full measurement model, and then re-estimated the same model after adding an uncorrelated method factor (Williams, Cote, & Buckley, 1989). The fit statistics improved only slightly, and some indices remain unchanged (e.g., RMSEA is 0.06 for both models). The poor fit of the one-factor model (e.g., RMSEA: .15; AGFI: .66) also suggests that common method variance does not pose a serious threat to the validity of our study.

Before proceeding, an ANOVA was run with the organization as independent variable to test the independence between cases. For all the latent variables, no significant differences between organizations are found (i.e., no F-values were significant; p<0.05). This finding is not surprising considering that, in most cases, individuals from the same organization came from different departments, and sometimes from different locations. Furthermore, as suggested by psychological climate theory (Brown & Leigh, 1996; Parker et al., 2003), variation in perceptions is likely to result from differences among people, from differences in situations experienced by each employee, from the employee-situation interaction, and from perceptual biases.

### Results
Means, standard deviations and correlations are presented in Table 2. The perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development correlate positively with all AWB dimensions and with the perceptions of work-family conciliation. All AWB dimensions intercorrelate positively. The perceptions of work-family conciliation correlate positively with all AWB dimensions. Age correlates negatively with the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development, and with pleasure, placidity, enthusiasm and overall AWB. Tenure correlates negatively with the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development, and with enthusiasm.

Table 2
Means, standard deviations and correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Op. for learning &amp; personal</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Work-family conciliation</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Pleasure</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Comfort</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.04</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Placidity</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>0.96</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Enthusiasm</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Vigor</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td></td>
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<td>8. Overall AWB#</td>
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<td>9. Gender##</td>
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<td>10. Marital status###</td>
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<td>11. Age (years)</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Organizational tenure (years)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05  **p<0.01  ***p<0.001
# Mean score of the five affective well being scores
## 1: Female; 2: Male.
### 1: unmarried; 2: married
Note: Alpha reliabilities in brackets.

Hierarchical regression analyses were carried out to investigate the unique predictive power of the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development, of the perceptions of work-family conciliation and of the interaction between both variables. Age was included as a control variable because it correlates significantly with the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development, and with some AWB dimensions (Table 2). Other studies have shown significant relationships between age and happiness, both positive or negative (e.g., Arthaud-Day, Rode, Mooney & Near, 2005; Kafetsios, 2006). Gender, tenure and marital status were also considered as control variables because studies have shown that they relate to well-being (e.g., Diener, Gohm, Suh & Oishi, 2000; Francis-Smythe & Robertson, 2003; Peiro, 2006; Shaw & Gupta, 2004; Westerhof, Thissen, Dittmann-Kohli & Stevens, 2006). In the second step, the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development and of the perceptions of work-family conciliation were entered. The interaction between both variables was entered next. The findings (Table 3) show that the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development predict unique variance of all AWB dimensions except comfort, and the perceptions of work-family conciliation predict unique variance of all AWB dimensions except vigor. Thus, Hypotheses 1 and 2 are supported. In comparison with the perceptions of work-family conciliation, perceptions of
opportunities for learning and personal development are better predictors of pleasure, enthusiasm, vigor and overall AWB, and the perceptions of work-family conciliation are better predictors of comfort and placidity. The interaction between both variables predicts unique variance of pleasure, comfort, enthusiasm and overall AWB.

Table 3
Hierarchical regression analyses: How spirit of camaraderie and need to belong predict AWB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pleasure</th>
<th>Comfort</th>
<th>Placidity</th>
<th>Enthusiasm</th>
<th>Vigor</th>
<th>Overall AWB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender#</td>
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<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marital status##</td>
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<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>0.06</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.17*</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
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<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>2.58*</td>
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<td>1.30</td>
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<td>Adj. R²</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender#</td>
<td>0.02</td>
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<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status##</td>
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<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op. for learn. &amp; pers. devel.</td>
<td>0.35***</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.26***</td>
<td>0.47***</td>
<td>0.35***</td>
<td>0.39***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-family conciliation</td>
<td>0.25***</td>
<td>0.22***</td>
<td>0.30***</td>
<td>0.18***</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.26***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>19.71***</td>
<td>4.54***</td>
<td>16.75***</td>
<td>27.67***</td>
<td>10.00***</td>
<td>26.60***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R²</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ Adj. R²</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 3</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender#</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marital status##</td>
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<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op. for learn. &amp; pers. devel.</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>-0.31*</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.28*</td>
<td>0.37**</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-family conciliation</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.48*</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction (op. for learn. &amp; pers. devel. x work-family conciliation)</td>
<td>0.42*</td>
<td>0.88**</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.42*</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.53*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>17.35***</td>
<td>5.38***</td>
<td>14.62***</td>
<td>24.23***</td>
<td>8.55**</td>
<td>21.06***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R²</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ Adj. R²</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>*p&lt;0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>**p&lt;0.01</td>
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<td>***p&lt;0.001</td>
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# 1: Female; 2: Male.
## 1: unmarried; 2: married

For exploring the interaction pattern, we divided the sample according to three levels (i.e., terciles) of the perceptions of work-family conciliation, and crossed them with five levels (i.e., quintiles) of the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development. The findings (Figures 1 to 6) suggest the following: (a) the highest AWB scores (except for vigor) emerge when perceptions of high opportunities for learning and personal development combine with perceptions of high work-family conciliation; (b) the lowest AWB scores (except for comfort) emerge when perceptions of low opportunities for learning and personal development combine with perceptions of low/middle work-family conciliation; (c) the relationship between the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development and AWB tends to be nonlinear mainly for those with perceptions of low work-family conciliation (in the Figures, “Poly” means “polynomial” and the line depicts the trendline representing polynomial regression). These individuals tend to decrease (or keep at a similar level) their AWB when perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development move from the middle to high level. They reach the highest AWB scores (except for enthusiasm) when their perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development are average (levels 3 and 4), not high (level 5). When the perceptions of work-family conciliation are low, the high opportunities for learning and personal development are especially detrimental for comfort (Figure 2). In the meanwhile, the findings support Hypothesis 3.

Figure 1
How the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development cross with the perceptions of work-family conciliation in predicting pleasure
Figure 2

How the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development cross with the perceptions of work-family conciliation in predicting comfort
Figure 3
How the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development cross with the perceptions of work-family conciliation in predicting placidity.
Figure 4

How the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development cross with the perceptions of work-family conciliation in predicting enthusiasm
Figure 5

How the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development cross with the perceptions of work-family conciliation in predicting vigor
Figure 6

How the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development cross with the perceptions of work-family conciliation in predicting overall affective well-being.
Discussion and conclusions

Main findings

Our results suggest that the perceptions of high opportunities for learning and personal development and of work-family conciliation associate with higher AWB. In comparison with the perceptions of high opportunities for learning and personal development, the perceptions of work-family conciliation are better predictors of comfort and placidity, both being dimensions of the unpleasantness-pleasantness dimension of AWB. The perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development are comparatively better predictors of pleasure and enthusiasm and vigor, both being dimensions of the low-high arousal dimension of AWB. On the whole (i.e., taking into account the overall AWB), the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development are better predictors than the perceptions of work-family conciliation, but both are relevant.
Since our study does not address objective organizational features, the only inference one can make is that organizations may increase employees’ AWB if they nurture the employees’ positive perceptions on both dimensions of the psychological climate. However, “perception is reality to the affected individuals” (Herndon, 1992, p. 45). If, as Haller and Hadler (2006) argued, it is people’s subjective perception and evaluation that are most significant for PWB, managers must act to influence employees’ perceptions, not only to change the “real” work environment. One implication is that assessments of employees’ perceptions may be part of interventions attempting to improve the quality of work life, to reduce employee turnover and to improve motivation and performance (Parker et al., 2003). However, managing only perceptions is neither enough nor recommendable. A purely instrumental strategy, lacking sustainable support in the way that organizations and managers act toward employees, can give rise to the false appearance of a healthy workplace (Greenberg, 1990), thus inducing employee cynicism (Andersson, 1996; Andersson & Bateman, 1997), damaging trust, lowering organizational commitment and job satisfaction, leading to emotional exhaustion and impairing performance (Bradley, Erickson, Stephenson & Williams, 2000; Brandes & Das, 2006; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002a, 2002b; Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly, 2003; Robinson, 1996). Managers must be aware of employees’ perceptions and be willing to make adjustments accordingly, but they should not be focused solely on employee perceptions – rather they must actively operate upon the real and deep sources of organizational health (Quick & Macik-Frey, 2007; Wilson et al., 2004).

Admitting that acting upon the organizational reality is necessary, but not enough, for encouraging the desired perceptions (at least, in the long run), organizations and managers must provide opportunities for learning and personal development to their employees, as well as allow them to reconcile their work and family roles. In this way, they are able to promote the employees’ happiness and, hopefully, their performance (Fredrickson, 2001, 2003; Wright & Cropanzano, 2004). Both aspects of organizational climate must be managed. If organizations provide
opportunities for learning and personal development but do not grant a certain level of work-family conciliation, those opportunities risk not only failing to lead to higher levels of happiness, but may even decrease employees’ happiness. Obviously, employees do not value such opportunities in the same way. They have different aspirations, motivations and social, cognitive and emotional resources, so they do not see and face organizational situations in the same way. The work-family conciliation is not a mere consequence of organizational actions and HRM politics. Individuals value differently their work and family roles differently, and they have different resources for coping with the challenges from both domains. This does not minimize the relevance of the employees’ perceptions, rather it challenges managers and organizations to understand how they emerge from the interaction between organizational features and individual characteristics.

Our study also calls attention to the nonlinear relationships between perceived organizational features and happiness. Improving the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development is not linearly and necessarily conducive to higher employee happiness. Figures 1 to 6 suggest that, as the opportunities for learning and personal development increase, the positive effects upon happiness diminish (and are even negative in some cases), mainly when employees perceive low work-family conciliation (see Figures 2, 5 and 6). It is not possible to state that the opportunities for learning and personal development are the causes of these effects, but rather their antecedents and/or contextual factors are (e.g., organization operating in a new industry with high growth rates; a very competitive performance appraisal system). In any case, the findings suggest that researchers must be more attentive to the nonlinear relationships between constructs, guarding themselves against the possibility of ignoring complex empirical relationships hidden behind weak correlations and regression coefficients. In our study, for the employees who have perceptions of low work-family conciliation, the opportunities for learning and personal development predict only 9% of unique variance (after control variables) of overall AWB (Beta: 0.33, p<0.001), against 24% for those who have perceptions of high work-family conciliation (Beta: 0.50, p<0.001). But careful
attention (Figures 1 to 6) shows that the numbers do not mirror the real empirical pattern between the opportunities for learning and personal development and happiness. De Jonge and Schaufeli (1998) also found that non linear relationships exist between job characteristics and employee well-being. In practice, managers need to be cognizant of the fact that improvements in some organizational conditions are not always associated with favorable reactions when managing employees, at least if other conditions are not observed.

Limitations and avenues for future research

The use of self-report measures for collecting data about all variables can result in method bias. The problem is difficult to address because all variables are perceptual in nature and/or can only be measured via queries to the individuals themselves. It does not make sense to use hetero-report questionnaires for measuring AWB, or to ask employee A to report employee B’s perceptions of organizational conditions. The tests showed that a significant amount of common method variance is not present in our data. In any case, future studies may obtain data about independent and dependent variables at different times. Another possibility is to aggregate perceptions of work-family conciliation at the team or organizational levels and test if employees with different perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development develop distinct levels of AWB in the presence of the same “objective” (i.e., aggregated) collective features. Conversely, studies may aggregate the perceptions of opportunities for learning and personal development at the individual or team level and investigate if individuals with different perceptions of work-family conciliation develop different levels of AWB in the presence of the same “objective” collective features. Due to the cross-sectional nature of our study, a causal relationship between the perceptions of organizational climate and AWB cannot be established. In fact, experiencing high AWB may lead individuals to be more optimistic, hopeful, resilient and more able to reconcile work and family roles, and lead them to see opportunities for learning and personal development where others see obstacles and difficulties (George, 2000). Both AWB and the perceptions of
organizational conditions may also be caused by a third variable (e.g., positive affectivity; psychological capital). Experimental or quasi-experimental data may also be used in future studies.

Our study was carried out in a single national culture, characterized by high family collectivism (Nikandrou, Apospori & Papalexandris, 2003). Considering that culture may influence the sources of AWB and the way individuals of different cultures see and react to the working contexts (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; Fineman, 2006), future studies may test if the empirical pattern found here is replicated in cultures scoring low in family collectivism. Future studies may also test the moderating role of family collectivism at the individual level of analysis: (a) are individuals who score high versus low in family collectivism more sensitive to the perceptions of work-family conciliation?; (b) do they experience higher stress and lower AWB when they perceive high opportunities for learning and personal development and few conditions for balancing work and family roles? Other candidates to the moderating role are the number of children, spouse participation in the domestic activities, and the career aspirations of the employee and/or her/his spouse. The marital status may also be tested as potential moderator in future studies, although our research shows no impact of such a variable. Another limitation of our study is that all individuals were young engineers attending training courses, and were thus not representative of the “average” worker. Future studies may thus collect more diverse samples.

Final remarks

Studying happiness at work is a valuable aim from the individual, organizational and societal perspectives (Diener, 2000; Diener et al., 2003). Our study enriches the knowledge about the sources of a healthy organization (Wilson et al., 2004). As Frederickson (2003, p. 175) stated, “[e]fforts to cultivate positive emotions may help organizations avoid stagnation and achieve harmony, energy, and perhaps even prosperity.” However, “all that glitters is not gold” (Lopes & Cunha, 2006), so it is not foolish to admit possible negative effects of positive emotions, and vice-
versa (Fineman, 2006; Roberts, 2006). As such, as suggested by Roberts (2006, p 296), future studies may adopt integrative approaches to generate new insights into the subtle connections between positive and negative dynamics.

**References**


