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Research Article

123, SMILE!: Workplace Happiness of Hotel Employees in Subic Bay Freeport Zone (SBFZ)

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed workplace happiness and work motivation among hotel employees in the Subic Bay Freeport Zone (SBFZ) using a convergent-parallel mixed-methods design. Sixty-five rank-and-file employees from selected hotels completed a structured questionnaire measuring rewards, proper training, and work relationships, together with open-ended questions on sources of happiness, workplace challenges, and improvement strategies. Quantitative data were summarized using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and standard deviation. Mann-Whitney U tests were used for two-group comparisons, while Kruskal-Wallis H tests were used for profile variables with more than two categories; qualitative responses were analyzed thematically. Work relationships received the highest rating (M = 3.88, SD = 0.21), followed by proper training (M = 3.73, SD = 0.27) and rewards (M = 3.61, SD = 0.26). Motivation scores did not differ significantly by sex, type of work, monthly income, or educational attainment. Employment status, however, was significantly associated with proper-training ratings (U = 339, p = 0.031). Qualitative findings emphasized guest interaction and service, teamwork and supportive relationships, and opportunities for personal and professional growth. Integrating both strands indicates that workplace happiness in SBFZ hotels is strongly relational and is reinforced by equitable access to training, recognition, communication, and supportive work environments.

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Introduction

Employee well-being is critical to service quality in the hospitality sector because hotel operations depend heavily on direct interactions between guests and employees. In tourism destinations such as the Subic Bay Freeport Zone (SBFZ), hotels contribute to local employment while shaping visitors' service experiences.

Consequently, employees' workplace happiness and motivation can influence organizational performance and customer service. Workplace happiness is commonly associated with job satisfaction, work engagement, and positive emotional attachment to the organization (Bhuvaneswari & Poulpunitha, 2019; Gangwani et al., 2020).

Workplace happiness has also become an important management concern because poor mental health and work-related strain can undermine productivity and employee functioning. The World Health Organization (2024) identifies mental health at work as a major public-health and organizational issue. Hospitality employees may experience demanding workloads and emotional labor, making it important for managers to understand the conditions that sustain motivation and positive workplace experiences.

Previous hospitality research has examined employee job satisfaction and motivation in relation to training, rewards, managerial support, and workplace relationships (Amissah et al., 2016; Borralha et al., 2016; Phathara & Phiphatseritham, 2020). However, localized evidence on workplace happiness among hotel employees in SBFZ remains limited.

This study addresses that gap by integrating quantitative measures of work motivation with qualitative accounts of workplace happiness, challenges, and employee-recommended strategies.

Objectives

This study aimed to assess workplace happiness among hotel employees in the Subic Bay Freeport Zone (SBFZ). Specifically, it sought to:

1. describe the respondents in terms of sex, employment status, type of work, monthly income, fringe benefits, and educational attainment;
2. determine the level of work motivation in terms of rewards, work relationships, and proper training;
3. determine whether motivation scores differ according to selected respondent-profile variables;
4. identify the major factors that contribute to hotel employees' workplace happiness;
5. identify workplace challenges that influence employees' happiness; and
6. identify strategies that hotel management may adopt to strengthen employee workplace happiness.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

The study employed a convergent-parallel mixed-methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same phase, analyzed separately, and then integrated during interpretation. The quantitative strand described motivation patterns and tested differences across selected employee-profile groups, while the qualitative strand captured employees' accounts of workplace happiness, challenges, and improvement strategies. This design was appropriate because convergence between numerical patterns and employee narratives could provide a more complete explanation of workplace happiness than either strand alone (Razali et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2024).

Research Locale, Respondents, and Sampling

The study was conducted in selected hotels in the Subic Bay Freeport Zone (SBFZ), Philippines. A total of 65 rank-and-file hotel employees participated, including front desk agents, housekeeping staff, maintenance personnel, cooks, waiters/waitresses, and dishwashers. Simple random sampling was used to select eligible respondents.

The sample of 65 was adequate for the descriptive analysis; however, its relatively limited size may reduce the statistical power of subgroup comparisons, particularly for categories with few respondents. Thus, the findings should be interpreted within the context of the participating hotels, and broader generalization should be made with caution.

Research Instrument and Data Gathering

Data were collected using a structured research questionnaire composed of five sections: respondent profile, work motivation, open-ended questions on workplace happiness, open-ended questions on workplace challenges, and open-ended questions on strategies that hotels could implement to improve employee happiness. The motivation section assessed rewards, proper training, and work relationships using a four-point Likert scale. The questionnaire underwent expert review and was pilot-tested with 30 employees occupying different hotel positions in Pundaquit. The pilot test produced a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90, indicating high internal consistency for the scale rather than evidence of construct validity.

After expert review and pilot testing, permission was obtained from the participating hoteliers before data collection. Questionnaires were administered to the selected respondents, retrieved after completion, and checked for completeness. Closed-ended responses were encoded for statistical analysis, while open-ended responses were prepared for thematic coding.

Data Analysis

Respondent-profile variables were summarized using frequency counts and percentages. Motivation ratings were summarized using weighted means and standard deviations on the four-point Likert scale shown in Table 1. Because the profile variables produced independent groups and the subgroup distributions were small or uneven, nonparametric tests were used for between-group comparisons. Mann-Whitney U tests were applied to variables with two groups (sex and employment status). Kruskal-Wallis H tests, reported with the chi-square approximation, were applied to variables with more than two groups (type of work, monthly income, and educational attainment). These tests evaluate differences in score distributions/ranks rather than differences in arithmetic means. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. Open-ended responses were analyzed thematically by coding recurring ideas, grouping related codes into themes, reviewing the themes against the responses, and integrating the qualitative findings with the quantitative results during interpretation.

Table 1. Interpretation Scale for the Survey Questionnaire

Range of ratings	Interpretation
3.50 - 4.00	Strongly Agree
2.50 - 3.49	Agree
1.50 - 2.49	Disagree
1.00 - 1.49	Strongly Disagree

Results

Profile of Respondents

The sample was nearly balanced by sex, with 34 females (52.3%) and 31 males (47.7%). Permanent employees accounted for 41 respondents (63.1%), while 24 (36.9%) were contractual. Front desk agents formed the largest occupational group (n = 15), followed by housekeeping staff (n = 14). Monthly-income information was available for 63 respondents; most reported earnings between PHP 12,000 and PHP 20,000. Fringe benefits were multiple-response items, so their percentages are not expected to total 100%. College graduates comprised the largest educational group (n = 35, 53.8%). Table 2 presents the cleaned frequency and percentage distribution.

Table 2. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Hotel Employee Respondents (N = 65)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Female	34	52.3%
	Male	31	47.7%
Employment status	Permanent	41	63.1%
	Contractual	24	36.9%
Type of work	Front desk agent	15	23.1%
	Housekeeping	14	21.5%
	Maintenance	10	15.4%
	Cook	10	15.4%
	Waiter/Waitress	9	13.8%
	Dishwasher	7	10.8%
Monthly income	PHP 12,000 to PHP 15,000	26	40.0%
	PHP 15,000 to PHP 20,000	23	35.4%
	PHP 20,000 to PHP 25,000	13	20.0%
	Above PHP 25,000	1	1.5%
Fringe benefit	Training privilege	1	1.5%
	Free meal	31	47.7%
	Free uniform	28	43.1%
	Communication subsidy	6	9.2%
	Transportation subsidy	9	13.8%
	Health insurance	17	26.2%
	Birthday leave	20	30.8%
Educational attainment	High school graduate	2	3.1%
	Senior high school graduate	16	24.6%
	College undergraduate	3	4.6%
	College graduate	35	53.8%
	Special program	9	13.8%

Note: Monthly-income responses were available for 63 of 65 respondents. Fringe benefits were multiple-response items; percentages were recalculated using n = 65 as the denominator and therefore may total more than 100%.

Motivation at Work

All three motivational dimensions were rated Strongly Agree. Work relationships received the highest mean score (M = 3.88, SD = 0.21), followed by proper training (M = 3.73, SD = 0.27) and rewards (M = 3.61, SD = 0.26). The results indicate that interpersonal relationships and access to appropriate training were especially salient components of workplace motivation among the respondents (Table 3).

Table 3. Motivation at Work of Hotel Employees

Item	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Rewards	3.61	0.26	Strongly Agree
Proper training	3.73	0.27	Strongly Agree
Work relationship	3.88	0.21	Strongly Agree

Comparison of Work Motivation by Profile Variables

Table 4 summarizes the nonparametric comparisons. Mann-Whitney U tests were used for the two-group variables sex and employment status, whereas Kruskal-Wallis H tests were used for type of work, monthly income, and educational attainment because these variables contained more than two categories. No significant differences were found in rewards, proper training, or work relationships by sex, type of work, monthly income, or educational

attainment (all p > 0.05). Employment status was the only profile variable associated with a significant difference: proper-training ratings differed between permanent and contractual employees (U = 339, p = 0.031). The available summary data do not include group-specific medians or mean ranks, so the direction of this difference should not be inferred from Table 4 alone.

Table 4. Summary of Statistical Comparisons of Work Motivation

Grouping variable	Motivational factor	Test statistic	p-value	Interpretation
Sex	Rewards	U = 480	0.529	Not significant
Sex	Proper training	U = 490	0.618	Not significant
Sex	Work relationship	U = 422	0.097	Not significant
Employment status	Rewards	U = 379	0.113	Not significant
Employment status	Proper training	U = 339	0.031	Significant
Employment status	Work relationship	U = 406	0.158	Not significant
Type of work	Rewards	H = 2.58, df = 5	0.765	Not significant
Type of work	Proper training	H = 5.32, df = 5	0.378	Not significant
Type of work	Work relationship	H = 4.21, df = 5	0.520	Not significant
Monthly income	Rewards	H = 5.29, df = 3	0.381	Not significant
Monthly income	Proper training	H = 5.04, df = 3	0.411	Not significant
Monthly income	Work relationship	H = 7.48, df = 3	0.187	Not significant
Educational attainment	Rewards	H = 1.53, df = 4	0.821	Not significant
Educational attainment	Proper training	H = 4.96, df = 4	0.291	Not significant
Educational attainment	Work relationship	H = 7.89, df = 4	0.096	Not significant

Note: p < 0.05 indicates statistical significance. U = Mann-Whitney U statistic for two-group comparisons; H = Kruskal-Wallis test statistic for multi-group comparisons, evaluated using the chi-square approximation.

Qualitative Themes on Workplace Happiness,Challenges, and Strategies

The qualitative strand complemented the quantitative results by showing how relational and service experiences were expressed in employees' own accounts. Guest interaction and service was the most frequently coded source of workplace happiness (9 mentions), followed by teamwork and a supportive environment (6) and personal and professional growth (5). These themes converged with the quantitative finding that work relationships received the highest motivation rating (M = 3.88). Employees also emphasized timely salary payment, clear communication and accountability, respect, empathy, active listening, and teamwork when describing workplace challenges and how they were managed. Suggested strategies centered on appreciation and communication, training and development, and respectful collaboration with coworkers and customers. Thus, the qualitative evidence did not merely repeat the survey results; it explained why relationships, communication, and developmental support were experienced as important sources of workplace happiness.

Table 5. Selected Qualitative Themes and Frequencies

Research focus	Theme	Frequency
Sources of workplace happiness	Guest interaction and service	9
	Teamwork and supportive environment	6
	Personal and professional growth	5
Management: policies and operations	Multiple methods of information dissemination	6
	Clear communication and accountability	6
Management: payroll	Timely salary payment	11
Coworker interaction	Respect and consideration	6
	Teamwork and support	6

Research focus	Theme	Frequency
	Valuing roles	5
Employee understanding	Open communication	8
	Empathy	7
Handling angry customers/complaints	Clear communication and calm listening	9 each
	Sincere apology and active listening	7; 6
Suggested hotel strategies	Appreciation and communication	9
	Training and development	6
	Salary and service charge	3
Suggested employee practices	Respect and collaboration	9
	Create a positive environment	7
	Open communication	3
Suggested customer practices	Respect and understanding	10
	Acknowledgement and appreciation	9

Note: Frequencies in Table 5 represent coded mentions within the qualitative responses; themes were not mutually exclusive.

Discussion

In conclusion, the research indicates that hotel management in SBFZ needs to develop its resources based on already existing strengths in place. Hotel management can create programs that emphasize cooperation through teamwork, appreciates employee input, and provides the opportunity for positive feedback on behalf of guests, as opposed to relying solely on financial incentives. Considering the fact that the study was limited by both case establishment and a total sample size of 65 employees, future studies will take place with an expanded subject group as well as with comparisons being made between different hotel categories with the intent of learning about the relationship between employee satisfaction and actual customer service standards through survey measurements.

The integrated findings indicate that workplace happiness among SBFZ hotel employees has a strong relational orientation. Quantitatively, work relationships obtained the highest score (M = 3.88), ahead of proper training and rewards. Qualitatively, guest interaction and service was the most frequently cited source of happiness, while teamwork and a supportive environment was the next most prominent theme. The convergence of these findings suggests that employees derive workplace happiness not only from formal organizational provisions but also from daily social exchanges with guests and coworkers. Positive customer encounters may provide immediate feedback and a sense of service accomplishment, while supportive coworker relationships may reduce the interpersonal strain of emotionally demanding hospitality work. This synthesis is consistent with studies emphasizing coworker support, quality of work life, work engagement, and customer-facing relationships as important to hotel employee well-being (Avci, 2017; Lahap et al., 2022; Phathara & Phiphatseritham, 2020).

Proper training also emerged as an important motivator (M = 3.73) and was the only dimension showing a significant profile-based difference, specifically by employment status (U = 339, p = 0.031). This result means that permanent and contractual employees did not evaluate proper training in the same way. The available summary table does not retain the group-specific medians or mean ranks, so the direction of the difference cannot be stated confidently. Nevertheless, employment arrangements can plausibly shape access to professional development: permanent employees may be more routinely included in recurring training, career-development activities, or formal performance systems, whereas contractual employees may receive more limited, role-specific, or onboarding-oriented instruction. In a service industry where employees often perform comparable customer-facing tasks, unequal access to training can affect confidence,

perceived fairness, skill development, and motivation. The finding therefore supports training systems that are accessible to both permanent and contractual employees, while future analysis should retain group-specific score summaries to clarify the direction and magnitude of the difference (Ahammad, 2013; Baum et al., 2016; Deery & Jago, 2015).

Rewards were also rated positively (M = 3.61), although the qualitative responses emphasized social and relational sources of happiness more strongly than monetary incentives. Employees referred to appreciation, acknowledgement, communication, timely salary payment, and respectful treatment as meaningful workplace experiences. This suggests that hotel reward systems should combine fair material compensation with nonmonetary recognition that employees perceive as timely and sincere. Research in hospitality similarly indicates that reward systems are most motivating when both monetary and nonmonetary forms of recognition are viewed as fair and meaningful (Salazar, 2021; Samat et al., 2024; Tumati & Al Yousfi, 2023).

The qualitative themes further identified workplace processes that may protect or strengthen employee happiness. Clear dissemination of policies, timely salary payment, respect, empathy, open communication, and active listening were repeatedly mentioned in relation to management, coworker interaction, and customer complaints. These responses suggest that employees view workplace happiness as connected to predictable organizational systems and interpersonal respect. Communication and listening appear particularly important in the hospitality setting because employees must manage both internal coordination and emotionally demanding guest encounters.

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative strands indicate that hotel management can build on existing relational strengths while improving the consistency of developmental support. Programs that reinforce teamwork, employee recognition, guest-feedback mechanisms, respectful communication, and inclusive training may be more responsive to the pattern observed in the data than strategies that rely on financial incentives alone.

Study Limitations

The study should be interpreted in light of its sample size and subgroup structure. The total sample of 65 respondents supports descriptive interpretation within the selected hotels but provides limited statistical power for subgroup comparisons, particularly where categories were small or uneven. For example, only one respondent was included in the above-PHP 25,000 income category, while some fringe-benefit categories also had sparse counts. Although nonparametric tests reduce distributional assumptions, they do not eliminate the instability associated with very small subgroups; therefore, nonsignificant results should not be interpreted as evidence that groups are equivalent. Future studies should recruit larger samples across different hotel categories and preserve group-specific statistics, such as medians or mean ranks, to improve statistical power and strengthen the interpretation and generalizability of the findings.

Conclusions

Hotel employees in SBFZ reported high workplace motivation across rewards, proper training, and work relationships, with work relationships emerging as the strongest quantitative dimension. The qualitative findings reinforced this relational pattern by emphasizing guest interaction, teamwork, supportive environments, respect, and communication as important sources of workplace happiness.

Motivation scores did not differ significantly by sex, type of work, monthly income, or educational attainment. Employment status, however, was associated with a significant difference in proper-training ratings ($U = 339$, $p = 0.031$), indicating that permanent and contractual employees perceived this aspect of workplace motivation differently. Because subgroup direction was not retained in the available summary, the result should be interpreted as evidence of a difference rather than as proof that one employment group had better access to training.

The mixed-methods integration shows that workplace happiness is supported by both organizational provisions and day-to-day relational experiences. Hotel management may therefore strengthen employee well-being by

providing inclusive professional development, maintaining fair and timely rewards, reinforcing respectful communication and teamwork, and recognizing positive guest-service experiences.

Because the study involved only 65 respondents and several small subgroups, profile-based comparisons should be treated as exploratory. Future research should use larger, clearly documented sampling frames across multiple hotel categories and preserve subgroup-level statistics to examine the observed employment-status difference more precisely.

Within these limitations, the findings provide localized evidence that hotel employee happiness in SBFZ is strongly connected to work relationships, developmental support, recognition, and communication.

Declarations

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The data summarized in this article are based on the uploaded source thesis and may be requested from the researchers, subject to institutional approval.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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