

## The mediating effect of employee happiness on the relationship between quality of work-life and employee intention to quit: A study on fast-food restaurants in Jordan

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### CHRONICLE

#### Article history:

Received: July 20, 2020  
Received in revised format:  
September 10 2020  
Accepted: October 1, 2020  
Available online:  
October 1, 2020

#### Keywords:

Quality of Work-Life  
Employee Happiness  
Intention to Quit  
Fast-food Restaurants  
Jordan

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the mediating role of employee happiness in the effect of the quality of work-life on employee intention to quit. Data were collected using a questionnaire developed regarding prior related works. It was administered to a sample consisted of 122 employees selected from four fast-food restaurants in Jordan. Data analysis was conducted using structural equation modelling via Smart-PLS3; the results revealed that the quality of life had significant direct effects on both employee happiness and employee intention to quit. The first effect was positive, while the second was negative. Employee happiness had a significant impact on employee intention to quit. Consequently, the results indicated that employee happiness played a significant mediating role in the effect of the quality of work-life on employee intention to quit. It was concluded that the quality of work-life is not enough to reduce employee intention to quit, which means that organization should pay great attention to employee happiness to ensure the positive effect of the quality of life and to reduce employee intention to quit.

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## 1. Introduction

Organizational assets such as human assets are deemed as core components required for organizational success. Human assets in organizations have an effectual role in this regard due to their positive outcomes (Al-Adamat & Alserhan, 2020). Since organizations are engaged in providing their customers with additional values through numerous practices like developing good relationships with their customers and improving the quality of their products and services, employees stand as a crucial pillar in all these organizational efforts. Therefore, organizations should pay their employees great attention via ensuring their satisfaction, loyalty, engagement, as well as happiness. The quality of employee work-life has gained significant importance from both academics and practitioners in response to its effects such as increasing employee satisfaction, involvement, and performance while reducing his or her intention to leave the organization (Sirgy et al., 2001; Swamy et al., 2005; Martel & Dupuis, 2006; Almalki et al., 2012). One of the most important outcomes of the quality of work-life is employee happiness (Tzeng, 2002; Chaiprasit & Santidhiraku, 2011; Al-Adamat & Alserhan, 2020). Employee happiness, in this regard, encourages the employee to stay with the organization, or in other words, reduce his or her intention to seek another position in another organization (Al-Ali et al., 2019). Therefore, it was expected that employee happiness exerts a significant effect on the relationship between the quality of work-life and employee intention to quit. In order to verify the potential effect of employee happiness, the current study took place. What justifies the current study is that organizations suppose that the quality of work-life is enough to lessen employee intention to leave the organization. This study seeks to highlight the role that employee happiness would play in this regard. In the absence of previous studies that tackled the mediating role of employee

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happiness in the effect of the quality of work-life and employee intention to quit, this study contributes to the literature on factors affecting employee intention to quit. As well, organizations could benefit from the findings of the study in designing programs that align the quality of work-life and employee happiness with retaining employees, particularly those who are talented and have valuable experiences.

The remainder of the study is constructed as follows. Section 2 presents the literature review and hypothesis development, followed by section 3 in which research methodology was introduced. Empirical results and discussion are shown in section 4, followed by conclusion and implication and study limitation and future research in sections 5 and 6, respectively.

## **2. Literature review and hypothesis development**

### *2.1 Quality of work-life (QWL)*

QWL term was used first by Irving Bluestone in the late 1960s in the USA. QWL aimed to evaluate employee satisfaction for introducing programs to elevate their productivity (Goode, 1989, cited in Martel & Dupuis, 2006). QWL has been defined as a construct of employee wellbeing. It should be noted that QWL differs from employee job satisfaction (Sirgy et al., 2001). It was also defined as employee satisfaction with both personal and work needs that can be achieved through participation in the workplace during his or her endeavor to achieve the organizational goals (Swamy et al., 2005; Almalki et al., 2012). In terms of its dimensions, QWL was described as a construct of four dimensions, which were health and functional status, life satisfaction, socioeconomic status, and self-esteem (George & Bearon, 1980, in Farquhar, 1995). In their study on QWL measurement, Sirgy et al. (2001) conceptualized QWL in terms of satisfaction seven needs related to health and safety needs, economic and family needs, social needs, esteem needs, knowledge needs, actualization needs, and aesthetics needs. Swamy et al. (2005) measured QWL using nine dimensions, which were job satisfaction and job security, facilities, training and development, organizational culture and climate, work environment, relations and cooperation, compensation and rewards, work autonomy, as well as resource adequacy.

### *2.2 Employee happiness (EH)*

EH refers to employee psychological wellbeing (Al-Ali et al., 2019) and related to life satisfaction, presence of positive emotional experience, as well the absence of negative emotional experience (Rego & Cunha, 2008). Generally, employee happiness can be divided into two types: life happiness and job happiness (Wesarat et al., 2015). For some scholars (e.g., Scott et al., 2003), happiness at work is related to job satisfaction. Other authors indicated that job satisfaction is one aspect of job happiness, which also encompasses employee engagement and employee commitment. Regarding the measurements of job happiness, scholars evaluated this construct by asking respondents to report their happiness in psychological, spiritual, and social domains (Golparvar & Abedini, 2014). Employee happiness was conceptualized in terms of two aspects, which are positive affect and negative affect (Bosman et al., 2005). Another dimension had been added, which is a fulfillment and personal accomplishment (Omar et al., 2018). These three dimensions were used in the current study as dimensions of EH.

### *2.3 Employee intention to quit (ITQ)*

ITQ has been defined in terms of two states. First, employee intention to leave the organization. Second, employee disengagement and therefore perform the minimum level of job requirements (Çankır & Arıkan, 2019). Definitions of ITQ cited by Hussein (2015) show that this term is related to employee willingness to seek an alternative job in another organization. It was also defined as employees resign from the workplace (Miligi et al., 2019). Many reasons were suggested in the literature as reasonable grounds for employee leave. For instant, low levels of job satisfaction, commitment, and engagement, job security, employee appreciation, as well as the quality of work environment (Markey et al., 2012). Other reasons include inadequate employee skills, job instability, lack of appreciation, work-life imbalance, and lack of training and growth opportunities (Mendis, 2017). As for ITQ measurement, scholars used several items related to employee search for another position in another organization, employee planning to resign the current organization, employee waiting for an opportunity to leave the organization, and an actual leave in the future (Lacap, 2019).

### *2.4 Relationships between QWL, EH, and ITQ*

Much research was carried out on employee outcomes like job satisfaction, employee engagement, employee job performance, and employee intention to quit, for example. However, the literature on employee happiness is still limited (Wesarat et al., 2015). The significant effects of QWL on employee behavior are well documented in the literature. Examples of such effects include increasing employee job satisfaction, employee job involvement, employee job performance, and decreasing employee intention to quit (Sirgy et al., 2001). Almalki, et al. (2012) studied QWL in healthcare settings in Saudi Arabia and found that employee QWL is affected by several factors like the inability to balance family and work needs, inappropriate working environment, as well as job security. This study is one of the other studies (e.g., Tzeng, 2002) that highlighted the importance of the work environment in increasing employee job satisfaction and happiness. Chairprasisit & Santidhiraku (2011) indicated that employee happiness is affected by some factors like QWL, job inspiration, relationships with co-workers, leadership role, and the organization's shared values. In one vein of the literature, scholars emphasized the importance of employee happiness in order to ensure positive employee outcomes. According to Al-Adamat and Alserhan (2020), employee happiness in very critical to ensure their engagement. Al-Ali et al. (2019) added that employee happiness exerts a significant positive effect on employee performance and a significant negative effect on employee turnover intention. Numerous positive outcomes of a happy employee were reported in the literature, like increased levels of productivity, decreased sick days and

less intention to quit, better performance in leadership careers, more willingness to serve customers, as well as more adaptability to change. Basically, employee happiness increases the attractiveness of an organization (de Waal, 2018). Furthermore, employee happiness was found to exert significant effects on other variables, such as employee retention and employee performance (Howard & Gould, 2000). For Othman et al. (2018), happiness is positively related to life and work conditions. Tzeng (2002) indicated that there is a significant impact of employee happiness on employee intention to quit. That is, higher levels of happiness result in lower levels of intention to quit. The relationship between QWL, EH, and ITQ can be explained through positive emotion theory, which assumes that employees who receive positive feedback and appreciation are more likely to develop positive responses and thoughts. On the contrary, employees who lack positive feedback or appreciation have a reason to leave the organization (Çankır & Arkan, 2019). Investigating the effect of QWL on employee intention to quit, Markey et al. (2012) found that employees who perceive their work environment as a good workplace are less likely to quit their jobs. Moreover, researchers suggested that organizations should adopt strategies to enhance QWL, employee happiness and to reduce employee intention to quit (Mendis, 2017). Based on the studies mentioned above, the following hypothesis was postulated:

Ha: QWL plays a significant mediating role in the effect of employee happiness on employee intention to quit.

In order to test such a hypothesis, the effect of QWL on EH should be investigated first, and then the effect of QWL on employee ITQ should be examined. Third, the effect of EH on ITQ should be identified. The results of these three sub-hypotheses reveal the direct and indirect effects of QWL on ITQ. The significant indirect effect represents a sign of a mediating role of EH.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research sample and data collection

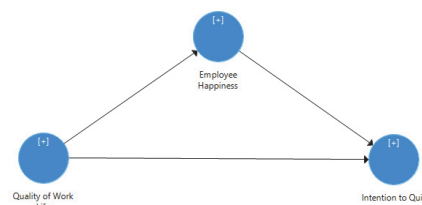
The sample of this study consisted of 122 employees working at four fast-food restaurants in Jordan, i.e., McDonald's, Popeyes, Pizza Hut, and KFC. The sample consisted of 122 participants. Hence, 122 questionnaires were distributed to sample members, and 110 questionnaires are returned with a response rate of 90%. Nine incomplete questionnaires were excluded; therefore, data analysis was conducted using 101 responses. Data were collected using a questionnaire developed regarding related works. Concerning respondents' personal data, it was noted that 70.29% ( $n = 71$ ) of them were males and 29.70% ( $n = 30$ ) were females. They were distributed on the three age categories, less than 30 years (79.20%), from 30 to less than 40 years (14.85%), and from 40 to less than 50 years (5.94%). The results indicated that 32.67% ( $n = 33$ ) of the respondents hold a diploma degree or less, 66.33% ( $n = 67$ ) had a bachelor's degree, and 0.99% ( $n = 1$ ) hold a higher education degree. Finally, it was observed that 76.23% ( $n = 77$ ) of the respondents have less than five years of experience, 16.83% ( $n = 17$ ) with 5 to less than 15 years of experience, and about 2% ( $n = 2$ ) with 15 years of experience or more.

#### 3.2 Measures

QWL was measured using three dimensions, i.e., work conditions, compensation and rewards, and work stability following prior works (Sirgy et al., 2001; Swamy et al., 2005; Chaiprasit & Santidhiraku, 2011; Sahni, 2019). Three dimensions measured employee happiness: positive affect, negative affect, and fulfillment based on previous studies (Chaiprasit & Santidhiraku, 2011; Wesarat et al., 2015; Omar et al., 2018). Intention to quit was evaluated as a whole construct (Lacap, 2019). The total number of items of the questionnaire equals 52 items. All items were anchored using a 5-point Likert scale in which 1 refers to "strongly disagree", 2 means "disagree", 3 denotes "neutral", 4 represents "agree", and 5 represents "strongly agree". Variables, dimensions, and items are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
Research instrument

| Variables            | Dimensions      | No. of | Order of items |
|----------------------|-----------------|--------|----------------|
| Quality of work-life | Work conditions | 5      | 1-5            |
|                      | Work stability  | 6      | 6-11           |
|                      | Compensation    | 8      | 12-19          |
| Intention to         | -               | 13     | 20-32          |
| Employee happiness   | Positive affect | 8      | 33-40          |
|                      | Negative affect | 6      | 41-46          |
|                      | Fulfillment     | 6      | 47-52          |



**Fig. 1.** Research conceptual model

#### 3.3 Research model

The conceptual model shown in Fig. 1 shows that the current study seeks to test one main hypothesis, which is QWL plays a significant mediating role in the effect of employee happiness on employee intention to quit. Therefore, the model was constructed to link the first latent variable (QWL) with the second and third latent variables (EH and ITQ). Moreover, EH, which is the mediating variable, was linked to ITQ. According to Baron & Kenny (1986) and Kenny et al. (1998), there are four requirements to evaluate the mediation effect. First, a significant relationship between QWL and ITQ. Second, a significant

relationship between QWL and EH. Third, a significant relationship between EH and ITQ. The fourth condition of the mediation effect requires that the coefficient of QWL to ITQ should be larger than the coefficient of the same path in the presence of EH (MacKinnon et al., 2007).

### 3.4 Reliability and validity

Reliability was tested based on Cronbach's alpha coefficients and composite reliability (CR), and validity was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE).

**Table 2**

Factor loadings, reliability and reliability

| Variable | Factor loadings | VIF   | $\alpha$ | CR    | AVE   |
|----------|-----------------|-------|----------|-------|-------|
| QWL      | QWL1            | 0.795 | 0.968    | 0.970 | 0.632 |
|          | QWL2            | 0.751 |          |       |       |
|          | QWL3            | 0.811 |          |       |       |
|          | QWL4            | 0.785 |          |       |       |
|          | QWL5            | 0.757 |          |       |       |
|          | QWL6            | 0.812 |          |       |       |
|          | QWL7            | 0.825 |          |       |       |
|          | QWL8            | 0.841 |          |       |       |
|          | QWL9            | 0.793 |          |       |       |
|          | QWL10           | 0.797 |          |       |       |
|          | QWL11           | 0.766 |          |       |       |
|          | QWL12           | 0.817 |          |       |       |
|          | QWL13           | 0.792 |          |       |       |
|          | QWL14           | 0.806 |          |       |       |
|          | QWL15           | 0.845 |          |       |       |
|          | QWL16           | 0.842 |          |       |       |
|          | QWL17           | 0.773 |          |       |       |
|          | QWL18           | 0.757 |          |       |       |
|          | QWL19           | 0.728 |          |       |       |
| ITQ      | ITQ1            | 0.823 | 0.960    | 0.964 | 0.676 |
|          | ITQ2            | 0.805 |          |       |       |
|          | ITQ3            | 0.808 |          |       |       |
|          | ITQ4            | 0.855 |          |       |       |
|          | ITQ5            | 0.809 |          |       |       |
|          | ITQ6            | 0.832 |          |       |       |
|          | ITQ7            | 0.799 |          |       |       |
|          | ITQ8            | 0.833 |          |       |       |
|          | ITQ9            | 0.812 |          |       |       |
|          | ITQ10           | 0.834 |          |       |       |
|          | ITQ11           | 0.882 |          |       |       |
|          | ITQ12           | 0.794 |          |       |       |
|          | ITQ13           | 0.800 |          |       |       |
| EH       | EH1             | 0.820 | 0.965    | 0.968 | 0.602 |
|          | EH2             | 0.777 |          |       |       |
|          | EH3             | 0.763 |          |       |       |
|          | EH4             | 0.778 |          |       |       |
|          | EH5             | 0.794 |          |       |       |
|          | EH6             | 0.779 |          |       |       |
|          | EH7             | 0.806 |          |       |       |
|          | EH8             | 0.821 |          |       |       |
|          | EH9             | 0.754 |          |       |       |
|          | EH10            | 0.734 |          |       |       |
|          | EH11            | 0.807 |          |       |       |
|          | EH12            | 0.755 |          |       |       |
|          | EH13            | 0.761 |          |       |       |
|          | EH14            | 0.739 |          |       |       |
|          | EH15            | 0.756 |          |       |       |
|          | EH16            | 0.826 |          |       |       |
|          | EH17            | 0.802 |          |       |       |
|          | EH18            | 0.721 |          |       |       |
|          | EH19            | 0.756 |          |       |       |
| EH20     | 0.758           |       |          |       |       |

R square for QWL = 0.146 and R square for ITQ = 0.323

Goodness of Fit (GoF) index = 0.386

Scholars used such indices to evaluate reliability and validity. Alpha coefficients and CR values should be greater than 0.70, while AVE should be greater than 0.50. Moreover, factor loadings should be greater than 0.50 (Wong, 2013; Al-Adamat et al., 2020; Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020; Bani-Khalid & Al-Adamat, 2020). Results of factor loadings, in addition to Cronbach's alpha coefficients, CR values, and AVE values, are shown in Table 2. It can be noted that all factor loadings of QWL were higher than 0.5 and ranged between 0.728 and 0.845, with AVE value of 0.632, CR value of 0.970, and alpha coefficient of 0.968. On the other hand, factor loadings of ITQ ranged between 0.794 and 0.882 with AVE value equals 0.676, CR value of 0.964, and alpha coefficient of 0.960. Finally, factor loadings of EH were higher than 0.50 and ranged between 0.721 and 0.826, with AVE value equals 0.602, CR value of 0.968, and alpha coefficient of 0.965. Moreover, the out values

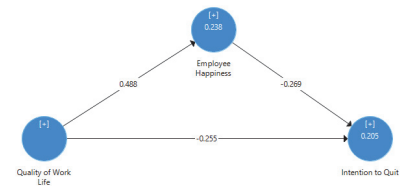
of the variance inflation factor (VIF) as a criterion of model quality were less than 10, which indicates that the current data are free of multicollinearity problems (Helm et al., 2010). Based on R square values and AVE values, the value of the Goodness of Fit (GoF) index equals 0.386, which indicates that PLS model is valid (Quazza et al., 2018).

#### 4. Empirical results and discussion

Fig. 2 shows the structural model of the study in which the quality of work-life was linked to employee intention to quit through employee happiness. The model highlights one positive effect of quality of work-life on employee happiness and two negative effects of both quality of work-life and employee happiness on the intention to quit. The detailed results can be seen in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
Results of hypothesis testing

| Paths     | Total effects |       |       | Direct effects |       |       | Indirect effects |       |       |
|-----------|---------------|-------|-------|----------------|-------|-------|------------------|-------|-------|
|           | $\beta$       | t     | P     | $\beta$        | t     | P     | $\beta$          | t     | P     |
| QWL → EH  | 0.488         | 7.055 | 0.000 | 0.488          | 7.055 | 0.000 | -                | -     | -     |
| EH → ITQ  | -0.269        | 2.553 | 0.011 | -0.269         | 2.553 | 0.011 | -                | -     | -     |
| QWL → ITQ | -0.386        | 5.035 | 0.000 | -0.255         | 2.345 | 0.019 | -0.131           | 2.319 | 0.021 |



**Fig. 2.** Research structural model

First, the results indicated that QWL had a positive significant direct effect on EH ( $\beta = 0.488$ ,  $t = 7.055$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ) and there was a negative significant effect of EH on ITQ ( $\beta = -0.269$ ,  $t = 2.553$ ,  $P = 0.011$ ). Second, there was a negative significant direct effect of QWL on ITQ ( $\beta = -0.255$ ,  $t = 2.345$ ,  $P = 0.019$ ) as well as a negative significant indirect effect of QWL on ITQ ( $\beta = -0.131$ ,  $t = 2.319$ ,  $P = 0.021$ ). Therefore, the hypothesis that EH plays a significant role in the effect of QWL on ITQ was supported. Mediation size was determined using variance accounted for (VAF) ratio. VAF values between 20% and 80% indicate a partial mediation (Baloch et al., 2018). For the current study, VAF equals 0.34, which means that EH partially mediated the effect of QWL on ITQ. Despite the lack of previous studies that investigate the mediating role in the effect of QWL on ITQ, prior works emphasized the importance of QWL in triggering employee happiness (Tzeng, 2002; Chaiprasit & Santidhiraku, 2011; Almalki et al., 2012; Othman et al., 2018). Employee happiness, in turn, reduces employees' intention to quit their jobs with the current organization (Howard & Gould, 2000; Tzeng, 2002; Al-Ali et al., 2019; Çankır & Arıkan, 2019). Similarly, QWL results in decreasing the degree of intention to quit among employees (Markey et al., 2012; Mendis, 2017; Çankır & Arıkan, 2019).

#### 5. Conclusion and implications

This study aimed to explore the effect of the quality of work-life on employees' intention to quit in the presence of employee happiness as a mediating factor. It was found that QWL is positively related to employee happiness while negatively associated with intention to quit. Moreover, employee happiness was found as a predictor of intention to quit with a negative effect. Hence, the results revealed that employee happiness plays a significant mediation role in the effect of the quality of work-life on employees' intention to quit. Consequently, it was concluded that the quality of work-life is a crucial factor in ensuring positive employee outcomes like satisfaction, socioeconomic status, and self-esteem, which in turn affect psychological well-being. It hence reduced his or her intention to leave the organization. Based on these results, managers of fast-food restaurants are required to improve the quality of employee work-life in order to enhance employee happiness. Happy employees are productive and involved individuals.

#### 6. Limitations and future research

The small sample size of the study is a significant limitation. The study was conducted using 101 employees of fast-food restaurants in Jordan. Additionally, responses were collected using a cross-sectional design. Hence, the results of the study should be considered with caution. Further studies are required to examine the effects of the same variables through larger samples based on longitudinal design and should be applied to different organizations. Researchers, on the other hand, are requested to underline the importance of the quality of work-life and employee happiness in employee retention. Researchers are required to replicate the current study using samples from different organization to identify the extent to which QWL explain the variance in both employee job happiness and employee intention to quit.

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