



Job Happiness in Startups: A Study of Job Autonomy, Work-Life Balance, and Social Support

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Abstract: Working in startups has its own dynamics, as it emphasizes flexibility and freedom for employees to complete their work. This study aims to understand the drivers of job happiness for startup employees by looking into their job autonomy, work-life balance, and social support. To obtain the data, we distributed questionnaires through online platforms to 165 startup employees in Bandung and Jakarta who participated as the respondents of this study. The data is then analyzed using multiple linear regression with SPSS 26 software. The findings indicate that job autonomy, work-life balance, and social support partially and simultaneously lead to the job happiness of startup employees. These results suggest that fostering a supportive and balanced work environment with a high degree of autonomy can significantly enhance employee well-being in startups. Organizations can leverage these insights to create targeted HR strategies that promote happiness and, in turn, improve employee retention and productivity.

Keywords: Job Autonomy; Job Happiness; Social Support; Work-Life Balance

INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-evolving work environment, employee happiness has become a vital aspect of organizational success. Happy employees tend to be more engaged, productive, and committed to their organizations, which in turn drives overall business performance (Akgunduz et al., 2023; Thompson & Bruk-Lee, 2021). This is especially critical for startups, where employees often face unique challenges (Setiawan et al., 2020), such as the pressure to meet ambitious goals in short timeframes and the need to adapt quickly to rapid changes. In such high-pressure environments, creating conditions that foster happiness is crucial for maintaining employee motivation, and turnover, and ensuring long-term organizational stability (Usai et al., 2020; Kanchana & Jayathilaka, 2023).

According to Salas-Vallina & Alegre (2021), happiness at work is not only about momentary satisfaction but is a complex, multidimensional construct that reflects an employee's overall sense of fulfillment and well-being in their role. Employees who are happy in their jobs are more likely to collaborate effectively, innovate, and contribute positively to the company culture (Goel & Singh, 2023; Melie et al., 2020). For startups, that rely heavily on small, agile teams, fostering happiness is key to sustaining high levels of performance and cohesion (Usai et al., 2020; Setiawan et al., 2020). Understanding the key drivers of happiness at work is, therefore, essential for startups seeking to attract, retain, and nurture talent in a competitive business environment.

From a theoretical perspective, there are limitations in measuring job happiness comprehensively. Many studies focus on the influence of these three variables on job satisfaction without distinguishing between the concept of job happiness which includes a more holistic aspect of emotional well-being (Niebhur et al., 2022; Dong et al., 2021). Although job satisfaction and job happiness are often considered similar, they have important differences. Job happiness does not only involve job satisfaction but also includes the overall happiness and well-being felt by employees in their work environment (Roy & Konwar, 2020). Therefore, understanding job happiness in more



depth by considering factors such as job autonomy, work-life balance, and social support is needed. In addition, most of the literature tends to examine the three factors separately or only in a combination of two variables (Labrague, 2021; Clausen et al., 2022; Akgunduz et al., 2023). Research that examines job autonomy, work-life balance, and social support simultaneously and how the interaction of the three can affect job happiness is still very limited. These three variables have the potential to provide a stronger effect in an integrated manner, so comprehensive research on the three will provide deeper insights into how to improve employee happiness in the workplace.

Furthermore, employee responses to job autonomy, work-life balance, and social support may also vary depending on demographic factors such as age and gender, as well as on the work context, such as startups or large companies (Brough et al., 2020). This suggests a need to formulate a more contextual and flexible theory, in order to capture the dynamics that occur in various types of work environments and employee profiles. Empirically, previous research has been conducted in more traditional industries or large companies (Melie et al., 2020; Yap et al., 2020), so research on the influence of job autonomy, work-life balance, and social support on job happiness in the startup context is still very rare. Given that startups generally have a more flexible work structure but with quite high demands, research results in this context have the potential to provide different findings compared to other industries. In addition, previous research has shown inconsistent results. For example, while some studies state that job autonomy increases job happiness, other studies show that high levels of autonomy can be an additional burden for certain employees (Clausen et al., 2022; Khoshnaw & Alavi, 2020). Likewise, work-life balance and social support, whose effects vary depending on the workload and employee preferences. This inconsistency creates an urgent need for further research that can confirm or reinterpret the impact of these three variables in different work situations.

This study focuses on three main factors that influence job happiness in startups: job autonomy, work-life balance, and social support. These variables are particularly relevant in startup settings, where flexibility and close-knit work cultures are common, but the fast-paced nature of the work can also lead to stress and burnout.

Job autonomy refers to the degree of freedom and control that employees have over their work (Khoshnaw & Alavi, 2020; Clausen et al., 2022). It involves the ability to make decisions about how, when, and where tasks are completed. In startups, where traditional hierarchical structures are often replaced with flatter organizational models, employees are usually given greater autonomy to innovate and solve problems independently (Frare & Beuren, 2021; Maaravi et al., 2021). Research suggests that job autonomy is strongly linked to job happiness, as it fosters a sense of ownership and personal responsibility (Sawang et al., 2020; Niebuhr et al., 2022). Employees with high autonomy feel empowered, which can enhance their motivation and reduce stress, leading to greater overall happiness at work.

Work-life balance is defined as the ability to manage professional responsibilities while maintaining a healthy personal life (Brough et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2020). In the startup environment, where the pace of work is often intense, maintaining a balance between work and personal time can be particularly challenging (Kanchana & Jayathilaka, 2023; Ahmad et al., 2022). Employees in startups may work long hours and face tight deadlines, which can blur the boundaries between their work and personal lives. However, a well-managed work-life balance is crucial for avoiding burnout and ensuring long-term well-being. Companies that support flexible work arrangements and respect employees' personal time are likely to see higher levels of job happiness (Yap & Badri, 2020; Roy & Konwar, 2020), as employees feel their personal lives are valued alongside their professional contributions.



Social support refers to the emotional and practical assistance that employees receive from their colleagues and supervisors (Labrague, 2021; Grey et al., 2020). In startup settings, where teams tend to be smaller and closely connected, the quality of social support can play a significant role in shaping the work environment (Zaman et al., 2021). Strong interpersonal relationships and supportive colleagues can help employees navigate the challenges of their roles, fostering a sense of belonging and community. High levels of social support have been associated with increased job satisfaction, reduced stress, and greater happiness at work (An & Suh, 2023; Kong et al., 2021), as employees who feel supported are more likely to thrive in demanding environments.

Despite the growing interest in employee happiness and well-being, research focusing specifically on startups remains limited (Zaman et al., 2021; Ahmad et al., 2022). Much of the existing literature on job happiness has concentrated on larger, more established organizations, leaving a gap in understanding how these dynamics play out in the fast-paced, high-pressure environments typical of startups. Furthermore, while job autonomy, work-life balance, and social support have been studied in various contexts, their combined effect on happiness in the unique setting of startups has yet to be fully explored. This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating how these factors contribute to happiness at work in startup environments, where employees often experience both increased autonomy and heightened stress. We hypothesize that each of these variables will have a positive impact on job happiness and that their effects may be amplified in the dynamic, flexible, and high-pressure context of startups. By identifying the key factors that drive happiness at work in startups, this research provides valuable insights for organizations looking to enhance employee well-being and improve overall performance.

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative research approach to examine the factors influencing job happiness in startup employees. The quantitative method allows for the systematic measurement of the relationships between variables, providing a clear and objective understanding of the effects of job autonomy, work-life balance, and social support on job happiness. The population refers to employees working in the education technology startup in Bandung and Jakarta, selected using purposive sampling techniques. The sample for this study was selected using a purposive sampling technique. The purposive sampling method was employed to ensure that the respondents met specific criteria relevant to the study. The criteria required that participants had been working in a startup for more than one year, as employees with this level of experience are more likely to have a well-formed perspective on the factors influencing their job happiness. With the criteria, a total of 165 startup employees from Bandung and Jakarta participated in the study as respondents.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires distributed through online platforms. The questionnaire was designed to capture responses related to the independent variables—job autonomy, work-life balance, and social support—as well as the dependent variable, job happiness. Respondents were asked to rate their experiences on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This approach provided quantifiable data for analysis. The collected data were analyzed using multiple linear regression to assess the relationships between the independent variables (job autonomy, work-life balance, and social support) and the dependent variable (job happiness). SPSS 26 software was used to perform the statistical analysis, allowing for accurate examination of the data and testing of the hypotheses.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

The respondents of this study comprised 165 startup employees based in Bandung and Jakarta. The determination of respondents is based on criteria based on age, gender, last education, position/job title, length of service, and type of startup. In terms of gender distribution, 59% of the respondents were male, while 41% were female. Regarding educational background, the majority of respondents (53%) held a Bachelor's degree, followed by 37% with a Master's degree, and 10% who had completed high school. When considering work tenure, most respondents (47%) had between 1 to 2 years of experience, while 36% had been working in startups for 3 to 5 years, and 17% had more than 5 years of experience. In terms of income, 57% of respondents earned between 5 to 10 million IDR per month, 12% earned below 5 million IDR, and 31% had monthly incomes above 10 million IDR. The details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents Characteristics

Category	Percentage
Gender	
Male	59%
Female	41%
Education	
High School	10%
Bachelor's Degree	53%
Master's Degree	37%
Work Tenure	
1-2 years	47%
3-5 years	36%
More than 5 years	17%
Income	
Below 5 million IDR	12%
5-10 million IDR	57%
Above 10 million IDR	31%

Source: Processed Data (2024)

Validity and Reliability Test

To ensure the construct validity of the measurement items, both the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and factor loadings were conducted. The KMO value for the overall model was 0.812, indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis, as values above 0.7 are considered adequate. Furthermore, all items had factor loading above 0.60, which indicates that all construct has good validity. The detailed factor loadings are presented in Table 2.



Table 2. Results of the Validity and Reliability Test

Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha
Job Autonomy		0.797
JA1	0.726	
JA2	0.820	
JA3	0.751	
Work-Life Balance		0.783
WLB1	0.782	
WLB2	0.775	
WLB3	0.655	
WLB4	0.739	
WLB5	0.741	
Social Support		0.774
SS1	0.799	
SS2	0.680	
SS3	0.702	
SS4	0.729	
SS5	0.698	
Job Happiness		0.756
JH1	0.811	
JH2	0.783	
JH3	0.729	
JH4	0.755	
JH5	0.806	
JH6	0.802	
JH7	0.791	
JH8	0.730	

Source: Processed Data (2024)

Table 2 also presents the results of the reliability test which were assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The results indicated that all variables demonstrated acceptable levels of reliability. Specifically, Job Autonomy exhibited a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.797, indicating high reliability. Work-Life Balance had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.783, also reflecting good reliability. The Social Support variable showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.774, confirming its reliability, while Job Happiness recorded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.756, which is still considered acceptable. These results suggest that the measurement items are consistent and reliable for assessing the constructs in this study.

Normality Test

Table 3. Normality Test with Kolmogrov Smirnov

		Unstandardized Residual
N		165
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	,0000000
	Std. Deviation	,41096709
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	,165
	Positive	,165
	Negative	-,075
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		,973
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		,300

Source: Processed Data (2024)



The value of Kolmogorov Smirnov is 0.973 with a significance value of 0.300. Because the significance value produced by Kolmogorov Smirnov is more than 0.05 or 5% (the real level of research significance) which is $(0.300 > 0.05)$, it can be concluded that H_0 is accepted or the residual data is normally distributed, in other words the regression model is suitable for use because it meets the assumption of normality or normally distributed data.

Multicollinearity Test

Table 4 presents the results of the multicollinearity test. The results indicate that there is no multicollinearity between independent variables as the VIF value has a number below 10, and the tolerance value is above 0.1. More details can be seen in Table 3 below.

Table 4. Results of the Multicollinearity Test

Variable	Tolerance	VIF
Job Autonomy	0.327	5.672
Work-Life Balance	0.726	2.473
Social Support	0.439	7.283

Source: Processed Data (2024)

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

This regression analysis aims to determine changes in the dependent variable if the independent variable experiences changes. The test results are as follows:

Table 5. Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Variable	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.
(Constant)	5.418	2.526	2.145	0.034
Job Autonomy (X1)	0.347	0.108	3.212	0.002
Work-Life Balance (X2)	0.240	0.103	2.337	0.021
Social Support (X3)	0.396	0.105	3.768	0.000

Dependent Variable: Job Happiness (Y)

Source: Processed Data (2024)

The regression equation model formed based on the analysis results is $Y = -5,418 + 0,347 X_1 + 0,240 X_2 + 0.396$.

The multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the effect of Job Autonomy (X1), Work-Life Balance (X2), and Social Support (X3) on Job Happiness. The results, as presented in Table 5, show that all three independent variables have a significant positive influence on job happiness. Job Autonomy ($B = 0.347$, $p = 0.002$) had a significant positive effect, indicating that higher levels of autonomy lead to greater job happiness. Similarly, Work-Life Balance ($B = 0.240$, $p = 0.021$) also showed a significant positive effect, suggesting that balancing work and personal life contributes to employee happiness. Lastly, Social Support ($B = 0.396$, $p < 0.001$) was the most influential factor, emphasizing the importance of support from colleagues and supervisors in promoting job happiness.

Coefficient of Determination

A coefficient of determination analysis was carried out to determine the percentage influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable. The test results are presented in Table 6.



Table 6. Results of Coefficient of Determination

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	0.752	0.565	0.553

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Social Support (X3), Work-Life Balance (X2), Job Autonomy (X1)
b. Dependent Variable: Job Happiness (Y)

Source: Processed Data (2024)

From Table 6, it is known that the determinant coefficient (R Square) is 0.565 or 56.5%. This value is obtained from the square of the correlation coefficient value of 0.752 \times 0.752 = 0.565. This means that job happiness (Y) is influenced by job autonomy (X1), work-life balance (X2), and social support (X3) by 0.565 or 56.5%. Meanwhile, the remaining 43.5% was influenced by other factors/variables outside this research.

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the factors influencing job happiness among startup employees by specifically focusing on job autonomy, work-life balance, and social support. These findings align with the dynamic nature of startups, where flexibility, freedom, and collaborative work environments are central to employee job happiness.

The influence of job autonomy on job happiness

The analysis confirmed that job autonomy has a significant positive effect on job happiness. This is consistent with the idea that employees in startups, where decision-making freedom and flexibility are often emphasized, tend to derive greater satisfaction when they can exercise autonomy. In fast-paced startup environments, where roles are often less structured and employees are expected to take initiative, autonomy becomes a key driver of job happiness (Sawang et al., 2020; Niebuhr et al., 2022; Maaravi et al., 2021). The ability to manage one's tasks independently aligns well with the startup culture, which often values innovation and self-management.

The influence of work-life balance on job happiness

Work-life balance was also found to significantly impact job happiness. This result supports the previous research from Yap & Badri (2020; Roy & Konwar, 2020). Given the intense demands of working in a startup, maintaining a balance between work and personal life is critical. Startups may be known for their long hours and high expectations, but as this study highlights, employees who can manage these demands while maintaining a healthy personal life are more likely to report higher levels of happiness. This finding emphasizes the need for startups to consider policies that promote work-life balance, such as flexible working hours or remote work options, to enhance employee well-being.

The influence of social support on job happiness

The most influential factor in this study was social support, indicating the crucial role of strong relationships and teamwork in driving job happiness. In startup environments, where collaboration is often essential to success and teams tend to be small and close-knit, employees who feel supported by their colleagues and supervisors experience greater satisfaction. Social support reduces stress, increases motivation, and creates a sense of belonging, all of which are essential for happiness in the workplace (An & Suh, 2023; Kong et al., 2021). This finding suggests that fostering a supportive and inclusive culture within startups can significantly boost employee happiness, contributing to both individual well-being and organizational success.



The influence of job autonomy, work-life balance, and social support on job happiness

The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.565$) shows that 56.5% of the variance in job happiness is explained by job autonomy, work-life balance, and social support. This relatively high percentage indicates that these three factors play a substantial role in shaping employee happiness in startups. However, the remaining 43.5% suggests that other variables, such as personal job fit, company culture, or career growth opportunities, may also be important in determining job happiness and should be explored in future research.

Overall, the findings of this study reinforce the importance of cultivating environments where employees have autonomy, a healthy balance between work and personal life, and strong social connections. For startups, which often face unique challenges related to growth and resource constraints, these factors are essential for maintaining a motivated, happy, and productive workforce. By addressing these areas, startups can enhance not only employee well-being but also organizational performance, as happy employees are often more engaged, creative, and committed to their work.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the factors influencing job happiness among startup employees, focusing on job autonomy, work-life balance, and social support. The results showed that all three variables have a significant positive impact on job happiness. Job autonomy allows employees to exercise independence and flexibility, work-life balance helps them manage personal and professional responsibilities, and social support fosters a sense of belonging and reduces stress. Startups can benefit from creating an environment that promotes these elements to enhance employee well-being and overall performance. Job autonomy, work-life balance, and social support have a positive influence on employee job happiness. Job autonomy allows employees to have more control over their work, which can increase their sense of satisfaction and happiness at work. A good work-life balance also helps employees maintain a balance between work demands and personal life, which has an impact on happiness and mental health. Meanwhile, social support from coworkers or superiors provides a sense of being appreciated and supported, thus increasing happiness at work. These three factors synergistically contribute to increasing job happiness, which in turn can improve employee performance and commitment to the organization.

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