The features and outcome of positive emotions in the Nkangala District municipalities

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to furnish insights into the features and outcomes of positive emotions in the Nkangala district. The reviewed literature indicated that such a topic is under-researched in the Nkangala region. This study employed the affective events theory (AET). The study’s research design was both descriptive and correlational and influenced by the positivism paradigm. The sample size of 808 municipal employees was conveniently selected due to not having a sample frame, and other municipal respondents were unwilling to participate in the study. In addition, other managers did not provide researchers with permission letters; hence, the data were collected from four municipalities. The data were collected using a close-ended questionnaire. A validated and reliable scales were analysed in Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 28. The results showed that autonomy was the highest feature/predictor of positive emotions. In addition, it was determined that positive emotions predicted job satisfaction. This study found that when municipal managers offer their employees autonomy, it yields happy, joyous and proud employees. Similarly, managers who provide employees with timely feedback and who do not micro-manage employees create a positive working climate. In addition, it is recommended that supervisors and managers should submit their reports/evaluations to their employees in a timely manner and offer constructive feedback. If it is negative, managers should also provide employees with appropriate support to improve their performance. This is vital since job satisfaction is a proxy of productivity or service delivery.

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Introduction

Municipal success depends on employees’ positive emotions while delivering services to the community at large. Positive emotion refers to an organised system of feelings, physiological responses, bodily expressions, and action tendencies that flow from an almost immediate assessment of how the current situation affects the individual (Fisher, 2019). Happiness, joy, satisfaction, positive thinking and a positive attitude are positive emotions. Therefore, positive emotion denotes a positive reaction toward certain events or objects. Setiadi and Warmika (2015) opine that positive emotions are conditions in which a person experiences feelings of pleasure or joy. Hence, emotionally stable employees tend to support the municipality’s strategic objectives (Masale et al., 2021). Researchers have shown that municipal managers who support and allow employees to participate in municipal strategic decision-making, such employees display happiness and a high level of job satisfaction (Purnomo et al., 2020).

International studies in the public sector have discovered that employees who are productive and willing to contribute to municipal strategic objectives are those who find comfort and support from their superiors (Sigursteinsdottir & Karlssottir, 2022). In the same vein, Abror (2020) proffered that quality feedback from municipal managers influences the ability of employees to perform optimally and display a high level of job satisfaction. Similarly, it was found that municipal workers engaged in the municipality’s activities render positive synergy and effective service to the community (Geisler, Berthelsen & Muhonen, 2019). Despite these findings in international research, positive emotion studies are rare in the South African municipal context.

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Other international research conducted on the municipality revealed that employees, who are restrained from participation in the municipal strategic objective and not encouraged to offer feedback about their day-to-day activities, were underperforming and unhappy (Nääs Starberg & Lindahl, 2022). In support of the latter, scholars have ascertained that less happy employees are counterproductive, leading to poor service delivery (Samanta & Kallou, 2020). Ampofo, Nassè, and Akouwerabou (2020) and Ahakwa et al. (2021) opined that municipal managers who do not provide relevant feedback after the performance is assessed tend to frustrate and demoralise employees to perform effectively. Unhappy and frustrated municipal employees who experience adverse treatment from their superiors will develop a negative attitude that can lead to them being highly dissatisfied with their job (Wu et al., 2021). Another driver of dissatisfaction for municipal workers’ unhappiness is unfavourable work conditions (Dhir, Dutta & Ghosh, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). This evidence demonstrates that positive emotions represent a worthy research topic in the South African municipal context. Thus, a framework can be developed that will empower HR and line managers to create a happy and productive environment.

It is noteworthy from the introduction section that there is currently a lack of research on South African municipalities concerning positive emotions, especially in the Nkangala district. In closing this gap, this study was conducted to furnish insight into the features of positive emotions and what could be the outcome of positive emotions in the municipality. The study objectives were as follows:

i. To determine how positive emotions are conceptualised in the literature; and
ii. To determine how positive emotion is predicted according to the features and how it predicts the outcome.

Literature Review

Theoretical and Conceptual Background

This study was based on affective events theory (AET) developed in the 1990s to observe the structure, causes, and consequences of emotions experienced at work. The theory suggests that certain events within an organisation contribute to the affective reaction of employees. The AET was revised by Wegge et al. (2006), who argued that antecedents influence positive emotions. Positive emotions refer to feelings like joy, happiness and being pleased by being treated fairly by the supervisor (Fisher, 2019). According to Fisher (2019), positive emotions are triggered when employees are allowed to participate in the business unit’s decision-making and when given autonomy to complete work independently Fisher (2019) added that from an AET lens, when employees are joyous, it results in satisfaction.

Empirical Review and Hypothesis Development

Employee performance and positive emotions

One of the features of the AET framework is employee performance, which is defined as an assessment of the activities and roles of individuals execute during specific work periods (Mokalu, Tambingon & Lengkong, 2019). Sari, Amin and Kurniawan (2022) proffered that employees with positive emotions experience a better life and also work efficiently. Su, Lin and Ding (2019) affirmed that through communication, supervisors can provide developmental feedback that can promote employees’ innovative behaviour. Furthermore, these authors argued that supervisory feedback is crucial as it positively impacts employee motivation and enhances supervisor-subordinate interaction. When supervisors provide open, honest, and valuable feedback, employees feel more encouraged to enhance their creativity. Therefore, employees are likely to exhibit positive emotions and put more effort into achieving organisational goals. Considering this discussion, the hypothesis (H) below was developed.

H:\(H_{p}\): Employee performance positively predicts positive emotions.

Autonomy and positive emotions

Robbins, Judge and Vohra (2019) opined that autonomy constitutes the freedom employees require to execute their tasks and make decisions without consulting their supervisors and managers. Scientific evidence suggests that certain organisational practices, such as employee autonomy, will likely trigger positive emotions (Kim, Holloway & Bempechat, 2018). Zhao, Yan and Keh (2018) concurred that employees granted the autonomy to work independently and make their own decisions are more likely to possess positive emotions. Additionally, autonomy yields positive job outcomes, such as higher levels of job satisfaction and positive emotions (Ahakwa et al., 2021). In other words, employees are likely to experience positive emotions when they are granted the autonomy to do their jobs. Given the information mentioned above, the following hypothesis was formulated.

H:\(H_{2}\): Autonomy positively predicts positive emotions.

Supervisory support and positive emotions

Supervisory support, which constitutes a feature in Wegge et al.’s (2006) AET framework, is the extent to which supervisors provide their employees with helpful feedback concerning their behaviour, thereby enabling them to learn, develop, and improve their general job performance (Zhou, 2003). Supervisory support also includes the following: providing assignments that allow subordinates to develop and strengthen new skills; taking the time to learn about subordinates’ career goals and aspirations; and supporting subordinates’ attempts to acquire additional training or education to further their careers, which may contribute to the organisation...
and foster organisational commitment. Employees who have received extensive supervisor support have reported high levels of affective commitment and positive emotions (Pandey, Schults & Camps, 2018). Moreover, supportive supervisors, who offer guidance and treat subordinates fairly and ethically, will likely enhance job satisfaction (Mohsin, Maira & Amit, 2015). This brings us to the following hypothesis.

H3: Supervisory support positively predicts positive emotions.

**Participation and positive emotions**

Participation involves the shared responsibility to make decisions that are intended to improve organisational goals (Behravesh, Abubakar & Tanova, 2019). These authors postulated that a participative work environment empowers employees to take control over their work outcomes. Lin, Jang and Roberts (2018) opined that when employees are given significant control over their work, they are eager to apply their skills and knowledge and share information unreservedly. In fact, numerous authors have confirmed that participation in the decision-making process may lead to enhanced job satisfaction, organisational commitment, motivation, job performance, empowerment, improved sense of ownership and job identity, as well as enhanced quality of services delivered to customers and clients (Ni et al., 2020). Furthermore, the findings of a study conducted by Zhao et al. (2018) revealed that most employees were likely to be satisfied and effectively committed when they were given an opportunity to participate in work-related matters. Behravesh et al. (2019) further argued that employees tend to be more engaged, committed, and feel fulfilled when they participate in decision-making. Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated.

H4: Participation positively predicts positive emotions.

**Job satisfaction and positive emotions**

Job satisfaction is a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences (Skosana, Maleka & Ngonyama-Ndou, 2021). Thus, it is merely evaluating whether one likes or dislikes their job. Anwar and Surarchith (2015) indicated that job satisfaction involves a multidimensional mental reaction to an individual's job. These authors further emphasised that such individual responses have psychological, affective, and behavioural elements. Hence, employees with high levels of job satisfaction tend to experience positive emotions (Ali & Anwar, 2021). Moreover, Permana et al. (2021) proffered that a sense of comfort, happiness, and positive emotions results from assessing one's work and work experience, which is known as job satisfaction. Satisfied employees display positive emotions and behaviour (Vizano, Sutawidjaya & Endri, 2021). Based AET and other literature, the hypothesis below was developed.

H5: Positive emotions positively predict job satisfaction.

The conceptual framework of the study is illustrated in Figure 1.

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**Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Study; Source: Wegge et al. (2006)**

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**Research and Methodology**

**Paradigm and research approach**

The positivism paradigm was used in this study, while the research approach was quantitative (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), because the authors used hypotheses to examine the relationship between positive emotional features and its outcome in the Nkangala district. This demonstrates that the study was correlational. Since the study was quantitative, it allowed the authors to be objective while analysing the data. This objectivism was achieved by being impartial and aggregating the data, while not focusing on individual perceptions. In addition, the study was descriptive, as it discussed the distribution of the sample.
Population and sampling

This study was conducted in the Nkangala district and focused on four municipalities. The population size was 2941. The convenience sampling approach was used, due to the lack of a sampling frame, 808 individuals participated in this study. Their distribution is reflected in Table 1.

Table 1: Sampling distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (345)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (463)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent (568)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time (240)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education levels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-tertiary (424)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary (384)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-44 (307)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-65 (501)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job categorisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-management (706)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management (102)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data collection

A questionnaire consisting of biographical and scale sections was used to collect the data. The former is depicted in Table 1. The questionnaire was adapted from validated scales, as shown in Table 2. The adapted scales were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree), with each consisting of five items. The questionnaire was piloted on 20 employees prior to data collection. All the items Cronbach’s alpha were above 0.7.

Data analysis

The frequencies, as displayed in Table 1, were used for data analysis. In addition, data analysis included means and standard deviations. As regarding inferential statistics, the correlation was used to determine the association between the study variables. Regression was also used to determine the relationship between study variables (Babbie, 2016). Moreover, autonomy, employee performance, participation, and supervisory support were chosen for the study's independent/feature variables, while positive emotions and job satisfaction represent the dependent/outcome variables. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to achieve construct validity, while Cronbach's alphas were calculated to determine the internal consistency of the scales (refer to Table 2).

Ethics

This paper forms part of one of the author’s doctoral studies. Before collecting the data, the author was granted ethical clearance at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), and permission letters were drafted by the management staff of four municipalities within the Nkangala district. No respondent was forced to participate in the study and was given consent forms to complete prior to completing the questionnaire. Participants were advised not to reveal their identities on the questionnaires to ensure they were anonymised and remained confidential. After completing their questionnaires, they deposited them in the designated box. Moreover, aggregating the data was part of the strategy to anonymise their identity.

Findings

The study results are discussed in this section. Table 2 reflects the EFA results. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.78, while Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity $p$-value was 0.00. The extraction method used the principal component analysis. Factor 1, autonomy, showed an Eigenvalue of 43.10, and Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha$) was 0.94. Its loadings ranged from 0.62 to 0.91. The other factors were interpreted in the same manner. All Cronbach’s alphas were above the threshold of 0.6, as suggested by Maree (2016)

Table 2: EFA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor loadings</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>PE</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>JS</th>
<th>EP</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s alpha</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Eigen Value</td>
<td>43.10</td>
<td>9.78</td>
<td>8.39</td>
<td>6.57</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>3.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: A represents autonomy, PE represents positive emotions, SS represents supervisor support, JS represents job satisfaction, EP represents positive emotions, and P represents participation
Shown in Table 3 are the descriptive statistics. The data reflect that none of the mean scores were above 3, and it also showed that none of the Skewness and Kurtosis were within the normality range of -2 to 2. The feature that correlated significantly and positively with positive emotions was participation ($r = 0.48$, $n = 808$, $p < 0.01$), while positive emotion correlated significantly and positively with job satisfaction ($r = 0.59$, $n = 808$, $p < 0.01$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>PE</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>JS</th>
<th>EP</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>K</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>-1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE</td>
<td>0.50**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>-1.15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>0.47**</td>
<td>0.42**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>-1.15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JS</td>
<td>0.51**</td>
<td>0.59**</td>
<td>0.40**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EP</td>
<td>0.39**</td>
<td>0.43**</td>
<td>0.37**</td>
<td>0.44**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>-0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.73**</td>
<td>0.48**</td>
<td>0.54**</td>
<td>0.56**</td>
<td>0.44**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note that M represents for mean, SD is the standard deviation, S represents for skewness, and K represents kurtosis.

The regression results are depicted in Table 4. All the variance inflator indicators (VIF) were below 5, suggesting multicollinearity issues. The $R^2$ was 0.34, $F(4, 803)$ = 104.15, $p < 0.01$. This meant that the model only reported 34% of the variance in positive emotions. This can be interpreted as other variables contributing to the variance of positive emotions. All features positively and significantly predicted positive emotions. The highest predictor was autonomy ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardised Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardised Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>VIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>8.42</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>6.16</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EP</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>6.79</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent Variable: Positive emotions

$R^2 = 0.34$

The regression results are shown in Table 5. The VIFs are all below 5, suggesting that there were multicollinearity issues. The $R^2$ was 0.35, $F(4, 806)$ = 434.93, $p < 0.01$. The model only reported 35% of the variance in job satisfaction. This can be interpreted as other variables contributing to the variance of job satisfaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardised Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardised Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>VIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>22.22</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PE</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>20.86</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent Variable: Job satisfaction

$R^2 = 0.35$

The decisions regarding the study hypotheses are reflected in Table 6, and they were all accepted.
Table 6: Decisions about the study hypotheses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H₁: EP &gt; PE</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₂: A &gt; PE</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₃: SS &gt; PE</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₄: P &gt; PE</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₅: PE &gt; JS</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

This study aimed to generate new insights associated with the features and outcomes of positive emotions in the Nkangala district. Moreover, this contributed to the AET body of knowledge by creating the framework for HRM managers in municipalities operating in a developing country. This study’s framework is consistent with the conceptual framework in Figure 1. Our framework can be interpreted as follows: employees experience joyous feelings due to supervisor support, being given autonomy and timely feedback and opportunity participate in decision making. In addition, they are most likely to be content with their work and offer excellent service delivery to municipal customers (Maleka et al., 2019).

Our framework has implications for managers. Robbins et al. (2019) opined that the positive spin-off of giving employees autonomy is that they develop creative methods to execute their tasks, leading to higher performance or service delivery (Maleka et al., 2016). Employees are most likely to experience positive emotions when their supervisors guide and treat them fairly and are ethical when making decisions related to the operation of municipal units. Municipal managers who provide timely feedback and allow employees an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process tend to create a happy, conducive and satisfactory work environment (Behravesh et al., 2019). Their subordinates are also more likely to support municipal managers’ strategic goals. Another benefit of managers allowing employees to participate in departmental affairs is that employees share their skills, knowledge and information unreservedly (Lin et al., 2018).

Limitations and recommendations

Despite this study offering theoretical and managerial contributions, it does have limitations. The results cannot be generalised because the study used a non-probability sampling technique. This was predicated on not having a sampling frame, as the gatekeepers in the HR departments were not allowed to share employees’ personal data. When conducting a similar study, researchers should engage municipality managers in order to develop a strategy to perform a probability study. In addition, not all municipalities in the Nkangala district participated in the study. Using the cross-sectional research was limited, as it only provided the study with a once-off picture. Hence, it is recommended that a longitudinal study should be conducted and use qualitative research to solicit in-depth information that could not be solicited by using a close-ended questionnaire. The following are recommendations for managers:

i. Involve employees in the decision-making process to solicit buy-in and support;

ii. Capacitate managers with interventions that will empower them to support employees and develop appropriate strategies and other managerial competencies;

iii. Supervisors and managers should submit their reports/evaluations to their employees in a timely manner and offer constructive feedback. If it is negative, managers should also provide employees with appropriate support to improve their performance;

iv. Supervisors and managers should create a conducive environment that encourages employees to enjoy their work and the working relationship; and

v. Supervisors and managers should create a conducive environment where HR (e.g., promotion) processes are applied consistently, ethically, and fairly.

This study used AET as a theoretical framework to create insights into the features and outcomes of positive emotions in the Nkangala district. Moreover, the study followed a positivist paradigm, and it was also quantitative. Five hypotheses were tested; based on these tests, it can be concluded that autonomy was the highest and the most significant predictor of positive emotions. Lastly, it can be concluded that positive emotions positively and significantly predicted job satisfaction.

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All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, T.B.S., M.J.M and T.L.N.; methodology, M.J.M.; formal analysis, M.J.M.; investigation, T.B.S.; writing—original draft preparation, T.L.N.
**References**


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