

HAPPINESS AT WORK: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF STUDIES PUBLISHED IN THE PERIOD 2022–2025

Ivana Jadrić* 

DOI: 10.51558/2303-680X.2025.23.1.17

Abstract

This study provides a comprehensive review of research on happiness at work – a dynamic and attractive concept that is constantly evolving. Given the dynamic nature of the concept and the impact of various factors on its understanding, the analysis is focused on scientific papers published in the last three years, with the aim of identifying the latest research trends. In order to map research tendencies and identify existing research gaps, 2,046 scientific articles retrieved from the Web of Science and Scopus databases were analyzed, using the key word happiness at work. After applying the PRISMA method and eliminating the papers that did not fully correspond to the topic, the final analysis included 98 relevant articles that were completely in the scope of the research. The research results indicate a growing interest in this topic, which is reflected in the growing number of publications in the last period. In addition, a strong connection of happiness at work with the concepts of corporate social responsibility, sustainability, management styles, and the formation of a positive organizational climate was observed. Also, there is a trend of increased publication of papers on this topic in specific sectors such as healthcare, banking, and education.

Keywords: happiness at work, systematic literature review, trends

JEL: M21, O15

1. Introduction

As Aristotle said, all living beings strive for happiness (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2014). Considering that we spend an average of 40 hours a week at work out of a total of 168 hours, which makes up as much as 24% of our total weekly hours, it is not surprising that happiness at work ("Happiness at Work - HAW") is researched both from a research and practical perspective. Organizations make increasing

efforts to determine what makes their employees happy. The importance of better understanding this construct stems from numerous previous studies that have shown that HAW is positively related to productivity (Vela *et al.*, 2021; Mathew, 2023), positive business results and profitability (Singh *et al.*, 2023), performance (Astuty *et al.*, 2025), and employee loyalty in organizations (Alzain *et al.*, 2023). There are studies that identify this concept with job satisfaction or well-being at work and define it as a state characterized by a high level of life satisfaction, a high level of positive emotions, and a lack of negative emotions (Fitriana, *et al.*, 2022). As Fisher (2010) emphasizes, there are several factors that can be associated with happiness in the workplace, such as those at the transient level (such as current performance, level of enjoyment in tasks, emotions, *etc.*), factors at the personal level (such as affective organizational commitment, engagement, mood at work, level of involvement in work, *etc.*) but also at the work unit level (such as collective job satisfaction, group mood, group affective tone, satisfaction with group tasks, *etc.*).

In the modern business environment, employers increasingly strive to create a positive work atmosphere, since happy and engaged workplaces have a positive effect on employees and empower them. This connection becomes an increasingly common subject of research because a positive work environment is often considered a predictor of HAW. Happy employees are not only more productive and satisfied, but they also take proactive responsibility not only for their own success, but also for the success of the organization they work for (Mathew, 2023). This is where we can pay attention to how employee orientation becomes a key predictor of well-being in the workplace (Tandler *et al.*, 2020). In addition, researchers increasingly study other

constructs associated with HAW, including organizational commitment (Preciado, 2023) and different leadership styles (Srivastava *et al.*, 2022), further expanding our understanding of the factors that contribute to happiness and engagement in the workplace. The need to research all predictors that contribute to the creation of happy workplaces, where satisfied employees work, has resulted in increased interest in this topic by the scientific community and, consequently, an increase in the number of publications. A special increase in the number of publications can be observed in the period after the COVID-19 pandemic, which indicates the need for further development of the quality of work in organizations and an increase in work efficiency in crisis situations (Núñez-Sánchez *et al.*, 2022). This paper provides an overview of the latest research related to the concept of HAW through the application of the systematic literature review (SLR) method. SLR is a method that can help us to identify the existing knowledge related to this construct and to identify which models can be applied in practice. Also, with the help of this method, we can see where there are additional research gaps, that is, niches that need to be addressed through future research, in order to achieve a better understanding of the construct.

A number of previous studies were found that offered a SLR in this area such as the one by Saritha and Mukherjee (2024). However, the mentioned research covers the publication period from 2010 to 2022. Since the number of published publications in the period from 2022 onwards increased significantly, and the growth of new publications on this topic is evident from year to year (which is visible in the overview of published publications in the Scopus database - Figure 1), there was a need to apply this methodology in researching publications published in 2022, 2023 and 2024, and the very beginning of 2025. Since the research was conducted at the beginning of 2025, only the first two months of 2025 were included in the analysis.

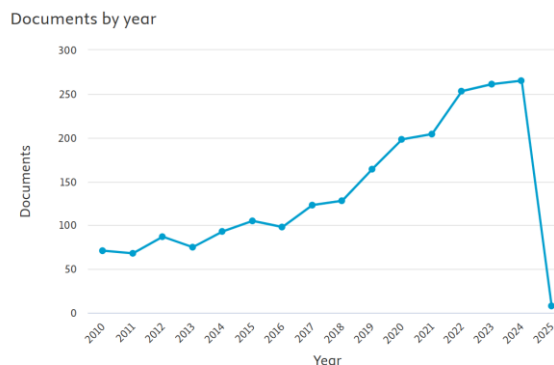


Figure 1. *Publications on HAW published in the Scopus database in the period 2010-2025*

Source: Retrieved from the Scopus database (Elsevier, 2025)

2. The concept of happiness

As stated by Xuan and Thi (2022), every person needs happiness, and every society strives to achieve it, since happiness plays a key role in human life. These authors state that Aristotle was the first to introduce the concept of happiness and the first to start research on happiness. He emphasized that happiness is a cognitive ability of people and that its level can be increased through training and education. where importance of education is a means to achieve happiness, although his concept of happiness stems from a spiritual perspective.

The need for the importance of defining happiness also lies in the fact that happiness is a factor that allows individuals to be successful and society to progress. Although for ancient philosophers the meaning of life was to seek happiness, in today's world there are other views. For example, de Boer (2024) focuses on a critical theory that sees happiness as a commodity within an industry, an ideological tool for control and a means of appeasing, justifying, and distracting attention from social injustice.

More recently, the study of happiness began in the early 20th century when several scientists began to deal with this topic, primarily focusing on people's moods. After the 1960s, several large-scale studies were launched that encompassed entire nations. As stated by Diener (2009), Warner Wilson in 1967 described a happy person as one who is young, healthy, well educated, well paid, extroverted,

optimistic, carefree, religious, married, with high self-confidence, high business ethics, sincere aspirations, and a wide range of intelligence. On the other hand, according to the World Happiness Report (Helliwell *et al.*, 2023), happiness is defined as a subjective assessment of life satisfaction, which is measured through self-assessments on a scale from 0 to 10. This includes an analysis of life ratings, taking into account factors such as social support, trust, social connections, and unhappiness in the form of negative life ratings. Happiness is also measured through differences in life ratings between different populations, as well as through the relationship between social factors and general life satisfaction. Happiness is a dynamic category conditioned by a whole range of factors, such as those related to cultural differences, as confirmed by the World Happiness Report. According to the aforementioned report, the level of happiness varies from country to country – from the happiest, Finland, to Afghanistan, which is at the bottom of the happiness scale.

2.1 Concept of happiness at work (HAW)

Employee happiness provides positive energy that improves work performance. Happy employees show their happiness and make the work environment friendly and pleasant, stated Ramachandran and Deepa (2022). Fisher (2010) defines HAW as an umbrella concept influenced by a number of factors. Some of these are short-term in nature such as mood to more long-term oriented such as those related to tasks, work and organization.

They can be influenced by a whole range of factors from individual characteristics such as personality, but also the fit between what the job or organization offers and the expectations, needs and preferences of the individual. Only an understanding of all the factors that influence the construct of happiness provides opportunities for understanding and improving HOW.

Due to the proven positive connection with productivity (Zelenski *et al.*, 2008; Oswald *et al.*, 2015), HAW is becoming the subject of study of numerous human resource managers and organizational psychologists. Taking into consideration the increasing stress that many

employees experience in their workplace, the challenge of developing interventions that will prevent long-term employee overload is also developed on the other side. Therefore, authors such as Schwarz *et al.* (2022) place special emphasis on developing the art of living, which encourages a more reflective and conscious approach to life and is reflected in HAW. According to their research, even short online interventions based on the art of living can be effective for employees. Improvements have been demonstrated in the art of living, progress, positive affect, and professional self-efficacy, as well as a significant reduction in negative affect. Other authors (Momin and Rolla, 2024) emphasize that in order to encourage a creative and happy workplace, it is necessary to develop a family-work culture at work.

3. Methodology

In order to identify contemporary research trends related to HAW, this research used the method of systematic review of literature ("Systematic Review Literature - SLR"). It includes a systematic search for studies while striving for transparent reporting of their identification, allowing readers a clear insight into what was done to identify studies and to link research results with supporting evidence (Cooper *et al.*, 2018). It is a method that systematically summarizes all publications in the observed period and systematizes them in order to see the research achievements more clearly.

The research presented in this paper builds on previously published comprehensive research by Sarith and Mukherjee (2024), who analyzed publications on HAW in selected databases. Their analysis resulted in a SLR on HAW, including works published in the period from 2010 to 2022. Since the search of the selected databases showed that there is an increasing number of published papers on this topic from year to year, there was a need to analyze more recent publications, published since 2022, in order to identify the key trends that characterize this area in the last three years.

Therefore, this research examined the period of publications on the topic in the range from 2022 to 2025 (the very beginning of 2025 was

included). Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases were used during the search, because the papers published in the Scopus database are defined as high-quality papers and are often used as a benchmark for assessing research impact (Agarwal *et al.*, 2016). These two databases, as the most relevant for reviewing quality publications, were also used in another available research (Rando Cueto *et al.*, 2024). When scanning published publications, the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) model was used, as a method of SLR that promotes transparency and clarity (Galletta *et al.*, 2024). The keywords used when searching the aforementioned databases was "happiness at work". The author of the article - a researcher who independently reviewed the titles, abstracts and full texts of the publications participated in the process of selection and analysis of the publications. The criteria for inclusion in the analysis were as included: publications published in the period from 2022 to 2025, availability of the articles in English, scientific and peer-reviewed articles that explicitly explore the concept of "happiness at work" or related concepts related to happiness in a professional context, and availability of the abstract and basic bibliographic data. Exclusion criteria included: duplicates that were repeated across databases (N = 923), papers whose content was not directly related to the topic of happiness at work, publications that were not scientific articles (*e.g.*, conference abstracts, editorial comments, books, book chapters, *etc.*), papers that did not contain sufficient information for evaluation (*e.g.*, without an available abstract). After a detailed analysis, a total of 98 publications that fully met the stated criteria and provided empirical or theoretical contributions to the understanding of HAW were included in the final synthesis. In the Scopus database, there were 787 published publications in the observed period for the searched keywords, of which 705 were published in English. In the Web of Science (WoS) database, 1,259 publications were found based on the searched keywords. The total number of articles analyzed in the study was 2,046. The articles, with title. names of authors, year of publication, publisher, issue number and number of pages, the link to where they are located, and keywords and abstracts were

transferred to the Zotero program, used for the analysis. The elimination of articles was carried out gradually in accordance with the PRISMA methodology, where the first step was the elimination of repetitive papers (N=923). After that, the titles and abstracts of the remaining papers (N=1,123) were scanned and only those whose content matched the research topic through the title and abstracts were taken into further consideration. All the remaining members went through a further selection process. After reviewing the titles and abstracts, we continued by analyzing the content of the selected articles. The articles whose content did not fit into the analysis of the concept of HAW (N=800) were excluded from further analysis. After removing the articles that did not meet the research criteria, an in-depth analysis was conducted on the papers selected for further consideration. (N=323). After reading all the remaining articles, only articles whose content fully corresponded to the research related to HAW were included in the final analysis (N=98). Below is the process of filtering the articles using the PRISMA model.

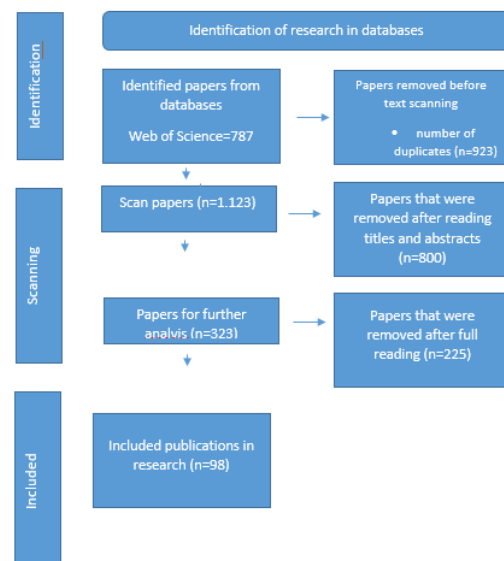


Figure 2. PRISMA diagram used to illustrate the method of selecting research papers

Source: Authors' own visualization

At the end, a total of 98 publications were analyzed and evaluated as relevant, and the main results of the research are presented below.

4. Results

Based on the analysis of a large number of publications published in the period from 2022 to 2025, a number of trends related to HAW was identified, which are discussed below. Some of the trends recorded are related to the connection between leadership styles and HAW, the connection between happiness and corporate social behavior, HAW and sustainability, HAW and organizational climate, *etc.* It was noted that certain industries, such as healthcare, banking, education and tourism, are particularly interesting for researching HAW, which is confirmed by the largest number of publications on this topic from these sectors.

4.1 Happiness at work and leadership

The influence of leadership styles on employee HAW was proven through numerous available studies. It can be concluded that the largest number of publications is dedicated to the topic of the connection between leadership styles and HAW. In doing so, the authors analyze different leadership styles and observe how each leadership style affects happiness in the workplace. Thus, Swanson *et al.* (2022) conclude that the service leadership style is positively associated with HAW, while Al-Edenat and Al Hawamdeh (2024) observe the relationship between the ethical leadership style and HAW. Aftab *et al.* (2022) connect the agile leadership style with HAW, while Jha *et al.* (2024) and Díaz-García *et al.* (2024) introduce the concept of a happy leadership style, which implies and analyzes its connection with the happiness of employees working in the observed organization. Rahmaningtyas *et al.* (2022) emphasize the positive connection of the inclusive leadership style with HAW, and Srivastava *et al.* (2022) emphasize the spiritual leadership style. These studies mainly focused on positive leadership styles and their connection with HAW, which was repeatedly confirmed. The findings have important implications for managers, as it has been shown that helpful, ethical and inclusive leadership styles can positively influence employee happiness. Therefore, managers can use this scientific knowledge to improve their leadership skills and create a more stimulating work environment.

4.2 Happiness at work and corporate social responsibility

Corporate social responsibility is particularly interesting in the analysis of predictors and outcomes related to HAW because, among other factors, it also takes into account employee well-being. This was discussed by numerous authors such as Jeong *et al.* (2022), Rando Cueto *et al.*, (2024), *etc.* Martínez *et al.* (2024) prove that organizations accredited by accreditation bodies incorporating socially responsible behavior in their criteria have employees who are happy at work. Furthermore, Mu, Hu and Chen (2024) show in their research how general employee satisfaction can be achieved if the organization emphasizes corporate social responsibility in its activities. This is also confirmed by Kocollari *et al.* (2024) who go a step further and propose a model of 5 elements related to corporate social responsibility that is related to HAW. These are the following elements: vision (related to personal and organizational value orientation), fairness (related to the definition and distribution of rewards); empowerment (related to career development and professional growth); experimentation (related to innovative tasks and organizational forms); and empathy (related to a supportive work environment and network of colleagues). Hayat and Afshari (2022) and Wulandari *et al.* (2024) also talk about the importance of corporate social responsibility and its connection with HAW. They emphasize that marketing related to social goals can increase the happiness of employees at work through their involvement in social meaningful activities. Socially responsible marketing is a form of cooperation between companies and non-profit organizations in which a portion of the income from product or service sales is donated to support a specific social cause. The studies discussed highlight the benefits that employees, as well as organizations, can have by engaging in socially responsible activities.

4.3 Happiness at work and sustainability

Sustainability is one of the key contemporary research topics, and an increasingly prominent trend—especially since 2024—is linking the concept of HAW with sustainability. The

relevance of implementing green practices within the human resources management process and their positive impact on the subjective well-being and happiness of employees is also confirmed by recent findings by Arun Kumar *et al.* (2024). This approach is based on the claim that investment practices in green human resource management go beyond environmental effects and affect the psychological and behavioral dimensions of employees. Rando Cueto *et al.* (2023) also wrote about sustainability, stating that promoting corporate social responsibility strategies aimed at encouraging sustainability and environmental care contributes to the well-being of organizations and the performance of their employees.

4.4 Happiness at work and organizational climate

A number of recent studies emphasized that a supportive business environment has a positive impact on employee HAW. Empirical research results show that working conditions are a very important factor in the development of HAW (Hayes-Mejia and Stafström, 2024). In addition, Trinh, Van and Nguyen (2023) highlight salaries, benefits, training, opportunities for advancement, workplace relations, and autonomy as important factors. According to them, these factors are predictors of the development of HAW and affect both employee satisfaction and loyalty.

The importance of a supportive environment is also discussed by Sanamthong and Prabyai (2023), as well as Zaffar and Gani (2022) and Mendoza-Ocasal *et al.* (2022), who emphasize that HAW is conditioned, in addition to the organizational supportive environment, by intrinsic motivation. In this context, research conducted by Potipiroon (2024) and Ravina-Ripoll *et al.* (2024) emphasize fairness as an important feature of a positive organizational environment. According to Singh *et al.* (2024), organizational support is very important, but also related to organizational citizenship behavior, whereby human resource management practices, such as flexible work arrangements, training and development opportunities, welfare programs, fairness in the workplace, *etc.*, can contribute to strengthening the relationship between the

organization and its employees, thereby improving the perception of organizational support. The results of research conducted by Singh *et al.* (2024) reveal that happiness in the workplace has a significant impact on organizational citizenship behavior. Also, the results show that this impact is further enhanced by the presence of organizational learning, confirming that organizational learning acts as a mediator in the relationship between HAW and organizational citizenship behavior.

4.5 Happiness at work in specific areas

By analyzing the publications published in the last 3 years, it was observed that certain sectors are particularly interesting in the context of research of predictors and outcomes arising from the construct of HAW. Some of the areas where a greater number of publications were recorded is the area of healthcare, where special emphasis is placed on the happiness of nurses (Chang *et al.*, 2022; Saliya *et al.*, 2024) or doctors (Chang *et al.*, 2022). This is not surprising, when one considers the fact that the observed period of publications is actually the post-pandemic period (or research conducted during the pandemic and published afterward.) Considering the great impact of the global health crisis on the healthcare system, the motivation for researching HAW among health workers—who bore the primary burden of the pandemic response—is clear.

Another particularly interesting area for analyzing HAW is the banking sector. In an article called *Factors determinant of career happiness in Oman banking sector*, it was proven that directors and colleagues are the most important factors influencing happiness at work, followed by elements such as environment, job security or financial rewards (Awashreh and Omri, 2024). It is also interesting to mention the research of Robina-Ramírez *et al.* (2022), which showed that contrary to the widespread idea that happiness is focused on enjoying goods, bank employees prefer to develop spiritual values and resources that enable them to resist the stress they experience due to mass layoffs and other pressures they experience while working in the banking sector.

Furthermore, a greater number of publications in the educational sector was recorded. Ozturk, Wigelsworth and Squires (2024) and Sudibjo and Manihuruk (2022) wrote about the well-being of primary school teachers, while the well-being of high school teachers was in the focus of research by Zheng *et al.* (2022), Song (2022), Bhatia and Mohsin (2023), and others.

5. Discussion

Due to the increasing pressure that employees face in their workplace—including stress and the risk of burnout, as discussed by Giess *et al.* (2022)—stress and the possibility of burnout, as discussed by Giess *et al.* (2022)—it is important to understand what makes employees happy in order to create conditions that lead to happiness, prevent crises and develop resilience to adverse conditions. This research aimed to analyze the latest research related to HAW in the last three years in order to identify trends as well as new research potentials. Through a systematic literature review (SLR), several research trends related to the construct of HAW that marked the last few years were identified. Some of them were leadership styles, corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and the influence of organizational climate on employee happiness.

Rando Cueto *et al.* (2024) state that almost half of all published works that study HAW are in some way related to organizational climate, therefore finding a connection between HAW and organizational climate is not surprising. Although organizational climate occupies a significant segment of contemporary research, the connection between HAW and other variables such as fair pay, meaningful work, and supervisor as predictors was proved (Curry *et al.*, 2024), and desire for advancement and career aspirations (Qamar *et al.*, 2023). Some of the research emphasize practical implications and advice for managers, stating that a way to increase HAW and reduce employee disengagement is to train managers and employees in task structuring techniques (Yasin Ghadi, 2024). A comprehensive solution for developing HAW was offered by a publication of Han, Long and Khanh (2024), which states that there are five factors that directly influence work happiness and

organizational commitment, namely: (1) work environment, (2) job characteristics, (3) relationships with colleagues, (4) work-life balance, and (5) compensation and benefits. Some research trends were also observed when looking at the areas of publication. For example, an increase in publications in healthcare was evident, which is not surprising because the observed publication period occurred immediately after the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in a series of publications that looked at the relationship between HAW and remote work, since the pandemic and post-pandemic periods were characterized by working from home. Due to research on the connection between HAW and working from home (Elnanto and Suharti, 2021) some employers decided to maintain working from home as a fundamental way of organizing work even after the pandemic. The attractiveness of the topic stems from numerous benefits that happiness brings with it, from more motivated individuals, to increased productivity, mental health, a better working atmosphere, a better image of the organization where happy people work, *etc.* Although there are trends in publications on HAW in correlation with various factors, it is important to emphasize that a large number of authors agree that HAW depends only on the balance between private and work life (Ramachandran and Deepa, 2022; Momin and Rolla, 2024). They emphasize that the very balance and satisfaction across two important sectors of our lives form the foundation of happiness. It is important to keep in mind that not all findings are relevant to all organizations and all employees. Therefore, it is necessary to keep in mind limitations such as cultural, economic, and generational. Namely, according to Astuty *et al.* (2025), human resource management that emphasizes HAW is increasingly becoming the focus of research on organizational behavior, particularly in organizations that employ members of Generation Z. The authors emphasize that this generation experiences HAW differently, which is why it is necessary to pay additional attention to it if an organization employs a generation of this age. Based on this, it can be concluded that it is important to take into account generational differences among employees when analyzing HAW.

This research offered a SLR on the topic of HAW in the last three years, but it is necessary to address the limitations of this research, which relate primarily to the observed time period of published publications as well as the two selected databases through which the publications were searched. Although this research relied on a SLR covering the papers published in 2022, 2023 and 2024, and the very beginning of 2025 and aimed to identify the latest research trends, the relatively short time period eliminated many important studies from this research, simply because they fell outside the observed research period. Furthermore, although publications published in respectable databases were observed, it is possible that the exclusion of other relevant databases reduced the scope of publications that can offer the breadth of the observed perspective.

The results of this research can contribute to a better theoretical understanding of the construct of HAW, emphasizing its multidimensional nature. The research suggests that HAW should not be viewed in isolation but is intertwined and dependent on a number of organizational factors such as leadership styles, organizational climate, and corporate social responsibility.

Future research can combine a SLR with primary research to truly and empirically test the theoretical findings. By combining qualitative and quantitative research methods, a deeper understanding of the mechanisms that link organizational practices and individual perceptions of happiness can be gained. Future research could explore which leadership styles have the greatest impact on the dimension of employee happiness and how a sense of social contribution and purpose mediate the relationship between organizational belonging and employee happiness.

The implications of this research for organizations are multiple. First, it once again highlights the need to observe and investigate HAW and its importance in relation to numerous other factors. By better understanding their employees, organizations can create tools that can influence the creation of environments that develop employee

happiness. There are numerous effects that are achieved that benefit organizations, from preventing employee burnout, taking proactive action in the context of reducing workforce fluctuations - preventing employee dismissals, to developing their mental resilience. In this paper, the emphasis was placed, among other things, on leadership styles. Namely, managers can explore some of the suggested leadership styles and study which ones correspond to their ideas of leading the organization. Research has shown that the way they manage resources and lead their staff as well as structure tasks, can be one of the reasons for HAW. Other observed trends include the connection between HAW and both social responsibility and sustainability. Research has shown that employees like to work in organizations that focus on their employees and that they value the sense of contributing, together with their colleagues, to positive outcomes in society.. Therefore, the recommendation of this research is that in order to increase the level of HAW, it is advisable to organize socially responsible actions that will not only have a positive branding of the organization but also strengthen the unity and happiness of its employees. Among other trends, it is important to mention the development of a positive organizational climate, even a family atmosphere, which needs to be continuously developed. The tools for this can be multiple, from relaxed employee gatherings, joint "victories", concern for business and personal results of employees to autonomy in decision-making, *etc.*

6. Conclusion

As Jaswal *et al.* (2024) state in their research, although it is possible to systematize the literature published so far on the topic of HAW and identify trends and patterns, this topic needs to be further systematically addressed, especially in developing countries. This research, therefore, was built on these principles. Bearing in mind how quickly information travels today and how it exponentially increases day by day, the SLR that covered publications up published in 2022, 2023 and 2024, and the very beginning of 2025 already needs to be updated if we want to have an overview of contemporary research

trends. The importance of the research topic lies in its connection with numerous other factors, such as life satisfaction (Streimikiene and Grundey, 2009) and job performance (Adnan Bataineh, 2019). Therefore, one of the key tasks for human resources managers is to analyze the factors that influence employee happiness and find ways to make employees happy in the workplace. In this research, publications published in the Web of Science and Scopus databases were analyzed, and based on the PRISMA method, publications that did not correspond to the focus of the research were eliminated. In the end, 98 publications were taken into account, which were judged to correspond to the core of the research. The research shows that modern trends are oriented towards different leadership styles, corporate social responsibility, sustainability of organizations, and the creation of a positive organizational climate as key factors related to HAW. These findings have significant implications, not only for scientific research, but also for practical applications that can benefit organizations.

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