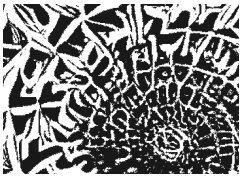

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THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN NATIONAL HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND MEASURES AND CORRELATES OF NATIONAL HAPPINESS

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People's happiness has become a first-class political question, which urges both governments and organisations to create policies and practices aimed at improving people's happiness, one of which includes human resource management (HRM) practices. As studies exploring the association between country level HRM practices and national happiness on the academic level are scarce, especially empirical ones, the aim of this paper is exactly to address this gap. HRM data used in the study were collected through the Cranet 2014-2016 survey round and refer to 5,093 organisations operating in 27 countries on five continents. National happiness data, Cantril ladder indicator (CLI) as a measure, and six correlates of national happiness, were obtained from the World Happiness Report database. Findings suggest that HRM practices associated with the highest levels of national happiness include: using information technology (IT) recruitment platforms, recruiting based on potentials and not on present knowledge/skills, customised compensations, various work-life balance initiatives, and training and development primarily for career's and not employer's sake, which corresponds with younger workforce cohorts' preferences.

Keywords: subjective wellbeing, life satisfaction, happiness, national happiness, human resource management (HRM), CRANET

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, happiness has been described as the natural goal of life (Eckhaus, 2017) and the ultimate end of temporal existence (Ng, 2015). The pursuit of happiness is, therefore, inherent to the human condition (Cordero et al., 2017), but the complexity of attaining happiness is bounded by the multitude of individual factors that influence happiness (e.g., Cordero et al., 2017; Diener et al., 2018; Dolan et al., 2008), such as age, religion, health, family, education, (un)employment or income (e.g., Blanchflower, 2021; Eastrlin, 2001). Moreover, happiness permeates both private lives of individuals (e.g., Diener & Chan 2011; Grant et al., 2007), as well as their job and career satisfaction (e.g., Edgar et al., 2015; Erdogan et al., 2012; Hagmaier et al., 2018; Joo & Lee, 2017). What is more, happiness has been promoted lately as a macro-economic concept which is now actively sought after by countries and their governments (Blackmann et al., 2010; Ralasic & Bogdan, 2018). In fact, measuring and keeping track of national happiness makes sense for many reasons, among which according to Diener et al. (2018) are at least three: it may reveal how various societal differences influence the quality of life in those societies, it has beneficial effects on health and behaviour, and citizens highly value it.

In order to create national policies that influence levels of happiness among people and countries, it is crucial to gain knowledge on different factors that could influence happiness (Ralašić & Bogdan, 2018), including work practices. As employment nowadays is central to people's lives, it is postulated that workplaces play a crucial role in attaining people's happiness (Gavin & Mason, 2004; Pluut & Wonders, 2020; Rego & Cunha, 2008). Managerial practices ranging from training and development to remuneration and performance appraisal are often designed with the explicit goal of improving work performance by increasing employee wellbeing (Grant et al., 2007), which then results in their increased overall life happiness (e.g., Erdogan et al., 2012; Newman et al., 2015). Organisations should nurture happiness because happy individuals are more likely to help their colleagues, be friendly, suggest improvements and volunteer for additional tasks (Warr, 2008). Additionally, happy individuals are more likely to be energetic, interested in their work and persistent in the face of difficulties compared to unhappy employees (Joo & Lee, 2017).

Despite the general consensus that the track of national accounts of happiness should be kept and used to improve policies and activities that affect people's lives (e.g., Diener et al., 2018), there is still a gap in understanding how different people management practices relate to happiness at national levels. There is ample research on the relationship between

individuals' wellbeing and specific human resource management (HRM) practices, such as job design (e.g., Boekhorst et al., 2017; Song & Gao, 2020), elements of performance management systems (e.g., Edgar et al., 2015; Hagmaier et al., 2018; Pan & Zhou, 2013; Park et al., 2016) and internal communication (e.g., Sinčić Ćorić et al., 2020), or bundles of HRM practices (e.g., Kooij et al., 2013). However, contributions to the knowledge base on how HRM practices prevailing on a national level, such as HR planning, recruitment, selection, compensation, and training and development practices, can distinguish between more and less happy nations are in short supply. To the best of our knowledge, the only attempt to investigate the association between HRM practices and national happiness was the one of Blackman et al. (2010), who discussed the role of strategic HRM (SHRM) in the development of "Gross National Happiness" in Bhutan on the theoretical level. Therefore, our research question is: *Are certain HRM practices more strongly associated with national happiness than others?* As such, our research question is rooted in the comparative HRM theory – the field analysing HRM in the light of national, cultural and regional differences (Brewster & Mayrhofer, 2012), and pertains to a less explored area of the association between HRM and national economic performance (Michie, 2019). On the one hand, scholars and practitioners need to develop a solid understanding of the contextual environment that has a critical impact on HRM in order to promote sustainable and mutually beneficial HRM practises (Brewster & Mayrhofer, 2012). On the other hand, HRM outcomes should be measured by their long-term impact not only on organisational effectiveness but also on individual and societal wellbeing (Beer et al., 2015). This argument is particularly strengthened by the fact that many governments are now taking a greater interest in the wellbeing of their nations – often conceptualised as happiness – and by the belief that a country's economic prosperity will continue to depend largely on how successfully HRM and related management practices are adopted and implemented throughout the economy (Allin & Hand, 2017; Michie, 2019).

To provide the answer to our research question, we conducted a secondary data analysis. Data on various HRM practices stems from the latest Cranet survey round (2014–2016), a large-scale, multi-time-point, cross-national survey of HRM (Parry et al., 2021), including 5,093 organisations (both private and public) operating in 27 countries on five continents. The national happiness data for each country in the sample was obtained from the World Happiness Report database for the same period. The associations between country level HRM practices, and one measure and six correlates of national happiness were explored.

HRM PRACTICES AS A SOURCE OF HAPPINESS

Defining happiness

Many authors use the terms subjective wellbeing, life satisfaction and happiness[1] interchangeably (Diener et al., 2018; Eckhaus, 2017; Joo & Lee, 2017; Ng, 2015). *Subjective wellbeing* (SWB) refers to the global evaluation of the quality of a person's life from his or her own perspective (Diener et al., 2018), and consists of three dimensions – the evaluative wellbeing, the positive and negative affect and eudemonic wellbeing (Eurofound, 2017). *Life satisfaction*, as the evaluative dimension of wellbeing (Eurofound, 2017), is the overall cognitive judgement of one's life, and represents the extent to which a person believes that his/her life is worthwhile or, in essence, 'good' (Diener et al., 1985). *Happiness* usually refers to a feeling or subjective state, i.e., serves as an emotional evaluation or assessment of life (Eckhaus, 2017; Eurofound, 2017). When differences in responses to questions about life satisfaction and happiness are analysed, evidence suggests that subjective wellbeing is a two-sided phenomenon – it has an evaluative or cognitive side (life satisfaction), as well as an experiential or emotional side (happiness) (Clark & Senik, 2011; Ludwigs et al., 2019; Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2013; Vinson & Ericson, 2014).

The advent of positive psychology has introduced the concept of happiness to wider audiences (Nemati & Maralani, 2016), not just at the individual level but at the level of organisations and whole nations as well. It has attracted the attention of researchers in psychology, sociology, philosophy, kinesiology and health sciences (Diener et al., 2018), as well as in economics where the new area of inquiry was named 'the economics of happiness' (Cordero et al., 2017; Dolan et al., 2008; Ralašić & Bogdan, 2018).

The operationalisation of national happiness

Compared to an individual's life satisfaction and happiness at work, *happiness at the national level* is explored less, but has started to generate more insights in the last couple of decades, fuelled by the relatively recent interest of economists to study and measure peoples' emotions and behaviour (Ralašić & Bogdan, 2018; Dominko & Verbič, 2019). What is more, as measures of subjective wellbeing are designed to capture subjective assessments of quality of life, those measures could be used to determine whether specific groups, regions or nations are flourishing or floundering (Diener et al., 2018), and consequently, policies could be designed to improve these indicators.

On a national level, so called "global measures" that "tend to encompass individuals' general life happiness … are prob-

ably the most represented modality of measuring happiness" (Tadić, 2009, pp. 318). They are usually designed in a form of one question/item and consequently do not demand a lot of the respondents' time, which makes them highly applicable for large-scale national and international research (Tadić, 2009), and because of which they are created, collected and delivered in the form of (annual) reports by supranational organisations/associations such as Eurofond, European Commission, European Social Survey Infrastructure, Eurostat, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations (UN) and World Values Survey Association.

In Eurofond's (2017) *The European Quality of Life Survey* established for monitoring and analysing quality of life in the European Union (EU), both life satisfaction and happiness are captured by one item. Both measures have remained generally stable over time in the EU overall (Eurofound, 2017). The European Commission addresses the quality of life in The Eurobarometer in two ways: (1) as time series indicators regarding the general judgment of living conditions and (2), intermittently, by including special topical modules on quality of life, particular life domains and related policies (Moschner, 2014). *The European Social Survey*, a methodologically robust cross-national data on wellbeing, includes a question related to wellbeing and a life satisfaction question, which are used for calculating the index as the average of two questions (ESS, 2015, 2021). Eurostat (2018) collects data on life satisfaction as a part of *The European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions* instrument which gathers timely and comparable cross-sectional and longitudinal multidimensional microdata on income, poverty, social exclusion and living conditions in the EU. The question of how to measure people's wellbeing and societies' progress has been addressed by the OECD as well (Durand, 2015), through the report called *How's Life? Measuring Well-Being* which is a part of the Better Life initiative – a statistical report released every two or three years that documents a wide range of wellbeing outcomes (OECD, 2020, p. 3). In The *World Values Survey*, that collected the longest available time series of cross-country happiness estimates that include non-European nations covering 82 societies in the 7th wave, respondents are asked a single question about happiness (Inglehart, 2020).

Finally, one of the most well-known indicators of national happiness, and the one used in the analysis presented in this paper, is the Cantril ladder indicator (CLI), a happiness indicator reported by the UN's Sustainable Development Solutions Network through the *World Happiness Report*, powered by data from Gallup World Poll and Lloyd's Register Foundation (World Happiness Report, n.d.). CLI asks respondents to eval-

uate their current life as a whole, using the image of a ladder, with the best possible life for them as a 10 and worst possible as a 0 (Helliwell et al., 2021). Although a subjective measure, CLI is an indicator listed and used often in the scientific literature and research (e.g., Choi et al., 2020; Helliwell, & Wang, 2014; Kahneman, 2013).

Considering the national level of analysis, many macroeconomic and social variables have been considered as correlates of happiness. A diversity of correlates gives economic policymakers, sociologists, managers and other decision-makers an insight into the overall picture of a nation's life (Ralašić & Bogdan, 2018). While there is a clear distinction between economic and non-economic correlates on the theoretical level, on the practical level most variables are interrelated. Amongst the most widely used economic correlates of national happiness, GDP per capita stands out (Cuijpers, 2009; Ralašić & Bogdan, 2018), while other social correlates, most notably those used in the World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al., 2019), include social support, healthy life expectancy at birth, freedom to make life choices, generosity, and perceptions of corruption.

The relationship between HRM and happiness

As mentioned, research on the role of prevailing HRM practices in a country in generating feelings of happiness at a national level is missing. However, the need of the human resource function to monitor its employees' subjective wellbeing levels has never been more called for (e.g., Eckhaus, 2017; Kooij et al., 2013), as research suggests that subjective wellbeing may be casually linked to more creativity and self-regulation, higher productivity on the job, as well as better citizenship behaviour (Diener et al., 2018).

At the same time, high-quality HRM practices, practices that integrate the organisations' overall HRM processes with business strategies (Einarsen et al., 2019), were revealed to be related to employee subjective wellbeing (e.g. Michie, 2019). For example, in the context of *job design*, according to Boekhorst et al. (2017), the quantity of work tasks or work intensity is negatively related to life satisfaction via emotional exhaustion. Okulicz-Kozaryn and Golden (2018) found that while "little flexitime does not increase happiness", substantial flexitime has a large effect on happiness, while Song and Gao (2020) found that compared to working in the workplace, bringing work home on weekdays is associated with less happiness.

Concerning *training and development*, a study conducted by Tang et al. (2020) showed that training is directly associated with happiness and indirectly associated with happiness via work-family facilitation. According to Ruggeri et al. (2020), it seems that individuals high in wellbeing exhibit more effective learning.

Regarding the relationship between *performance appraisal system* and life satisfaction, Edgar et al. (2015) showed that life satisfaction shares a significant, positive relationship with objective performance ratings, while attentiveness, a facet of positive affect, shares a significant positive relationship with subjective performance. According to Bakker et al. (2020), a good goal-setting process is recognised as one of the well-known approaches used to raise hedonic happiness.

The results on the relationship between *direct and indirect compensation* and subjective wellbeing are somehow mixed. Pan and Zhou (2013) propound that the effect of *salary* on happiness is significant for people with a middle level income, but not for people with low or high levels of income. Park et al. (2016) found that pay for performance enhances worker happiness in the private sector, but not in the public sector. However, regarding variable individual pay in a manufacturing setting, i.e., classic piece-rate setting, Oswald et al. (2015) provide evidence that happiness makes people more productive. Finally, benefits related to work-life balance have been found to be positively related to life satisfaction (Hirschi et al., 2016), especially because employees often wish to reciprocate which results in superior work outcomes (Haar & Roche, 2010).

Considering *career management* activities, in a study conducted by Mafini and Dlodlo (2014), promotion was found to be related to life satisfaction. A longitudinal study by Hagmaier et al. (2018) confirms the positive relationship between career satisfaction and life satisfaction, both within and across time. Interestingly, in a study conducted by Pan & Zhou (2013), the hypothesis about the relationship between career progress and happiness was not supported. This could be explained by the fact that people with a higher position have more responsibilities and face more stress, more complicated problems, and more difficult assignments, which can harm their chances for increased happiness (Pan & Zhou, 2013).

Finally, the study by Sinčić Ćorić et al. (2020) showed a very high, statistically significant correlation between *internal communication* satisfaction and life satisfaction, with the relationship being the strongest between life satisfaction and two dimensions of internal communication satisfaction – satisfaction with informal communication and satisfaction with communication climate.

Generally speaking, the results, although somewhat mixed, imply that by improving staffing and performance management practices, especially compensation system and development and growth opportunities, organisations contribute not only to employees' work and career happiness, but also to happiness with their lives in general (e.g., Joo & Lee, 2017).

METHOD

Data

For exploring the association between national HRM practices and national happiness, we used the cross-sectional Cranet[2] survey data collected between 2014 and 2016 (see Cranet, 2017) and World Happiness Report online database data for the same period (see Helliwell et al., 2019).

We used the Cranet database as a high quality HRM database (e.g., Berber et al., 2017), which is a result of the Cranet survey that has mapped HRM practices worldwide for more than 25 years (Christensen et al., 2019). The database covers world countries operating on five continents, with the organisation being the unit of analysis. Cranet methodology implies the use of a standardised questionnaire regarding HRM practices, capturing responses from the most senior HR manager in an organisation. The questionnaire consists of 62 closed-ended questions covering all HRM areas that are considered to correlate with firm performance (Gooderham et al., 2008) – general HRM characteristics, resourcing practices, employee development, compensation and benefits, and employee relations and communication, resulting in 338 HRM variables. For the present analysis, we used all questions from the database exhibiting a factual HRM practice in a binary way (0 = not present, 1 = present), precisely 18 questions forming 173 HRM indicators.

From The World Happiness Report online database, as a measure of national happiness, we used the Cantril ladder indicator (CLI). From the same database, as correlates of national happiness, we used six variables – log GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy at birth, freedom to make life choices, generosity, and perceptions of corruption, following Helliwell et al. (2019), who used those correlates as factors associated with variations in happiness across countries (Besley et al., 2023). For all seven national happiness variables used, we calculated 2014-2016 averages, to make them correspond with Cranet data.

Sample

The sample was generated by matching the Cranet 2014–2016 database and the World Happiness Report database on the country level. Both HRM indicators and variables of national happiness were available for 27 out of 35 countries covered by the Cranet database. Table 1 depicts the size of national subsamples, covering 5093 organisations employing more than 200 employees (the organisation size needed for participating in the Cranet survey in some countries).

➲ TABLE 1
Size of national subsamples

Country	n	Country	n	Country	n
Australia	240	Germany	239	Russia	112
Austria	214	Greece	133	Serbia	81
Belgium	122	Hungary	151	Slovakia	119
Brazil	354	Italy	164	Slovenia	114
Croatia	155	Latvia	66	South Africa	100
Cyprus	49	Lithuania	86	Spain	98
Denmark	130	Netherlands	101	Switzerland	212
Estonia	51	Philippines	62	Turkey	143
Finland	176	Romania	204	USA	403

Data analysis

In order to reduce a large number of HRM variables (173) to a smaller set of underlying factors that account for the maximum portion of the variance represented in the original set of variables, we conducted a Principal components analysis (PCA) with varimax rotations. To be more definite when interpreting factors, we set the cutoff point, i.e. the factor loading, above the 0.63 level (see Comrey & Lee, 1992), implying that items belong to a 'very good' to 'excellent' category. We conducted the factor analysis procedure four times since items with factor loadings below the cutoff point were discarded from subsequent analyses. The final factor analysis resulted in 32 HRM factors covering 87 standard individual HRM practices, with Eigen values of at least 1 and explaining 74.18% of the total variance (rotated component matrix of HRM factors based on principal components analysis available upon request). The rotation converged in 8 iterations, with Barlett's test of sphericity being significant ($p < 0.001$), and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy being greater than 0.6 (KMO = 0.757), indicating that PCA was appropriate for the data. As factor scores are estimates of the values that would be produced if the underlying constructs could be measured directly (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014), we saved the resulting factor scores as regression variables and used them as continuous independent variables in the regression analyses, which is consistent with previous Cranet-based factor analyses (e.g., Gooderham et al., 2008; Stavrou et al., 2010). Precisely, as factor scores are considered helpful in further analyses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014), we used factor scores per unit of analysis (organisation) to calculate national averages per HRM factor.

As all assumptions of linear regression were met, including the sample size – as according to Hair et al. (2009) more than 20 observations are sufficing for multiple regression analysis – we used it for analysing associations between HRM

factors (independent variables) and one measure and six correlates of national happiness (dependent variables). As we looked for the method showing a better overall model fit, we used the stepwise method, since because of their numerosity there was a need for reducing the set of predictor variables to those relevant.

Missing values were not included in the analyses, and data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 23.

RESULTS

In line with our research question, our statistical analysis is focused on HRM practices associated with national happiness the most. Table 2 presents seven regression models for the association between country HRM practices operationalised by HRM factors, and national happiness operationalised by CLI and six correlates of national happiness, revealing significant HRM factors for each model.

TABLE 2
HRM factors significantly associated with national happiness measure and correlates, linear regression analysis (stepwise method)

	Measure/correlate of national happiness	Unstandardised coefficients B	SE	β	t
CLI (4 models)	(Constant)	6.142	0.090		68.415***
	Recruiting employees through social media (F11)	1.732	0.321	0.673	5.397***
	Selecting managers using technical and ability tests/work samples (F28)	-1.374	0.367	-0.475	-3.741**
	Selecting clericals/manuals using technical and ability tests/work samples (F29)	-0.692	0.277	-0.294	-2.497*
	Recruiting employees through vacancy page on company website (F14)	0.739	0.312	0.279	2.368*
	F-test value	16.803***			
	R^2	0.753			
	Adjusted R^2	0.709			
Log GDP per capita (2 models)	(Constant)	10.174	0.070		145.407***
	Training evaluation through job performance before and immediately after training used (F31)	-0.946	0.237	-0.571	-3.996**
	Managers' and professionals' self-appraisal (F21)	0.513	0.183	0.401	2.806*
	F-test value	12.515***			
	R^2	0.511			
	Adjusted R^2	0.470			
Social support (4 models)	(Constant)	0.862	0.008		111.638***
	Recruiting employees through vacancy page on company website (F14)	0.095	0.023	0.508	4.127***
	Stock options for clericals/manuals and professionals (F22)	-0.220	0.048	-0.617	-4.587***
	Selecting clericals/manuals using technical and ability tests/work samples (F29)	-0.091	0.022	-0.551	-4.098***
	Bonuses based on team goals for managers and professionals (F25)	0.070	0.023	0.386	3.075**
	F-test value	13.433***			
	R^2	0.709			
	Adjusted R^2	0.657			

(Continues)

(Continued)

	Measure/correlate of national happiness	Unstandardised coefficients B	SE	β	t
Healthy life expectancy at birth (4 models)	(Constant)	68.401	0.475		144.047***
	Training evaluation through job performance before and immediately after training used (F31)	-6.078	1.807	-0.419	-3.363**
	Managers' and employees' self-service of electronic HRM system (F26)	7.165	1.704	0.475	4.206***
	Written HRM strategy and substrategies (F13)	-6.152	2.264	-0.339	-2.718*
	Immediate supervisor appraisal for clericals/manuals and professionals (F2)	3.504	1.375	0.282	2.549*
	F-test value	15.168***			
	R^2	0.734			
	Adjusted R^2	0.686			
Freedom to make life choices (6 models)	(Constant)	0.737	0.015		49.148***
	Recruiting employees through social media (F11)	0.247	0.047	0.556	5.307***
	Selecting employees using references (F17)	0.150	0.041	0.369	3.621**
	Flexible benefits for all employees (F5)	0.127	0.034	0.366	3.688**
	Recruiting employees through vacancies in newspapers (F15)	0.107	0.031	0.352	3.483**
	Selecting employees using psychometric tests (F18)	0.096	0.037	0.258	2.558*
	Profit sharing for all employees (F6)	0.087	0.035	0.255	2.493*
	F-test value	14.467***			
	R^2	0.813			
	Adjusted R^2	0.757			
Generosity (3 models)	(Constant)	-0.034	0.021		-1.630
	Recruiting employees through social media (F11)	0.273	0.068	0.597	4.047**
	Parenting schemes (F8)	0.180	0.056	0.479	3.228**
	Flexible benefits for all employees (F5)	0.134	0.054	0.374	2.475*
	F-test value	8.428**			
	R^2	0.524			
	Adjusted R^2	0.462			
Perceptions of corruption (6 models)	(Constant)	0.763	0.021		36.199***
	Recruiting employees through social media (F11)	-0.232	0.073	-0.314	-3.164**
	Recruiting employees through vacancy page on company website (F14)	-0.375	0.074	-0.494	-5.084***
	Subordinate and peer appraisal for clericals/manuals and professionals (F4)	-0.170	0.073	-0.236	-2.335*
	Parenting schemes (F8)	-0.151	0.053	-0.249	-2.875**
	Selecting employees using psychometric tests (F18)	-0.148	0.061	-0.240	-2.440*
	Selecting clericals/manuals using technical and ability tests/work samples (F29)	0.134	0.061	0.199	2.183*
	F-test value	19.389***			
	R^2	0.853			
	Adjusted R^2	0.809			

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$

All models presented in Table 2 are significant (all $p < 0.001$), accounting for 71 percent of the variance in national happiness measured through CLI, and 46 to 81 percent of the vari-

ance in national happiness measured through correlates of national happiness. The regression analysis showed that 18 HRM practices are statistically significantly associated with national happiness, with some of HRM practices being detected to be relevant for several variables of national happiness. Table 3 summarises either positive (marked '+') or negative (marked '–') statistically significant associations between HRM factors and variables of national happiness.

TABLE 3
HRM factors being significantly positively/negatively associated with measure and correlates of national happiness

	Measure/correlate of national happines							
Relevant HRM factors	CLI	Log GDP per capita	Social support	Healthy life expectancy at birth	Freedom to make life choices	Generosity	Perceptions of corruption	Times detected significant
Immediate supervisor appraisal for clericals/manuals and professionals (F2)				+				1
Subordinate and peer appraisal for clericals/manuals and professionals (F4)							–	1
Flexible benefits for all employees (F5)					+	+		2
Profit sharing for all employees (F6)					+			1
Parenting schemes (F8)						+	–	2
Recruiting employees through social media (F11)	+				+	+	–	4
Written HRM strategy and substrategies (F13)				–				1
Recruiting employees through vacancy page on company website (F14)	+		+				–	3
Recruiting employees through vacancies in newspapers (F15)					+			1
Selecting employees using references (F17)					+			1
Selecting employees using psychometric tests (F18)					+		–	2
Managers' and professionals' self-appraisal (F21)		+						1
Stock options for clericals/manuals and professionals (F22)			–					1
Bonuses based on team goals for managers and professionals (F25)			+					1
Managers' and employees' self-service of electronic HRM system (F26)				+				1
Selecting managers using technical and ability tests/work samples (F28)	–							1
Selecting clericals/manuals using technical and ability tests/work samples (F29)	–		–				+	3
Training evaluation through job performance before and immediately after training used (F31)		–		–				2
Number of factors significant for the measure/correlate of national happiness	4	2	4	4	6	3	6	

As visible from tables 2 and 3, higher national happiness as measured by the CLI is associated with a higher incidence

of recruiting employees through social media and through vacancy pages on company websites, and not selecting managers and clerical/manual workers based on technical and ability test/work samples. Higher log GDP per capita is associated with greater use of self-assessment by managers and professionals, and less frequent evaluation of training based on job performance before and immediately after the training used. Higher social support is associated with a higher incidence of recruiting employees through vacancy pages on company website and the use of bonuses based on team goals for managers and professionals, and a lower presence of selecting clerical/manual workers based on technical and ability tests/work samples and the use of stock options for clerical/manual workers and professionals. Higher healthy life expectancy at birth is associated with greater use of self-service by managers and employees, and immediate supervisors' appraising clerical/manual workers and professionals, but lower presence of written HRM strategies and substrategies, and evaluation of training based on job performance before and immediately after the training used. Higher perception of freedom to make life choices is associated with a higher incidence of recruiting employees through social media and vacancies in newspapers, selecting employees based on references and psychometric tests, and offering flexible benefits and profit sharing. Higher generosity is associated with recruiting employees through social media and offering flexible benefits and parenting schemes. Finally, lower perceptions of corruption are associated with recruiting employees through social media and vacancy pages on company website, selecting employees based on psychometric tests but not technical and ability tests/work samples, using subordinate and peer appraisal for clerical/manual workers and professionals, and offering parenting schemes.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical implications

The quality of the working life initiatives from the second half of the 20th century onwards resulted in a growing and ongoing interest among scholars, practitioners and policy makers in finding ways to increase the wellbeing of not just individuals but of whole nations as well. No matter which of the popular constructs – subjective wellbeing, life satisfaction or life happiness – are in their centre of attention, substantial proof has been generated that the most prominent factors in shaping happiness are social and economic conditions (Vinson & Ericson, 2014). Consequently, as work life is fundamental in

individuals' lives, practices employers apply in managing human resources certainly play a significant role in attaining happiness. However, although organisations have a notable role in the national socio-economic development (Michie, 2019) and people's lives, papers exploring factors of national happiness on the organisational level are almost non-existent and are called for. Our paper addresses this gap by examining the association between prevailing HRM practices in a country and the national happiness level. Therefore, our paper that explores this association using quantitative empirical data opens the discussion.

Our findings suggest that prevailing HRM practices in a country are associated with the happiness of citizens of that country. HRM practices found to have the strongest association with national happiness are: recruiting employees through social media and vacancy pages on company websites; selecting employees using psychometric tests but not selecting clerical/manual workers using technical and ability tests/work samples; offering flexible benefits and parenting schemes; and not using training evaluation through job performance before and immediately after the training used. Listed HRM practices considerably align with preferences frequently discussed as preferences of younger workforce generations (Zemke et al., 2000). Namely, they correspond with younger workforce cohorts' preferences for IT platforms as recruitment platforms, for being recruited based on their potentials and not on their present knowledge/skills, for customised compensations, for high levels of work-life balance, and for not being obliged to immediately pay back what was invested in them – as they believe that they are worth receiving training and development and that the training and development is primarily for their careers' sake and not for their employers' sake.

In terms of more specific HRM practices, greater consideration should be given to different employee motivation techniques. The association between flexible benefits and happiness levels might be explained by the fact that employee involvement in designing their own benefits programme can lead to the perception that employees can influence compensation policies and decisions (Armstrong, 2010; Michie, 2019). The importance of parenting schemes, as an integral part of work-life balance programmes stems from the well-established fact that work is not the defining role for all employees – non-work roles, including parental roles, can be at least as important as work-related roles. A philosophy that actively supports efforts to help employees succeed in both their business and personal lives therefore sends the message of organisational support and can lead to many positive outcomes, par-

ticularly work and life satisfaction (Newman et al., 2015). Finally, as training is often explained in terms of satisfying growth needs, which occurs when individuals have the opportunity to be fully who they are and realise their potential to become the best version of themselves (Armstrong, 2010), opportunities for personal development through training are therefore not only necessary to nurture talent and the ability to keep pace with the ever-changing and growing demands of the environment, but also an important or the most important motivator for certain categories of employees. However, our research suggests that higher levels of satisfaction can be expected when employees are assessed only after they have had sufficient time to learn new skills and apply them in the workplace. The study therefore contributes to this theme by identifying the more specific HRM practices that may be associated with higher levels of national happiness. All of these practices can be considered high-quality HRM practices, or more specifically – motivational and reward practices that employers can use to try and fulfil the higher-level needs of their employees.

Practical implications

Life happiness is nowadays a frequently explored concept as it is proven to be associated with various positive individual, organisational and country outcomes. Research has revealed that on the individual level it is associated with higher job and career satisfaction, better job performance, fewer health problems and longevity, and on the organisational level with higher levels of employee commitment, lower levels of employee turnover and better customer service (e.g., Diener & Chan 2011; Erdogan et al., 2012; Hagmaier et al., 2018). On the country level, national happiness is associated with higher income levels and higher GDP per capita (e.g., Easterlin, 2001; Ralašić & Bogdan, 2018). Consequently, organisations must bring to consciousness that employee life satisfaction is a mechanism for influencing the bottom line (Erdogan et al., 2012), and governments should be aware that people's happiness is a first-class political question (Ralašić & Bogdan, 2018).

In order to promote a higher level of national happiness, which can occur as a spillover effect of higher levels of individuals' life satisfaction, governments should foster, support and finance, and companies should introduce, maintain and constantly improve various 'happiness-generating' HRM practices (Michie, 2019). Our results suggest that governments should subsidise or co-finance the usage of IT platforms for delivering HRM activities and flexible work arrangements that enable a better work-life balance, as well as decrease tax burdens for companies offering flexible benefits, using merit-

-based pay, and providing financial participation to their employees. At the same time, in order to contribute to happiness of people in countries where they operate, companies should hire based on talents and not on competences, use multiple stakeholders while appraising employee performance in order to be as objective as possible, and treat employee development as a process that benefits their employees directly, themselves indirectly and ultimately their countries.

Research limitations and recommendations for future research

The main constraint of our study is the data limitation. The HRM data comes from a Cranet research, which uses a specific methodology of collecting managerial responses. However, despite the limitations of the Cranet survey, Cranet data enables the description and understanding of the developments in the area of managing people and labour relations across the world (e.g., Karoliny et al., 2009). The happiness data comes from the World Happiness Report database, which, excluding the objective happiness correlates used in our study – log GDP per capita and healthy life expectancy at birth – encompasses an indicator (CLI) collected through surveying citizens' perceptions. Moreover, a major theme has been the shift towards a multidimensional approach over reliance on single measures of wellbeing or economic proxies (e.g., GDP) (Ruggeri et al., 2020). However, the World Happiness Report is a landmark survey of the state of global happiness that ranks countries by how happy their citizens perceive themselves to be (Helliwell et al., 2019). Additionally, it shows how six correlates contribute to explaining national happiness (Helliwell et al., 2019), which enabled us not to rely on a single variable, but to use a multi-angle approach.

The next limitation of our research is that it is designed as a cross-sectional study. Namely, although the nature of Cranet database is longitudinal, data are not collected annually but in survey rounds every four to five years, which does not enable the identification of causal relationships when using this database. Moreover, although the World Happiness Report data are available for 156 countries, because of the scope of the Cranet database, our analysis is limited to 27 countries for which the HRM data was available (among which more than a third pertains to developed western countries and a third to the CEE region).

Consequently, future research, in order to verify our results, should use other national HRM and happiness databases, should use a longitudinal research design to examine the associations over time, as well as include a greater set of world countries that are more evenly distributed over the world.

Moreover, although the quest for happiness is universal (Rego & Cunha, 2008), according to Diener et al. (2018), subjective wellbeing depends on people's culture and values, and the context in which they live, which asks for research revealing cross-cultural differences in HRM practices that are associated with people's happiness.

CONCLUSION

The objective of our paper was to shed light on the association between prevailing HRM practices in a country and national happiness. Namely, individual HRM practices, such as learning opportunities and compensation practices, were found to be relevant for employee subjective wellbeing, while research including a national business systems approach is lacking, although a comparative HRM perspective adopts a 'broader' view of HRM practices by including national differences (Peltonen & Vaara, 2012). Our findings reveal not only that national happiness is associated with overall socially and institutionally embedded HRM practices, but also that tailored HRM practices and HRM practices that enable work-life balance can play a significant role.

NOTES

[1] The term happiness refers to happiness in life, i.e., life happiness, but the academic consensus is to use the term 'happiness' without the 'life' prefix.

[2] Cranet network is a collaboration between over 40 universities and business schools that has carried out a regular international comparative survey of organisational policies and practices in comparative HRM across the world since 1989. More about Cranet network and Cranet research at www.cranet.org.

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Povezanost između nacionalnih praksi upravljanja ljudskim potencijalima i mjera i korelata nacionalne sreće

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Ljudska sreća postala je prvorazredno političko pitanje, koje potiče i vlade i poduzeća da kreiraju politike i prakse koje ljude čine sretnijima, a jedna od njih jesu prakse upravljanja ljudskim potencijalima (ULJP). Budući da su radovi koji istražuju odnos između praksi ULJP-a na razini zemalja i nacionalne sreće na akademskoj razini rijetki, posebno oni empirijski, cilj je ovoga rada upravo istražiti navedeni odnos. Podaci o ULJP-u upotrijebljeni u studiji prikupljeni su kroz ciklus istraživanja Cranet 2014-2016 i odnose se na 5093 organizacije koje djeluju u 27 zemalja na pet kontinenata. Podaci o nacionalnoj sreći, Cantril ladder indikator (CLI) kao pokazatelj i šest korelata nacionalne sreće preuzeti su iz baze podataka World Happiness Report. Nalazi upućuju na to da su prakse ULJP-a povezane s najvišim razinama nacionalne sreće: upotreba IT platformi za zapošljavanje, zapošljavanje na temelju potencijala, a ne na sadašnjem znanju/vještinama, prilagođene nagrade za rad, razne inicijative za usklađivanje privatnoga i poslovnoga života te obuka i razvoj u prvom redu zbog karijere, a ne poslodavca, što odgovara preferencijama mlađe radne snage.

Ključne riječi: subjektivno blagostanje, zadovoljstvo životom, sreća, nacionalna sreća, upravljanje ljudskim potencijalima (ULJP), CRANET