Ways to Achieve Life Satisfaction in Representations of the Unemployed

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Abstract. On the basis of statistical analysis labor market dynamics is revealed in different subjects of the Russian Federation. It is followed by the involuntary unemployment and the diminishing quality of life. In the Far East the tendency is intensified due to the migration intentions of a major part of the population. The previous life satisfaction studies of the people living in the Far East are limited by the standardized survey. The article deals with the results of the empirical research of the free expression of the unemployed individuals’ ideas how to achieve the life satisfaction, which is followed by the content analysis of the texts by means of the method of exploring natural categories. The results of the survey in two groups are presented (the individuals differ in the length of ‘the unemployed’ status: the first group members have been unemployed for less that 6 months, while in the second group they have been jobless for more than 6 months). The subjective life satisfaction/dissatisfaction status of the unemployed in the first group is action-oriented. Their representations reflect the strategy of problem solving and, at the same time, their attempts to get some social support from family and friends. The emotional reaction to the situation is ambivalent, this is what is being discussed with the inner circle. Representations of the unemployed in this group are characterized by cognitive complexity, integration and differentiation. The representations of the people, who stay unemployed for more than half a year, reflect their inactive state and the strategy of keeping out of trouble; they are cognitively simple, diffusive and weakly integrated. Empirical evidence actualizes the necessity to provide special support for those who have been unemployed for a long period of time in order to preserve the human capital in the Far East.

1. Introduction
The problem of preserving human capital in the condition of economic instability of the society is rather actual. The dynamics of the labor market can be seen in all the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, it is accompanied by the unemployment and the decrease in quality of life. In the Far East, the tendency is intensified by the migration intentions of the significant proportion of the population.

According to Rosstat (The Russian Federal State Statistics Service), the population in the modern Far East region is dramatically decreasing. The average decline of the population in Russia because of natural mortality and migration processes is seven persons per ten thousand. Over the period 1991-2010 the population decreased by 1,8 million people and constituted 22% [1]. Taken as a whole, the population in the Far East (FE) is 8.2 million people; in 2018, it was 5.6% of the population in Russia.
Researchers point out a number of factors forming the population in the Far East. In different periods of history, the territory was inhabited by migrants, Cossacks, professional hunters and fishermen, foreigners and others. It resulted in the formation of different identities (L. Blyaer [2]). Currently, the public mood regarding migration is being intensified in all the constituent entities of the Far East Federal Area, including Komsomolsk-na-Amure, where mass layoffs of workers and highly skilled professionals take place periodically because of lack of regular orders at the core enterprises. At the same time, migrant workers are attracted. The key ‘push factors’ of actors in the labor market is low potential of professional self-realization and inappropriate pay level. The All-Russian Public Inquiry Centre, the Far Eastern Human Capital Development Agency, and the Russian Federation Ministry of the Far East Development carried out a survey among Komsomolsk-na-Amure residents aged 18-65 to determine the out-migration to other regions of the country. It was done twice: first in November 2017, then in February 2018. It showed the increase of those who assess the opportunity for getting good education and development for their children quite low. 10% of responders said there was no reason for them to stay. The majority of those who continue hesitating are ready to change their mind in case their income increases and travelling by plane to the central regions of the country become more affordable. Expectations, connected with the highest salary, are typical for people at the age of 31-34. 59% of responders consider that the business environment in the Far East is unfavorable, while in 2017 53% of residents noted it. The youth admits positive social changes in the area (52% of Komsomolsk-na-Amure residents aged 18-30 [3]). Komsomolsk-na-Amure residents are quite satisfied with their cultural life. 46% of responders admit positive changes connected with all types of concert tours. The youth, being a driver of socio-economic changes, gives the most optimistic assessment of the conditions for their businesses.

According to the Ministry for Economic Development of Khabarovsk Krai [4] and Komsomolsk-na-Amure Employment Centre [5] the present situation at the job market is characterized by the low level of the registered unemployment (see table 1). However, young people mention lack of facilities for recreational activities; it is one of the reasons to leave the city.

**Table 1. Dynamics of Komsomolsk-na-Amure Labor Market Indicators according to the Ministry of Economic Development of Khabarovsk Krai and Komsomolsk-na-Amure Employment Centre.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period of time</th>
<th>Number unemployed, thousands of people</th>
<th>Vacancies, thousands of people</th>
<th>Registered unemployment rate, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01.01.2010</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.01.2011</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.01.2012</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.01.2013</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.01.2014</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.01.2015</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.01.2016</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.03.2016</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.02.2017</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.03.2018</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.01.2019</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.05.2019</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sociological data is confirmed by psychological researches done by a group of authors of the Educational Psychology Department at Amur State University of Humanities and Pedagogy, Komsomolsk-na-Amure [6, 7]. The comparative analysis of migration intentions in two groups of responders (high school students and university students) showed that high school students intend to leave the city.

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more often. The results are statistically significant ($p \leq 0.01; \phi_{emp.} = 2.53$). As for the reasons, they mention the following ones: ‘prestigious job offers’ (69.4%), ‘desire for new impressions’ (66.8%) and ‘top salary job offers’ (62.4%), ‘studies at a university in some other city’ (56.6%), ‘desire to live in other climatic conditions’ (54.7%), ‘lack of opportunities for self-realization’ (52.2%), ‘family’s move’ (54.1%). University students, as compared to high school students, their relocation most often associate with such a motive as ‘family’s move’, i.e. a necessary need and a desire to live near their relatives.

A research performed by A.V. Topilin and O.D Vorob’eva showed that the sharply increased differentiation of regions by the level of unemployment in Russia (during 1997-2012) was due to the enlarged number of territories with outmigration and the reduction of the territories building-up the human capital by means of migration [8]. According to E.O. Skripnik, the effect of ‘bringing up’ migration intentions is revealed: the more the responders themselves are motivated on relocation, the more they want their children to live beyond the Far East [9].

Along with economic reasons, the researchers have noted a number of psychological ones, preserving both forced and voluntary unemployment (E.B. Avgust [10]; S.B. Vlasova, E.S. Krasilova, YU.A. Prokof’eva [11], V. Frankl [12] and others). Both types of the unemployed can be satisfied or dissatisfied with life when economic conditions are kept constant. A.V. Baranova empirically elicited five components of life satisfaction: economic prosperity (25.6%); socio-psychological (19.0%), personal (20.9) and social well-being (17.5%); family (16.1%). The study was based on a sample of 175 men and women at the age of 18-35 living in Moscow and belonging to different socio-economic groups [13]. I.A. Gorbunov and V.B. Zajceva, having studied the structure of values of the unemployed in the Rokitch method with the further data factorization, found out that there was some distortion in self-identification in the coordinate axes system of the values’ structure. It was built up by the unemployed, they could keep to one system of values, and realize themselves in the other one [14]. Foreign researchers got similar data. Sam (2000 [15]) revealed that life satisfaction of teenagers had positive correlation with family values. According to Cases and others (2004 [16]), the life satisfaction of the youth has positive correlation with non-materialistic values. The research done by Hofer and others (2006 [17]), showed that in all the cultures under study the high level of life satisfaction is connected with the high value of interpersonal relations.

In a number of national surveys (I.A. Salihoiva [18], K.V. Karpinskij [19], G.L. Puchkova [20], R.M. SHamionov [21], S.V. YAremchuk [22] and others) the subjective well-being is considered in the context of self-monitoring vital activity, that has a complicated hierarchy structure; its components are built up in different regulation systems and they are mediated by the notional personality system. Disparities of the person’s opportunities and his/her values of life lead to a reconsideration of inaccessible values of life and goals. The internal conflict, caused by the reduction of life satisfaction, increases the person’s motivation to achieve renewed values in different aspects of life and can motivate a person to change his/her life [22]. According to V. Frankl, a person does not invent the meaning of life; he/she finds it in the world. Characterizing positive meanings, he identifies three groups of values or three main ways for a person to find the meaning of life. The first way is directed to something the person gives to the world; the second – to something he/she takes from the world in his/her meetings and experience. According to V. Frankl, a person resorts to the values of relations (the third way) when he/she is in the power of circumstances which cannot be changed, but he/she is able (free) to take a comprehensive position towards circumstances and make sense of his/her sufferings. In a situation of being jobless, V. Frankl describes two strategies of behavior: constructive and destructive (‘Unemployment Neurosis’). The unemployed with a destructive strategy consider, that they cannot be asked about anything and do not demand anything from themselves. They think that the plight as the result of having no job, allows them to feel free of responsibility towards others and themselves, they no longer respond to life challenges [12]. In other words, it is easier to be unhappy than to become happy, but the ways to achieve happiness depend not only on external circumstances, but also on the man himself: ‘If you want to be happy, be happy!’
A.A. Kronik and R.A. Ahmerov [23], reviewing the interconnection of the life style and representations on the ways of happiness achievement, formulate principles of self-regulation on the bases of analysis of different points of view starting with ancient times. The utility maximization principle is the human pursuit of objects maximally useful and fully satisfying the person’s demands, getting the most of every moment of life in all the life situations. The needs minimization principle is the person’s endeavor to lower the intensity and the degree of tension of estimated requirements. The minimization of difficulties principle is a tendency to simplify the man’s world in general and concrete objects – the goals of various activities. The maximization of abilities principle is striving for all-round development, physical and spiritual self-improvement. This principle cannot be reduced only to self-improvement, two complementary ideas how to achieve happiness are based on it: self-improvement and devotion to others. Thus, depending on the type of life problem, a person usually uses two strategies of life’s activity management. The first one is connected with putting and/or accepting life goals, implementation of objectives, while the second one – with counteraction to stresses. If the first strategy includes processes connected with meaning-making, target setting and overcoming difficulties in achieving life goals, the second one is connected with the choice how to solve different types of problems, resolve conflicts with people, and crisis management (intrapersonal, interpersonal and others).

In our previous research, age and gender variations in the estimation of the ways to achieve happiness by the unemployed were revealed. Young unemployed people (under 30) consider the following three strategies of achieving happiness to be the most effective: ‘aspiration to be useful and live for the good of others’, ‘to accept oneself and others for who they are’ and ‘need for self-actualization, all-round development and self-improvement’. It proves their state of subjective well-being and optimistic view of life. In adulthood, the unemployed with a university degree feel more satisfied with life in comparison with the unemployed having secondary vocational education. Gender variations in the estimation of the ways to achieve happiness are statistically significant. To achieve happiness men more often choose the strategy directed at others, while women – directed towards themselves and the world around - ‘as it is’ [24, 25].

The scientific literature analysis showed that the previous research of the life satisfaction in the Far East was most often done by means of standardized tests. We could not find any research reflecting the content of representations of open statements; it has become the subject of our study. Representations of a person, performing a regulative function, ensure the focus of behavior and conscious regulation of life’s activity, including the situation with the loss of the job. That is why; the content-related analysis can be applied to study psychological reasons for forced and voluntary unemployment.

2. Research methodology
The purpose of the study was to reveal the representations about the ways of the life satisfaction achievement by the unemployed. The following hypothesis was tested: the length of being unemployed affects the life satisfaction degree and, as a result, the content of representations, reflecting their vital activity. The study was organized by means of comparative method. Two groups of the unemployed looking for a job with the help of Komsomolsk-na-Amure Employment Centre consisted of 44 participants. The first group comprised those, who were unemployed for less than six months, while the second one – more than six months. The survey of all the unemployed was conducted at the same time, but the subdivision into groups and the text analysis were done six months after the registration at the Employment Centre. The empirical data collection was performed with the help of sentence completion test. The unemployed were asked to complete two sentences: 1) In order to be happy, I am doing…, 2) When I feel unhappy, I …. Content analysis of natural categories (by B. A. Eremeev [26]), was used to analyze the results. A word, having a subject meaning, was taken as an observation unit. 88 texts were analyzed; 44 texts were with the description of words, characterizing strategies to achieve life satisfaction, while the other group of texts expressed life dissatisfaction. Statistical processing of the vocabulary was done with the help of Statistik 6.0 program using Spearman rank correlation coefficient.
3. Results and discussion

Let us consider the content of representations, reflecting strategies to achieve life satisfaction by two groups of the unemployed, which are given below. In picture 1 the content shows the representations of the unemployed, looking for a job for less than half a year, while in picture 2 – more than that.

Five natural categories (NC) were revealed in the representations of the first group of the unemployed: occupation, independent, chance, share, be. They are defined in a dictionary as follows:

- **be** – to exist, to be present;
- **independent** – not influenced or controlled by other people, free to do things;
- **occupation** – regular activity; person’s job, business
- **chance** – an occasion that allows something to be done; an opportunity
- **share** – to divide, give part of it to someone else; to tell someone else about your thoughts, feelings, ideas, etc.

Two natural categories (‘independent’ and ‘be’) are isolates, their content points at the actual need of independent, free from control existence. NC ‘occupation’ is connected with two words, interpreting its meaning ‘occupation – children’ and ‘occupation – self’. It makes the object of activity in the achievement of happiness concrete. Two more NCs make a chain ‘chance – share – evaluate’. It points at the reflection of personal abilities and the discussion of the problem with family and friends. Chains of words, interpreting the meanings ‘look for – opportunity’, ‘job – any’, ‘for – do – employment’ point at the condition of active job hunt and the importance of having a job to feel happy. Meanwhile, the word ‘job’ makes a start from two words: ‘all’ and ‘for’, it means ‘job – not – all’, ‘job – not – for’. It is possible to say, that for the unemployed, who are looking for a job for less than half a year, having a job is very important in order to feel happy and be independent. They are active inside and outside (they reflect on it, discuss, do everything…). However, they also think, that it is important to take care of children and yourself to achieve happiness. Their representations are cognitively complex and differential.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 1.** Correlation pleiades of representations of the unemployed looking for a job for less than half a year, finishing the sentence ‘In order to be happy I do...’ Figure legend (hereinafter: natural categories are put into a rectangle; words-interpretations – into an oval; positive statistically significant correlation between words is defined by a straight line, negative correlation – by dash and dash line).
Picture 2 shows the content of representations on the ways to achieve happiness given by the unemployed, looking for a job for more than half a year. There are two natural categories in their structure and one the least accepted word; they have the following dictionary meanings:

- **surroundings, environment** – that is everywhere around something; the conditions that you live or work in and the way that they influence how you feel or how effectively you can work
- **life** – state of being alive, a way of living

**Figure 2.** Correlation pleiades of representations of the unemployed, who are looking for the job for *more than half a year*, finishing the sentence ‘*In order to be happy I do...*’

Subjective life dissatisfaction was studied by means of the text analysis finishing the sentence ‘*When I feel unhappy, I ...*’. Figures 3 and 4 show correlation pleiades, reflecting the content of representations of the unemployed, experiencing life dissatisfaction and negative emotional state.

**Figure 3.** Correlation pleiades of representations of the unemployed looking for a job for *less than half a year*, finishing the sentence ‘*When I feel unhappy, I ...*’.

11 natural categories are revealed in representations of the unemployed, looking for a job for less than half a year:

- **try** – to attempt to do something
- **smile** – to make a happy or friendly expression in which the ends of the mouth curve up slightly
- **cinema** – movie theater, a theatre where people pay to watch films
- **telephone** – a device for speaking to someone in another place by means of electrical signals
- **a lot of** – a large amount or number of people or things
- **watch** – to look at something/somebody for a period of time
• **friends** – people who you know well and like a lot; close people, pals
• **cry** – to produce tears as the result of a strong emotion
• **opportunity** – the possibility of doing something
• **way out** – a method of solving a problem
• **talk** – have a conversation, exchange information

Natural categories of representations of the unemployed looking for a job for less than half a year reflect active action-oriented state in a condition of subjective life dissatisfaction (feeling unhappy). Emotions accompanying this state are ambivalent (‘smile’ – ‘cry’). Activities are connected with both spending free time (‘watch’, ‘cinema’, ‘a lot of’, ‘telephone’...), associating with family and friends, and attempts to find the way out while looking for a job. Meanwhile, a constructive coping strategy is reflected in the representations of the unemployed. It is revealed in the words, interpreting the meaning of the natural category ‘way out’: ‘way out – job’, ‘way out – try – do – job’, ‘way out – situation – find’, ‘way out – job – good – think – this’.

The second conceptual block of the natural categories ‘cry’, ‘friends’, ‘talk’ reflects the coping strategy ‘looking for social support’ and it reflects the emotional response to the situation not on one’s own, but together with friends, family and close people. It is reflected in a chain of words ‘Cry, – friends – children, family – close people’ and ‘Talk – close people – children, family – communicate’. Representations are cognitively complicated and differentiated enough.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 4.** Correlation pleiades of representations of the unemployed looking for the job for **more than half a year**, finishing the sentence ‘When I feel unhappy, I ...’.

Picture 4 shows correlation pleiades of representations of the unemployed, who are looking for a job for **more than half a year**, experiencing life dissatisfaction and negative emotional state. One natural category is revealed – ‘situation’; it is an isolate with a dictionary meaning ‘the set of things that are happening and the conditions that exist at a particular time and place’. The unemployed do not describe concrete circumstances; the situation is given to them as a task (the state of unhappiness) and a certain social state (being unemployed for more than half a year).

The semantic chain of words, interpreting the meaning ‘not – want – see – nobody’ points at the inactive state and reflects the usage of the most ineffective coping strategy used in difficult life situations, which is called ‘problem avoidance’.

Numerous surveys show that people’s representations, being verbal and cognitively level of activity regulation, provide anticipation of the course of events and planning of activities in general, take part in the goal formation, problem identification and decision-making. Because of the content analysis, the main difference in the representations of people, being unemployed for a different period has been revealed. It lies in the level of activity and self-consistency both in the ways to achieve happiness and negative problem-solving strategies. Comparison of these results with the ones got under our supervision (by S. Stepanova and A. Filipenko) with the help of standardized methods, spotted common peculiarities, influencing the term of employment. According to S. Stepanova, the unemployed who managed to find a job within 6 months had an adaptive personality type. They were ready to reframe their resources in the state of being unemployed. They could be characterized as responsible, worrying about safe existence of relevant close people, having terminal values (health, love), and altruistic, gaining social acknowledgement. The unemployed, who failed to find a job within 6 months, showed...
maladaptive personality type characterized by pessimism, rigidity, individualism, detachment from life, external locus control, loss of life goals, self-identity and self-integrity [S. Stepanova]. According to the research done by A. Filipenko [30], young specialists, who managed to find a job within 6 months after graduation, had a high level of goal orientation, process, the result and meaningfulness of life, openness to experience, stability, pro-sociality and social success.

The results of this research and the scientific literature analysis give an opportunity to formulate the stages of losing job stress experience. The first stage of ‘unwanted rest’ is accompanied by the state of euphoria, joy and the opportunity to relax at last. However, the unemployed is confronted with the first wrong mental set: he/she is sure to find a job quickly because he/she is a good specialist; he/she just has to start looking for it. The stage can last for 2-3 weeks.

At the second stage of ‘active search’ a person is trying to find his/her favorite job, looks optimistic. It is proved by a rich cognitive content of correlation pleiades of the unemployed. The main aim is to find a good well-paid job. As practical psychologists say, such kind of active state can last for a month.

The third stage of ‘anxiety and doubt’ comes when a person experiences a failure in finding the job, he/she loves. A person becomes unconfident and feels procrastination of the intended result. As a rule, such kind of reaction appears after getting a great number of refusals on the employees’ part. The stage can last for about two months.

The fourth stage of ‘making compromise decision’ makes a person refuse from getting only the job he/she likes and start looking for unfavorable, less paid job; it is possible to change occupation or start up some business. No matter what happens, a person has to make a decision, and it must be done within two months.

After 5-6 months of unsuccessful work search the fifth stage of ‘problem avoidance’ comes. It is accompanied by full apathy, helplessness, confusion, withdrawal. A person gets confirmation in his/her insolvency, uselessness as a specialist. Obviously, feeling depressed, a person is in need of psychological support to get a new life purpose not only on the part of family and friends, but also on the part of psychologists.

4. Conclusion
The research showed that in case the unemployed are looking for a job for less than half a year, their representations on the ways to reach happiness are distinguished by cognitive complexity, integrity, and differentiation. The state of subjective satisfaction (and dissatisfaction) is active; a constructive coping strategy ‘problem solving’ is reflected in their representations. It is connected with the wish to find the way out, get a job, and at the same time, ‘looking for social support’ among family and friends. In case of dissatisfaction (feeling unhappy), the following things are revealed: emotional reaction, ambivalence of feelings, social support from family and friends, and the discussion of the situation.

The research showed that the unemployed, being in this status for more than half a year, are distinguished by cognitive simplicity, diffusion, weak integrity. In their search for the ways of achieving happiness, the representations are spacially local; they are connected with the environment, having close friends, reflection of the person’s being and the reality. In case of dissatisfaction (feeling unhappy), they resort to inactivity and the most ineffective coping strategy – ‘problem avoidance’.

Thus, in order to preserve the human capital in the Far East, it is necessary to provide the employment centers with psychological and psychotherapeutic support of the unemployed. Different types of trainings can be used (for example, ‘Text therapy’ training that can give a person an opportunity to get unexpected meanings, taking them out of unconscious with the help of existential texts and the training ‘Happiness as I see it’. ‘Effective technologies Course’ can be offered to the unemployed for educational purposes.

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