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TOWARDS ENHANCING HAPPINESS AT WORK: A CASE STUDY

Natthawin SAENGHIRAN¹

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to study how an Organization Development Intervention (ODI) can enhance Happiness at Work in terms of Feelings at Work, Job Satisfaction, and Subjective Happiness of administrative staff members at Assumption University. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and Happy Eight (Happy Soul, Happy Heart, Happy Brain, Happy Relax, Happy Body, Happy Money, Happy Family and Happy Society) were used as an Organizational Development Intervention (ODI) and were applied with the experimental group. The results showed that ODI could enhance Happiness at Work in terms of Job Satisfaction, and Subjective Happiness at the 0.05 significance level. In terms of Feelings at Work, there was no change at the 0.05 significance level. However, the findings of the post-ODI survey showed a higher score of positive feelings and a lower score of negative feelings.

Keywords: Happiness at Work; Feelings at Work; Job Satisfaction; Subjective Happiness; Appreciative Inquiry; Happy Eight.

Introduction

In 1970, His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan–Jigme Singye Wangchuck - focused on Gross National Happiness (GNH) as an indicator of well-being and quality of life in addition to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (The Center of Bhutan Studies, 2010). GDP indicates National Well-being by measuring goods and services. GNH can be regarded as the next evolution in indicators for sustainable development, going beyond measuring only material values such as production and consumption, by incorporating all values relevant to life, including the most subtle and profound: happiness.

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Giver today's global challenges and the current economic turmoil, measuring citizens' well-being and quality of life have become essential to policy makers. National happiness might be a more meaningful indicator of national well-being than economic measures alone such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Blanchflower & Oswald as cited in Ashkanasy, 2011, Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009). Contemporary research scientists have decided that happiness is the best indicator of a country's relative success (Templeton, 2004).

Thailand is another country that is taking into consideration people's happiness as a current focus and trying to improve the quality of people's lives using the theory of His Majesty the King – Sufficiency Economy Theory. It has been used as the guiding light for Thai people's livelihood and behavior at all levels, from the family, to the community, and to the country as a whole on matters regarding national development and administration. In the world of business in Thailand, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation aims to drive organizations to take care of their employees (Raungarreeerat, 2011). Therefore, any country that wishes to develop long term sustainability should not overlook the mind of its people. Likewise, for sustainable development of any organization, the leaders should not ignore the feelings, perceptions and attitudes of their employees. Therefore, the Happiness at Work of employees becomes an interesting issue.

The focal organization for this study is the administrative units of Assumption University (AU) with the following research objectives:

- (1) To design an ODI to enhance AU administrative staff members' Happiness at Work in terms of Feelings at Work, Job Satisfaction, and Subjective Happiness.
- (2) To implement the ODI to produce a higher level of Happiness at Work of AU administrative staff members in terms of Feelings at Work, Job Satisfaction, and Subjective Happiness.
- (3) To determine the impact of the ODI on the Happiness at Work of AU administrative staff members in terms of Feelings at Work, Job Satisfaction, and Subjective Happiness.

Literature Review

Happiness at Work

Happiness at Work is defined from both hedonic and eudaimonic views at work. The definition of Happiness at Work is not only having feelings of pleasure, positive affective experience, good feelings, and enjoyment but also one's work life must be meaningful. Boehm and Lyubomirsky (2008) defined a happy person as someone who frequently experiences positive emotions. Positive emotions also signal that life is good and that no threats are readily apparent (Cantor et al. 1991; Carver & Scheier, 1998; Cojocaru, Bragaru & Ciuchi, 2012) and they also trigger the organization's success (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Cojocaru &

Bragaru, 2012). Edmunds, L. D., & Pryce-Jones, J. (2008) defined “Happiness at Work as about mindfully making the best use of the resources one has to overcome the challenge one is facing. Actively relishing the highs and managing the lows will help one maximizing one’s performance and achieve one’s potential. And this not only builds one’s happiness but also that of others”. Chiumento (2007) defined Happiness at Work as “enjoy good working relationship, career development, feel valued and well treated.” According to Seligman (2011), he uses the acronym “PERMA” which concluded that people feel happiest when they have: *Pleasure* (delicious food, warm baths, etc.), *Engagement* (or flow, feelings enjoyment but challenging activity), *Relationships* (social ties have turned out to be extremely reliable indicator of happiness.), *Meaning* (a perceived quest or belonging to something bigger), and *Accomplishments* (having realized tangible goals). People pursue meaning, engagement and accomplishment for their own sake, and not only to experience more positive emotions. Therefore, for this study, the term “Happiness at Work” refers to the pursuit of positive feelings, and the meaning at work.

Feelings at Work

Psychologists now recognize the critical influence of affect in human experience. Affective Well-being has its philosophical and theoretical foundations in the concept of happiness (Haybron, 2003). Job-related Affective Well-being is currently the closest available expression of happiness in the workplace (Hosie, & Sevastos, 2010). The Job Related Affective Well-being Scale (JAWS) was developed by Katwyk, Fox, Spector, & Kelloway (2000) to assess a wide range of emotional reactions to work. The JAWS model consists of four sub-scales as follows:

- (1) High Pleasure – High Arousal (HPHA: ecstatic, enthusiastic, excited, energetic, inspired);
- (2) High Pleasure – Low Arousal (HPLA: satisfied, content, at ease, relaxed, calm);
- (3) Low Pleasure – High Arousal (LPHA: furious, angry, frightened, anxious, disgusted); and
- (4) Low Pleasure – Low Arousal (LPLA: depressed, discouraged, gloomy, fatigued, and bored).

Respondents were asked to evaluate 20 job-related affective statements in terms of how their current job has made them feel over the past 30 days. They responded by choosing one of the five variable categories, ranging from “never” to “extremely often.” Of all the items, 10 referred to pleasurable affects while the remaining 10 referred to unpleasurable affects.

Happy Eight

Eight happiness or Happy Eight are elements of the happiness that the Health Promotion Foundation uses as a direction and aims to drive organizations to apply in order to take care of their employees (Raungarreerat, 2011). They are Happy Soul (spirituality), Happy Heart, Happy Brain, Happy Relax, Happy Body, Happy Money, Happy Family, and Happy Society activities. In line with Covey (2004), a human being has great assets that need to preserve and enhance four areas of his or her life, namely the physical, the social/emotional, the intellectual, and the spiritual dimensions. These eight happiness issues consist of:

- (1) Happy Soul means having religious faith and ethics in living one's life. The company can arrange for or facilitate employees in performing religious ceremonies.
- (2) Happy Heart means showing hospitality to each other.
- (3) Happy Brain is concerned with learning for self-development from various sources in order to become professional, secure, and to gain progress.
- (4) Happy Relax is about knowing how to relax in life and at work.
- (5) Happy Body is concerned with physical happiness and the knowledge of how to spend one's life, eat, sleep, and work with efficiency.
- (6) Happy Money deals with having money, saving, and knowing how to spend money.
- (7) Happy Family is about having a happy and stable family.
- (8) Happy Society involves love, harmony, kindness to communities where they love and reside in, a good society, and a good environment.

Job Satisfaction

According to Fisher (2010), job satisfaction is one of the factors that contribute to Happiness at Work. Much of the research on happiness in the organization has focused on the job's properties, with challenging, and interesting work and is assumed to produce a positive work attitude. Job satisfaction is largely seen as affect which is "a pleasurable emotional state resulting from an appraisal of one's job as achieving or facilitating one's job values", (Locke 1969, p.317; Locke and Lathan, 1976). Job satisfaction is, therefore, related to happiness. Warr, Cook, and Wall (1979) developed an instrument to measure Job Satisfaction which referred to the degree to which a person reports satisfaction about intrinsic and extrinsic features of the job which can be grouped into three sub-factors namely:

- (1) Job Itself Intrinsic Satisfaction consists of
 - 1.1. The freedom to choose one's own method of working
 - 1.2. The amount of responsibility one is given
 - 1.3. The opportunity to use one's abilities
 - 1.4. The amount of variety in one's job

- (2) Working Conditions Satisfaction consists of the following items:
 - 2.1. The physical work conditions
 - 2.2. One's fellow workers
 - 2.3. One's immediate boss
 - 2.4. Hours of work
 - 2.5. Job security
- (3) Employee Relations Satisfaction consists of the following items:
 - 3.1. The recognition one gets for good work
 - 3.2. The rate of pay
 - 3.3. Industrial relations between management and workers in the firm
 - 3.4. The chance of promotion
 - 3.5. The way of management in the workplace
 - 3.6. The attention paid to suggestions one makes

Subjective Happiness

Subjective Happiness is the degree of general happiness according to Lyubomirsky & Lepper (1999). The employees who got a higher score on subjective happiness, seemed to be more optimistic. Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) proposed a Subjective Happiness Scale which indicated that individuals who got a higher score, perceived themselves as happy, also thought well of themselves, were optimistic, and experienced a predominance of positive emotions.

Conceptual Framework

The concept of Happiness at Work for this study as shown in Figure 1 consists of three components namely: (i) Feelings at Work which refers to an employee feeling more frequent positive emotions than negative emotions, (ii) Job Satisfaction which refers to an employee who feels more satisfied with his or her job, and (iii) Subjective Happiness of an employee which refers to the happiness an individual employee feels at a particular moment. Appreciative Inquiry was applied to renew the four areas of human beings (Spirituality, Intellectual, Emotional /Social, and Physical dimensions) to enhance Happiness at Work in terms of Feelings at Work, Job Satisfaction, and Subjective Happiness.

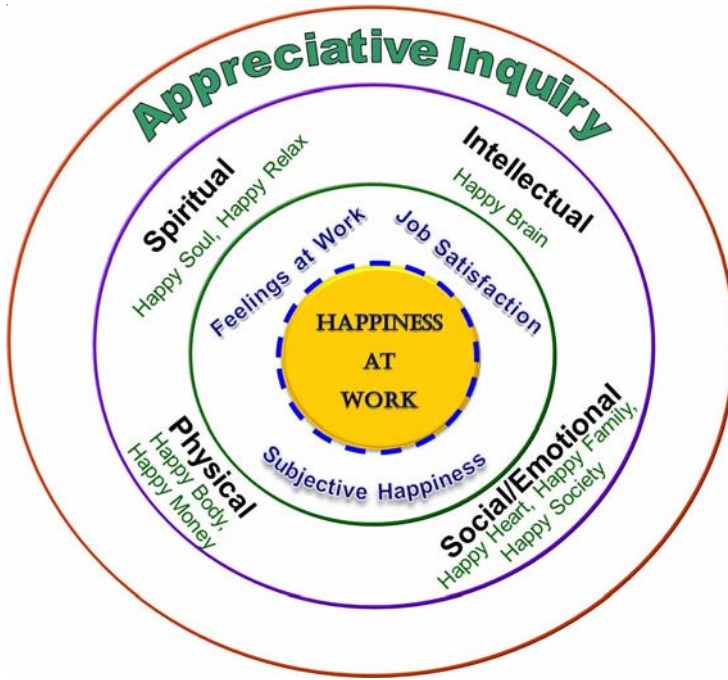


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Source: Created by the author for this study

Methodology

Research methodology

Questionnaires were administered to all 404 AU administrative staff members during the academic year 2012, to investigate the current situation of Happiness at Work in terms of Feelings at Work, Job Satisfaction, and Subjective Happiness. The questionnaire contained five parts namely: (i) Job-related Affective Well-being Scales (Katwyk, Fox, Spector, & Kelloway (2000), (ii) Job Satisfaction (Warr, Cook, & Wall, 1979), (iii) the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyumbomirsky & Lepper, 1999), (iv) a Demographic Profile and (v) Other recommendations. Then, 30 respondents from the Office of Inventory Management were selected as an experimental group who received an ODI and 32 respondents from the Office of Financial Management as the control group who did not receive the ODI. One week after completing the ODI, the same questionnaires were administered for the second time to the experimental group of 30 respondents and the control group of 32 respondents. The results of the pre- and post-ODI of the experimental group and the control group were compared and contrasted to see the differences

and the changes in their experiences by using a Paired Sample Test. Moreover, the researcher used an Independent Samples Test to compare the variables between the experimental group and the control group to see the differences before and after the ODI.

ODI methodology

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and Happy 8 were used as organization development interventions to increase the levels of happiness at work of the experimental group in terms of Feelings at Work, Job Satisfaction, and Subjective Happiness. The researcher made use of the AI approach using the 4-D cycle (Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny) in order to enable the participants to be aware of their strengths and make use of those strengths to do better in their daily life. The AI workshop was organized with the eight issues of happiness: Happy Soul, Happy Heart, Happy Brain, Happy Relax, Happy Body, Happy Money, Happy Family, and Happy Society. The experimental group consisted of 30 members who were divided into three groups of 10 due to their routine duties. Each group completed each happy session in one week. The researcher began with Happy Soul (spirituality) to enable the participants to open their minds and have positive thinking referring to Covey (2004). The Happy Soul workshop took 180 minutes because it needed more time to explain about Appreciative Inquiry. The other workshops took 150 minutes each. The second workshop was Happy Heart which was essential to build good relationships among the participants. The next workshops were Happy Brain, Happy Relax, Happy Body, Happy Money, Happy Family, and Happy Society which were conducted respectively. All these workshops were implemented in a one and a half month period.

Findings and Discussion

On the pre-ODI survey, the findings of Happiness at Work in terms of Feelings at Work, Job satisfaction, and Subjective Happiness are given below.

Table 1: The Findings of Pre-ODI of Experimental Group and Control Group

	Experimental Group	Control Group	Sig (2-tailed)
	Mean	Mean	
High Pleasure-High Arousal (HPHA)	19.400	17.438	.021*
High Pleasure-Low Arousal (HPLA)	19.333	17.500	.020*
Low Pleasure-High Arousal (LPHA)	10.633	12.031	.063
Low Pleasure-Low Arousal (LPLA)	10.633	12.375	.022*
Job Itself Satisfaction	5.058	4.797	.165
Working Conditions Satisfaction	5.373	5.125	.185
Employee Relation Satisfaction	4.967	4.828	.488

* The Significance Level of 0.05

On the Pre-ODI survey, the researcher used an Independent Samples Test for testing the differences between the Experimental and Control Groups. The findings showed that both groups had no significance difference at the level of 0.05 except in HPHA, HPLA, LPLA. After the ODI, the findings and discussion of Happiness at Work in terms of Feelings at Work, Job satisfaction, and Subjective Happiness are given below.

Feelings at Work

From *Table 2* below, on the pre-ODI survey, both the experimental and control groups had differences of feelings in HPHA, HPLA, and LPLA but not feelings of LPHA at the significance level of 0.05. The experimental group had a higher score of positive feelings in terms of HPHA and HPLA and a lower score of negative feelings in terms of LPHA and LPLA on the post-ODI survey. The ODI workshop could not change those feelings. The researcher concluded that the ODI workshop could not change those feelings at the significance level of 0.05, However, some intervention feedback on Feelings at Work showed that 80% of the participants stated that they were “inspired” by the stories their colleagues shared and 90 % of the participants reflected that they were “at ease,” “relaxed,” and “calm.”

Table 2: The Findings of Feelings at Work

	Pre-ODI	Post-ODI	Sig (2-tailed)
	Mean	Mean	
High Pleasure-High Arousal (HPHA)	<u>19.400</u> 17.438	<u>19.900</u> 17.969	<u>.537</u> .583
High Pleasure-Low Arousal (HPLA)	<u>19.333</u> 17.500	<u>19.600</u> 17.281	<u>.706</u> .795
Low Pleasure-High Arousal (LPHA)	<u>10.633</u> 12.031	<u>9.400</u> 11.594	<u>.085</u> .537
Low Pleasure-Low Arousal (LPLA)	<u>10.633</u> 12.375	<u>9.333</u> 11.625	<u>.115</u> .340

Note: Experimental group // Control Group

Job Satisfaction

Job Itself Satisfaction

From *Table 3* below, the findings of the pre-ODI survey of both the experimental and control groups had no difference in Job Itself Satisfaction. On the post-ODI survey, the experimental group had the highest score of all variables on Job Itself Satisfaction at the significance level of 0.05. In contrast, the control group showed no difference in Job Itself Satisfaction. Therefore, the researcher concluded that the ODI workshops could enhance the satisfaction related to the job itself.

Job Itself Satisfaction	Pre-ODI	Post-ODI	Sig (2-tailed)
	Mean	Mean	
Freedom to choose their own method of working	<u>4.967</u> 4.625	<u>5.533</u> 4.531	<u>.030*</u> .675
Amount of responsibility	<u>5.167</u> 4.844	<u>5.600</u> 4.844	<u>.030*</u> 1.000
Opportunity to use their abilities	<u>5.033</u> 4.719	<u>5.633</u> 4.813	<u>.015*</u> .742
Amount of variety in job	<u>5.067</u> 5.000	<u>5.767</u> 4.719	<u>.000*</u> .313
Job itself satisfaction	<u>5.058</u> 4.797	<u>5.633</u> 4.727	<u>.003*</u> .705

*Note: Experimental group // Control Group, * The Significance Level of 0.05*

Working Conditions Satisfaction

Table 4 shows that on the pre-ODI survey, both the experimental and control groups had the same level of Working Conditions Satisfaction. The experimental participants were more satisfied with their working conditions in terms of Immediate Boss, Hours of Work, and Job Security after the ODI. The highest satisfaction after the ODI was related to their immediate boss.

It can be concluded that the ODI workshops significantly changed the personal perspective in the area of working conditions satisfaction.

Table 4: The Findings of Working Conditions Satisfaction

Working Conditions Satisfaction	Pre-ODI	Post-ODI	Sig (2-tailed)
	Mean	Mean	
Physical Work Conditions	<u>5.333</u>	<u>5.800</u>	<u>.090</u>
	5.000	4.781	.293
Fellow Workers	<u>5.767</u>	<u>6.000</u>	<u>.363</u>
	5.469	5.531	.810
Immediate Boss	<u>5.200</u>	<u>5.933</u>	<u>.004*</u>
	5.031	5.094	.810
Hours of Work	<u>5.333</u>	<u>5.900</u>	<u>.001*</u>
	5.000	5.188	.385
Job Security	<u>5.233</u>	<u>5.800</u>	<u>.002*</u>
	5.125	5.250	.683
Working Conditions Satisfaction	<u>5.373</u>	<u>5.887</u>	<u>.000*</u>
	5.125	5.169	.808

Note: *Experimental group* // *Control Group*; * *The Significance Level of 0.05*

Employee Relations Satisfaction

From Table 5, before the ODI, there was no difference in Employee Relations Satisfaction between the groups. Considering the findings of the post-ODI survey, the AI workshops were able to enhance the experimental group’s satisfaction in terms of “Industrial relations between management and workers,” “the chance of promotion,” “the way of management in their workplace,” “the attention paid to their suggestions” at the significance level of 0.05. In particular, “Industrial relations between management and workers” was rated the highest score. The other two factors which were recognition and rate of pay could not increase at the significant level of 0.05.

Table 5: Findings of Employee Relations Satisfaction

Employee Relations Satisfaction	Pre-ODI	Post-ODI	Sig (2-tailed)
	Mean	Mean	
Recognition they get for good work	<u>5.367</u>	<u>5.667</u>	<u>.163</u>
	4.938	4.938	1.000
Rate of pay	<u>4.933</u>	<u>5.333</u>	<u>.178</u>
	4.844	4.938	.620
Industrial relations between management and works in organization	<u>5.233</u>	<u>5.767</u>	<u>.027*</u>
	5.219	5.406	.423
Chance of Promotion	<u>4.700</u>	<u>5.400</u>	<u>.005*</u>
	4.531	4.375	.639
The way the workplace is managed	<u>4.800</u>	<u>5.600</u>	<u>.001*</u>
	4.656	4.406	.325
Attention paid to suggestions	<u>4.797</u>	<u>5.600</u>	<u>.002*</u>
	4.781	4.813	.918
Employee relations satisfaction	<u>4.967</u>	<u>5.561</u>	<u>.005*</u>
	4.828	4.813	.937

Note: *Experimental group* // *Control Group*; * *The Significance Level of 0.05*

Moreover, 90% of the participants stated that they had a better relationship with their colleagues and immediate boss following the ODI. These evidences also supported the quantitative findings of Working Conditions and Employee Relations Satisfaction.

Subjective Happiness

Table 6 shows that the experimental group felt generally happier at the significance level of 0.05 while the control respondents had less Subjective Happiness after the ODI, in spite of the fact that the findings of the pre-ODI survey of both groups showed no difference in Subjective Happiness. The intervention feedback also showed that 90% of the workshop participants stated that they were more optimistic and tended to think and look at things around them more positively.

Table 6. The Finding of Subjective Happiness

	Pre-ODI	Post-ODI	Sig (2-tailed)
	Mean	Mean	
Subjective Happiness	<u>4.558</u>	<u>5.067</u>	.005*
	4.734	4.672	.679

Note: *Experimental group* // *Control Group*; * *The Significance Level of 0.05*

Conclusions and Recommendations

The following conclusions and recommendations were made from the results of both the questionnaire survey and from observations of the researcher and the participants in the experimental group.

Conclusions

Appreciative Inquiry with Happy 8 workshops can increase positive feelings and reduce negative feelings. The workshops could also transform negative thinking and deficit discourse of staff members into positive thinking and behavior. The workshops could enhance the job itself in terms of freedom for employees' to choose their own method of working, the amount of responsibility, the opportunity to use the abilities, and the variety of tasks assigned. The workshops could enhance the satisfaction with working conditions, especially the satisfaction with their immediate supervisors. The workshops could enhance the level of employee relations satisfaction namely "Industrial relations" between management and workers in the office and organization, the chance of promotion, the way of management of the workplace, and the attention paid to the suggestions from staff. The workshops helped the participants become more optimistic. To increase happiness at work, the unit under consideration should create inspiration, opti-

mism, and understanding using different methods. The workshop participants could benefit in three levels, namely: individual, team and organization.

Recommendations for ODI

AI with Happy 8 needs to be applied to the group of more negative feelings or negative attitudes in order to initially change individual perspectives. Group intervention should be conducted with small groups (not more than 10) for the benefits of discussion and interaction among members of the group. In order to increase the participants' positive feelings at work, the positive feelings should be recorded with the rationales or the details of the events that made them feel such feelings. The inspiration, optimism, and understanding should be raised so as to achieve the goals' effectiveness and the success of the organization and it should be continued until it is formed as a culture. It requires an ongoing process of active motivation and support for positive thinking and a sense of happiness. An organization needs to have a committee who would devise an implementation plan in line with their organization's vision.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Future studies can be done using other kinds of interventions with different units both in academic institutions and in non-academic organizations. The results can also be compared and contrasted to see the impact of those interventions.

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