# An Approach to Create a “Happy Workplace”

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# Abstract

The science of work happiness has emerged and received an immense attention from organizations around the world for the last decade. In Thailand, Thai Health Promotion Foundation has been doing research on “Happy Workplace” for more than five years, yet much more research work on this topic is still in need. This research was funded by Thai Health Promotion Foundation as a second phase project to design an approach to creating “Happy Workplace” in organizations. The research methodology included focus groups and workshops. The 3 previously proposed models of happy workplace which were derived from interviewing and site-visiting 103 private organizations in Thailand in the first phase of the research were used as prototypes. Five private organizations volunteered to participate in this pilot project. The results indicated that there were 4 key components in creating happiness in the workplace including: Happiness Mapping, Organization Diagnosis, Melting Values of Happiness, and Environment Creating, so called “HOME” model. Finally, it was suggested that there should be a university curriculum or a training course on how to create a happy workplace for organizations in Thailand.

**Introduction**

The science of happiness in general, has been around as shown on a large volume of studies in several decades (Veenhoven, 2011). Recently, in May 2011, Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) launched happiness index as a tool to measure well-being and perceptions of living condition. The happiness index embraces 11 dimensions: housing, incomes, employment, social relationships, education, the environment, the administration of institutions, health, general satisfaction, security and the balance between work and family and will later add two more areas include sustainability, and governance. Because measure the well-being based upon GDP is not adequate.

At the policy level in Thailand, creation of workplace happiness has become an important issue for the Thai Society as appeared in the drafted framework of the Eleventh Plan (2012-2016) that Thailand will be “a happy society with equity, fairness and resilience” (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2011). The NESDB has been conducting a series of workshops engaging a wide range of stakeholders in order to complete the final plan. However, in the past 5 years, happiness at work has proven to receive immense attention, by simply searching the word “happy workplace” on Google, 207,000 results returned. In addition, when performed the similar search words on amzon.com it showed more than 2,000 books on how to create happy organizations, well-being at work, happiness at work, etc. Additionally, Rao (2010) wrote the book on “Happiness at Work: Be resilient, Motivated, and Successful No Matter What” which investigated the path to happiness at work and meaningful life. The book reflects how happiness at work plays a role in employees learning, leadership and productivity.

In order to respond to the new demand of modern workplace, Thai Health Promotion Foundation (2011) under the Health Promotion Foundation Act 2001 has taken the issue of creating happy workplace in to special consideration by including the healthy workplace as one out of eight key strategy plans to promote healthy organization. On the outset, the Thai health organization initiated the concept so called “HAPPY 8” which includes happy body, happy heart, happy soul, happy relax, happy brain, happy money, happy society, and happy family. In the year 2009, the research on “Decoding 103 happy organizations” was funded by the Thai Health Promotion with a key objective to capture the knowledge of how to create happy workplace in private sectors ranging from a number of big corporations to small/medium enterprises. The results of the first phase of the research were a fruitful source of know-how knowledge of how to create a happy workplace. It was proven that people are happy not only because of remuneration but there are several factors that make them happy and become successful at work.

Though “Happy Workplace” concept has been adopted by many organizations in Thailand, most of practitioners still lack knowledge and understanding on how to create such happiness in their organizations. Therefore, many organizations perform happiness creation by the use of activities that can create fun and enjoyment. Many types of activities are adopted without considering organization’s characteristics and context, and needs of employees. Moreover, a common mistake which can be found among organizations at the initial stage of happy organization development is the attempt to perform activities to achieve the goal of Happy 8 without any consideration on the real needs of employees.

**Objectives of the Study**

This research was funded by Thai Health Promotion Foundation as a second phase project to design an approach to creating “Happy Workplace” in organizations, test it and report the results. The 3 previously proposed models of happy workplace which were derived from interviewing and site-visiting 103 private organizations in Thailand in the first phase of the research were used as prototypes.

**3 Models of Happy Workplace**

At the first phase of the project, School of Human Resource Development at National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) received funding from Thai Health Promotion Foundation (ThaiHealth) to conduct a research on exploring 103 private organizations on their characteristics of happy workplace. These organizations were selected through 3 channels namely, expert recommendation, nomination through web-based and ThaiHealth events, and quality and sufficiency-economy philosophy award recipients. The following 3 Models of Happy Workplace were derived as a result of the research.

1. The first model classified workplace happiness into 3 categories according to 3 types of organizations: Simplified Organization, Sustainable Organization, and Creative Organization. Simplified Organization is the type of most sample organizations in the research fit in. These organizations provide their employees with external happiness creation factor such as monetary reinforcement and recreational activities. For Sustainable Organization type, these organizations put most emphasis on good management practice and creation of balance between organization’s benefits and those of society as a whole. Finally, for Creative Organization, people in these organizations are given autonomy in decision making process and less controlled by rigid rules and regulations.
2. The second model is called “To Be, To Live, To Mean” model. Firstly, people in any organization perceive their happiness at work by looking at their being whether they can be their own self, proud of themselves, and worthwhile to their family and community. Secondly, To Live means employees consider their happiness through their living conditions at home and at work which include wealth and health conditions, constructive work atmosphere and work enabling environment. Finally, To Mean is how they are perceived by the organization, whether their work is valued and their performance is meaningful.
3. Finally, a model of happy workplace from a behavioral standpoint is titled “Turning a Happy Workplace Padlock: Discovering Codes of Happiness.” Factors enabling people in these organizations to perceive happiness in their work are classified into 2 groups. The first one is individual factors; comprising of individual characteristics, life-style, family and social context and current situation. The other group is organizational factors, comprising of job characteristics, leader/colleague/other related persons, and environment and work atmosphere. People in these organizations agreed that these mentioned factors affected their perception of happiness at work and they averaged all these factors to specify their level of work happiness at a certain period of time. However, all of them said that their level of perceived happiness lied extensively on their thinking skills, belief, attitude, wisdom, self regulation, and learning and practice.

These three models were presented in a so called “**H**OME” concept, meaning happy organization, happy management, and happy employees.

**Research Methodology:**

# “Triple C Roadmap to Happiness in the Workplace”

The data collection method utilized a program titled, “Triple C Roadmap to Happiness in the Workplace,” which can be shown in the following picture.

**Conceive**

**Conduct**

**Concrete**

**Creation of Understanding and Inspiration of Happiness in the Workplace**

**Triple C Roadmap To Happiness in the Workplaceาน**

- Inspire

- Build understanding

- Create an approach

- Implement

- Have firsthand experience

- Share experience

- Review learned lessons

- Explore further concepts

- Strengthen motivation

**Objectives**

Knowledge about happiness in the workplace and how to create it

Planning and Implementing

Sharing of experience and strengthening of knowledge on how to create happiness in the workplace

**Content**

**Workshop and Focus Group**

Section 1: 3 Models of Happy Workplace

Section 2: Approaches to creating happiness in the workplace

Section 3: Tools

Action Learning: Implementing a pilot project in creating a happy workplace and site-visiting pilot organizations

Sharing Session

**Learning Method**

2 days

1 month

2 days

**Duration**

Triple C Roadmap to Happiness in the Workplace Program was designed to provide participants an opportunity to review their perception and understanding of workplace happiness, brainstorm with their team members on an approach to build happiness in their workplace through focus groups and workshops, implement pilot projects, and share experience and learned lessons. The program module consists of 3 C steps: Conceive, Conduct, and Concrete with the following 3 underlying notions.

1. An approach to creating a roadmap to building happiness in the workplace should be designed specifically to fit each organization because no two organizations are alike.
2. To build happiness in any workplace, most members of the organizations should be actively involved in every step.
3. Leaders of the organizations are one key success factor who must act as a role model and facilitate the implementation of the program.

**5 Pilot Organizations**

Five pilot organizations participated in Triple C Roadmap to Happiness in the Workplace Program are described as follows:

1. B-Food International Co., Ltd. is a subsidiary company of the Betagro Group, a leader in the integrated feed and farming business for almost 30 years. Their operation covers animal feed production, poultry breeding, supplying baby chicks, broiler rearing, food processing and export of chicken products.

2. NK Apparel Co., Ltd. is a textile and garment company which exports their products to big name customers worldwide. The company has its factories situated in Thailand and in a few neighboring countries.

3. Western Digital (Thailand) Co., Ltd. provides cost-effective solutions for the collection, management, protection and use of digital information and video and audio content. The company is a pioneer and leading global maker of hard drives and solid-state drives for internal, external, portable and shared storage applications.

4. Mitr Phol Group is a group of companies operating business in cane and sugar industry for more than 53 years. With a clear vision in sugar industry and its strong commitment to develop the business to the best of their experience, Mitr Phol has become the leader in sugar industry with world-class standard operation today.

5. Siam Cement (Kaeng Khoi) Co., Ltd. is in SCG Cement Group that manufactures and supplies cement, ready-mixed concrete, concrete products, white cement and refractory as well as provides technical services and consultations on plant installation to customers both within and beyond SCG.

**Findings**  
 The following section describes the results from Triple C Roadmap to Happiness in the Workplace Program:

Conceive Session

Happiness is viewed by employees as well being, and leaders is should provide some guidance and counseling. Happiness creation in an organization should take part in every division of the organization simultaneously because the needs of each employee group are different. The initiation of this happiness creation project depends upon the balance of the needs of executives and employees. As a middleman, HR people have to know how to make executives understand and support such projects aimed at creating happiness for all staffs. The crucial issue is that persons who are responsible to the project should have patience and effort to overcome any obstacles, and courage to initiate new things or any difficulty jobs. For any happiness creation project, it can be started from a small unit in the organization and the responsible persons can be established as a working team.

Construct and Concrete Sessions

From a circle of focus group session, participants stated their wishes of what they could have preferred to have it happened during their pilot implementation of happy workplace workshop. Those wishes included:

* Everyone should open up and share their true feelings.
* It is very essential to have collaboration from all employees.
* Management must give a full support.
* All of us must think positively
* Balance of work and life is a key to happiness
* Creating a happy workplace is no one specific person’s responsibility, but all’s.
* Continuity is one critical success factor when implementing a happy workplace project.

At the end of the last session, participants identified critical success factors in implementing any approaches to creating happiness in the workplace as follows:

* Leaders: Leaders of various levels in the organization must provide strong support in creating happiness in the workplace. They should involve people from all work departments in designing and implementing the organization’s “happy strategy.”
* Employees: All employees should participate actively in all activities and must be made change in their perceptions toward happiness in the workplace.
* Organization’s Policy: The organization must announce and enforce a clear policy on creating happiness in the workplace.
* Work Atmosphere: Work environment, both physically and culturally, should be friendly, family-like atmosphere and open to communication.

**HOME Model**

Deriving from the findings, the following HOME Model represents an approach to creating a happy workplace. HOME Model suggests that there are four steps in creating happiness in organization as shown in the picture.



**Happiness**

**Mapping**

**Organization**

**Diagnosis**

**Melting Value of**

**Happy Workplace**

**Environment**

**Creation**

According to the HOME Model, organizations can start creating happiness at any step. However, happiness creation process can occur back and forth. In other words, planning and re-planning are needed constantly in order to cope with changing employees’ needs. Steps in creating workplace happiness are as follows:

1. Happiness Mapping which is inspiring people in organizations and building concerns regarding importance of happiness in a workplace consists of two major actions, namely, searching for preferred type(s) of happiness, and pushing forward the preferable happiness to allies and those with authorities to sustain factors of happiness.

1.1 Searching for preferred type(s) of happiness relies on not only employees’ needs, but also factors and methods to properly respond to those needs. Mostly, searching process could be performed with two sources of information: employees and organization.

- Happiness needed by employees could be discovered by two methods which are asking and creating employee suggestion system.

- Happiness needed by organization is good will provided to employees by providing benefits and welfares above the minimum requirement of the labor laws. Additionally, this type of happiness could be built by top management’s actions and steering committee’s actions, such as reviewing obstacles in work system and correct them, and constantly finding innovation in happiness creation.

1.2 Pushing forward and creating buy-in of the preferable happiness to allies and those with authorities are a critical step in sustaining employees’ happiness. Steering committee needs to put forward the Happiness Map and communicate it to gain supports from the authorities and stakeholders. Putting forward Happiness Map includes selection of targets and allies in implementation. This process can be done more smoothly if the top management is the one who puts forward the map.

1. Organization Diagnosis is the process of reviewing Happiness Map in the context of the organization to state concrete purposes and strategy map. Organization diagnosis needs two parts of input, namely, Happiness Map (both employee’s part and organizational part), and vision, missions, organization culture, and organizational context.

Organization diagnosis could be done in many ways. However, it needs participation of steering committee and related persons (depending on size of the organization). Organization diagnosis performed in small organizations could be done among the group of owner and two or three representatives of employees.

Results yielded from organization diagnosis must include concrete purpose(s) and organization’s strategies to create happy organization. Preciseness of strategies is subjected to organizational context. However, the strategies should consist of activities’ detail, timeline, purposes of each activity, resource needed, responsible person(s), and monitoring and evaluation system.

1. Melting Value of Happy Workplace is the implementation of activities to create happiness in a workplace. This stage consists of activities developed by the organization to serve its’ unique needs and context. Activities could be put in a series, from basic recreational activities to complicated activities which related to sustainability and employees’ as individual.

Melting value of happiness holds two major methods, implementing in accordance with plan and building value of living together.

1. Environment Creation is a crucial stage. There are two types of environment to be considered: physical environment and work system. Physical environment could consist of work station and equipments, facilities for employees’ gathering and relaxation, attractiveness of building, ventilation system, etc. Work system includes security and safety system, work hours, mentoring system, organization structure, workflow design, overtime payment calculation system, etc.

Generally, creating happy organization involves three groups of people: top management, facilitators (mostly performed by members of human resource department), and steering committee. This steering committee needs to understand that happy organization is in concern with collective happiness. Therefore, happiness building must not be performed in accordance with individual plan, or plan of any department solely, but performed systematically in accordance with the happy mapping, organization diagnosis result, melting value of happiness approach, and environment creation.

**Conclusion**

“Happy Workplace” is one of the organization development approaches adopted by many organizations in Thailand. However, most practitioners still lack knowledge and understanding about how to create such happiness. The results of this research suggest a HOME Model as a guideline for any organization to use for the building of happiness in their workplace. Finally, it is also advisable for organizations, training or consulting companies, and educational institutions to design a curriculum or a training course on how to create a happy workplace for organizations in Thailand in order that happiness can be happening in any workplace all around the land of smiles.

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