

The Five Drivers of Happiness at Work

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COMMENTARY By JESSICA PRYCE-JONES

The Source has teamed up with the [iOpener Institute iOpener Institute for People and Performance](#) to find out how happy and fulfilled our readers are at work. The Institute has a specially designed survey to help you establish how happy you are at work and along with the article below you can figure out how you can increase your happiness. [Complete the questionnaire now.](#)

I am in a wood-paneled boardroom of a large multinational waiting to make a pitch. My stomach lurches as I anticipate having to use the “H” word to the CEO. It just feels too “new-agey” to associate with the hard-numbered world of business.

“We’re here to talk about happiness. Happiness at work.” The words sound so flaky; “happy clappy” and “happy hippy” ping into my mind even though the numbers tell their own story.



Office workers.

We’ve all had to face and deal with a very different working world, especially since the financial crisis and ensuing recession.

Data which we’ve gathered since 2006, shows that people everywhere feel less confidence, motivation, loyalty, resilience, commitment and engagement.

And whether your local economy is in a state of boom or bust, employees are experiencing similar pressures and bosses can only squeeze until the pips squeak for so long.

But imagine a mindset which enables action to maximize performance and achieve potential in these tough times. At the iOpener Institute for People and Performance, we understand that this is another way of describing happiness at work.

Our empirical research, involving 9,000 people from around the world, reveals some astonishing findings. Employees who report being happiest at work:

- Stay twice as long in their jobs as their least happy colleagues
- Spend double their time at work focused on what they are paid to do
- Take ten times less sick leave
- Believe they are achieving their potential twice as much

And the “science of happiness at work” has big benefits for individuals too. If you’re really happy at

work, you'll solve problems faster, be more creative, adapt fastest to change, receive better feedback, get promoted quicker and earn more over the long-term.

So how can you get to grips with what it's all about?

Our research shows that there are five important drivers that underpin the science of happiness at work.

1. Contribution.

This is about what you do, so it's made up of some of the core activities which happen at work. Like having clear goals, moving positively towards them, talking about issues that might prevent you meeting your objectives and feeling heard when you do so.

You'll do all this best when you feel appreciated and valued by your boss and your colleagues. So it's not just about delivering: it's about doing that within collaborative working relationships too.

Here's what Daniel Walsh, executive vice president at one of the world's leading transport and logistics organizations, Chep, said about his insight into the value of his colleagues' contributions:

“I was very task-focused and goal-oriented early in my career and I delivered significant deals. But afterwards it would take a few weeks to mop up the wreckage because I was more gung-ho than I needed to be. I had a meeting with my mentor who said, “look this has got to stop. You’re delivering fantastic results but you’ve got to take people with you.”

“Now I try to create an environment where people feel their opinions or views matter and I appreciate what they bring to the table. I can’t do my job on my own.”

2. Conviction.

This is the short-term motivation both in good times and bad. That's the key point: keeping going even when things get tough, so that you maintain your energy, motivation and resources which pull you through.

Key to doing this is feeling that you're resilient, efficient and effective. In fact, our data clearly shows that we're much more resilient than we are aware but we're much less aware of how variable our motivation is and how to manage it.

Actively deciding to do this can make a huge difference.

As Adam Parr, CEO of Williams F1 said, “a driver who gets out of a car when it's spun off or he's been

hit and it's all gone horribly wrong and reminds himself that he's privileged to do the work and there's a job to be done—that takes him to another level.”

3. Culture.

Performance and happiness at work are really high when employees feel they fit within their organizational culture. Not fitting in a job is like wearing the wrong clothes to a party—all the time.

It's hugely draining and de-energizing.

If you're in the wrong job, you'll find that the values mean little to you, the ethos feels unfair or political and you don't have much in common with your colleagues. What's interesting about our data is that employees like their organizational cultures a lot less than they did in pre-recession times: in particular “generation Y-ers” or “millennial” workers really don't seem to like what they're experiencing at work.

So any business which wants to attract and retain top young talent and find the leaders of tomorrow, needs to start addressing this issue today.

4. Commitment.

Commitment matters because it taps into the macro reasons of why you do the work you do. Some of the underlying elements of commitment are perceiving you're doing something worthwhile, having strong intrinsic interest in your job and feeling that the vision of your organization resonates with your purpose.

We've seen commitment decline for the majority of employees post-recession as leaders and organizations think that tuning into this soft stuff is a waste of time.

It isn't.

It's how you enable your employees to understand why they should make a greater discretionary effort for you. What is important is to recognize that the five factors work as an ecosystem.

That means if one of the five drivers isn't functioning well, the others will be affected. For example if you don't feel high levels of commitment, it's likely that your contribution will be affected. When contribution goes down, conviction, especially the motivation part of it, tends to go down with it. And that obviously has an effect on your confidence too.

5. Confidence.

Confidence is the gateway to the other four drivers. Too little confidence and nothing happens: too much leads to arrogance and particularly poor decisions. Without greater levels of self-belief, the backbone of confidence, there will be few people who'll take a risk or try anything new. And you can't have confident organizations without confident individuals inside them.

Here's what Dr Rafi Yoeli, founder of Urban Aeronautics, the leading Israeli fancraft aviation entrepreneur said:

“We’ve built a flying machine that’s half way between a Harrier jump jet and a helicopter. We work very differently here, it’s organic engineering. You need a high level of curiosity and of expertise if you’re going to make something extraordinary. And you need an even higher level of confidence to put it together.”

And finally, understanding what makes you happy at work and how that affects your performance offers a whole new way of managing yourself, your career and your opportunities.

And by the way, the CEO at the beginning of the piece told me that, “when you said happiness, it really resonated with me. I’m so unhappy in my job, I hate what I do and I can barely bring myself to come in every day.”

So if you want to know how the science of happiness applies to you at your work, simply [complete our quick questionnaire and get your personalized report](#).

[Jessica Pryce-Jones](#) is the CEO and founder of the iOpener Institute. She is the author of, “Happiness at Work: Maximizing Your Psychological Capital for Success”.