



*"Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success..."*  
*(Albert Schweitzer)*

## Health, harmony and happiness – vital New Ingredients in the employee commitment recipe?

By Lydia Rolando  
TNS Research Surveys

## Biography



Lydia Rolando is not a researcher. However, having spent the past nine years at TNS Research Surveys she has, by osmosis, become rather curious about why people do what they do. Her day job as Director: People and Culture keeps her focused on building intellectual capital within TNS Research Surveys while developing innovative human and organisational strategies to respond to the changing face of employment in the research industry. In short, she thinks up ways of keeping people happy.

She has extensive experience in change management, having worked as a strategic advisor to local government during the early to mid 90s. She also had a three-year stint as Director of Tourism and Marketing for the City of Johannesburg.

Lydia studied at the University of the Witwatersrand (Fine Arts), the University of South Africa (Strategic Human Resources Management), the Trinity College of London (Drama), Wits Graduate School of Business Administration and the Centre for Innovative Leadership. Her eclectic passions include motherhood, her animals, the African bush and art.

## Abstract

Traditionally, the measurement of organisational success or 'wellness' could be summed up in one word...*profit*. However, contemporary business has begun to acknowledge the importance of employee commitment and its potential impact on profit. New worldwide trends have led to a more holistic approach whereby organisational wellness is a product of physically and psychologically healthy employees. Thus, the physical and psychological well-being of employees (*health, harmony and happiness*) is now being seen as integral to the success, and indeed, survival of many organisations, including those in our own industry.

*So, what's new and why is this relevant to SAMRA, research users or marketers?*

My hypothesis is that *Health, Harmony and Happiness* are the vital **New Drivers of Commitment for companies in the New Age**. What's more, employers should recognise it is the *Quality of Happiness* that counts. Simply put, what makes people truly happy is not currently on the standard employer menu featuring money, position and training. What makes people truly happy is contributing to others, making a difference, forming relationships, feeling valued and having a sense of control over their lives. This is extremely relevant to all concerned about retention and the attendant costs of high staff turnover.

The primary objective of this paper is to investigate a ***new and critical relationship*** – the relationship between *Health, Harmony and Happiness* and Employee Commitment. In so doing, I will pose the question: "What is happiness?" and attempt to show that true and lasting happiness can only be experienced at a level which encompasses meaning (harmony with self) and engagement (harmony with others).

With the insights gleaned from my paper, I intend to provide employers in our industry and related industries, with new ideas and better measures to improve employee commitment – leading to happier employees and more successful businesses.

## Objectives

The pursuit of happiness is central to all human endeavour. This paper seeks to explore the nature of happiness and discover whether or not *real happiness*, underpinned by physical and psychological well-being, makes a difference to commitment in the workplace.

I will attempt to show that salary and job stability alone are not enough to ensure commitment. Health, Harmony and Happiness are taking centre stage in the play for organisational success. My paper suggests that employers should be looking at a range of 'softer' and more holistic attributes relating to happiness and well-being in order to meet the challenges of the future and the new generation of employee.

Finally, I will propose practical guidelines for employers, based on leading edge international thinking and plain common sense.

## Methodology

Various sources of information were used:

- Secondary desk research was first conducted to understand the extensive research that has been carried out to date relating to areas such as positive psychology, happiness, well-being and employee commitment.
- Next, an employee commitment study was conducted including a measure of health and well-being, and results were compared with a similar study conducted in 2004. The objective of this phase was to expand on the salient points of desk research and to collect more specific data relating to the themes underpinning *real* happiness.
- Additional data from past studies conducted internationally was used to provide further insight.

## Work and happiness? Do they go together? Has anything really changed?

*Nose to the grindstone...shoulder to the wheel* - until fairly recently, work has primarily been associated with hardship, slavery, and drudgery. The Greek word for work, *ponos*, also means 'pain'. Jews and Christians were condemned to a life of labour and suffering as divine punishment for original sin. "Cursed is the ground because of you, through painful toil you will eat of it...By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food...." (Genesis 3:17-19).

The Protestant ethic maintained that work was a sacrifice that demonstrated moral worthiness, and it stressed the importance of postponed gratification (Hill, 1999).

Pain and toil in the workplace still appear to be very much in evidence, not just in employee commitment surveys, but also in popular culture. And since the age-old antidote to pain is laughter, we should perhaps be viewing the popular comics of our times more seriously. Created in 1933 when workers were considered to be intrinsically lazy, and bosses were the ruling class, Blondie's layabout husband, Dagwood Bumstead became a metaphor for the plight of the working man for over half a century. Dagwood's fear and loathing of his boss, the tyrannical Mr Dithers continued to strike a chord until geeky, cynical Dilbert took over in 1989.

The comics and the satirists are trying to make fun of what is happening in the workplace, and the cringe-making television series 'The Office' has a very contemporary dig at pseudo employer/employee relations, but there is a serious note to the laughter.

The despotic character of Dilbert's boss clearly rings true for many working people who share a negative image of their employers. "He's every employee's worst nightmare" according to Dilbert.com, the official Dilbert website by Scott Adams. "Of absolutely no concern to him is the professional and personal well-being of his employees."

Perhaps even more distressing is Adams' comment on the human resources profession, embodied by Catbert, Human Resources Director at Dilbert's company. "Catbert is a typical cat, in the sense that he looks cute but he doesn't care if you live or die" (Adams, 2005).

Donald Trump's reality TV show 'The Apprentice' raises another set of issues, particularly in its brazen contradiction with the realisation, even in America, that valuing employees, indeed valuing people, makes good business sense. Not only does 'The Apprentice' present an in-your-face comment on the feeble labour laws of the United States, where most workers can be fired at will without a valid reason, but it also flagrantly challenges any sense of looking to the 'softer issues' when it comes to employee engagement.

Happiness, in this series, is an irrelevant concept even for the winner – whose prize is ultimately at the expense of the rest of the team. Money, status and positional power rule in Trump's kingdom. Nowhere in this series is there even a suggestion of concepts such as those explored in this paper – namely contribution to others, relationships with colleagues and personal well-being – as being the drivers of commitment or engagement. In fact, who cares about commitment when there are so many others out there, eager to get a taste of the Trump Empire even at the risk of personal degradation? For if you don't cut the mustard, "You're fired!"

What are various studies saying about employee engagement globally?

- 54% of employees are not engaged in their work and 17% are actively disengaged (Gallup)
- Unhappy (disengaged) employees cost U.S. businesses \$350 billion (Gallup)
- More than half of employees' emotions toward work are negative and 1/3 are intensely negative (Towers Perrin)
- 24% of employees are stressed by difficult co-workers or interfering bosses (CareerBuilder.com)
- 62% of workers plan to look for a new job in the next three months (Salary.com)

Based on statistics such as these, there certainly does not appear to be a great deal of happiness out there in the workplace. And, given that a hundred years ago, Sigmund Freud recognised that happiness is "...something essentially subjective", will employers ever, realistically, be able to really make a difference?

My contention is – they should try. And by working on more compelling drivers of happiness than remuneration and status, they may improve their chances of success. They may see a difference in the bottom line as a result of improved retention and happier clients. They may even feel better about themselves.

## So, is happiness in the workplace more than just a nice-to-have?

Self proclaimed *Chief Happiness Officer*, Alexander Kjerulf cites a number of reasons that make good business sense. Kjerulf consults to businesses around the world on ways in which the workplace can be a happier place, and how this impacts positively on profitability. He maintains that not only are happy people fun to work with, they also have stronger networks and support systems. They understand relationships and as such make good team players and better customer service people. Stressed out, unhappy, uncommitted employees can seriously damage customer relations and the bottom line.

According to Kjerulf, happy managers are easier to work for and retain their staff. Happy people are generally more innovative and creative; they feel in control of what they do and get into the *flow*<sup>1</sup> more easily; they look for solutions and don't give up as readily. They're less stressed and because they're less stressed, they're happier. Similarly, they don't get sick as often as unhappy people tend to and so are more productive. They cost companies less in sick days. Because they're healthy, they're also happier than their unhealthy colleagues.

Happy people don't look for obstacles; their optimistic outlook enables them to achieve their goals, and go beyond their goals. And so, their happiness is at the heart of their success. Happy employees see their work as meaningful and enjoy contributing. Happy employees are easier to have on board, more productive and more receptive to learning and change. Best of all, happiness is contagious (Kjerulf, 2007).

Companies spend vast sums of money on selecting, training and developing their employees, only to see their most talented employees move to other companies, often competitors. Happy employees are less likely to leave. As a result, many companies are beginning to see that by investing in employee happiness, they are also investing in commitment and that 'doing the right thing' by their employees can help avoid unnecessary business costs.

<sup>1</sup> **Flow** is the mental state of operation in which the person is fully immersed in what he or she is doing, characterised by a feeling of energised focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity. Proposed by psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi who is noted for his work in the study of happiness, creativity, subjective well-being, and fun, but is best known as the architect of the notion of *flow*.

Who is doing it right? Companies such as Dallas-based Southwest Airlines and SAS, the computer software company, come up as 'people-friendly' companies.

*In the midst of one of the worst periods of crisis in the airline industry, Southwest hired rather than laid off employees, and subsequently posted a profit every quarter since the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001, while all other airlines showed record losses or even sought Title 11 protection by declaring bankruptcy (Tsui, 2006).*

SAS has appeared on Fortune Magazine's *Best Company* listings since 1998 and, according to Tsui, the software giant places a premium on cultivating long-term relationships with its employees. Known for the beautiful work environment of its headquarters in Cary, N.C., SAS has two on-site child care centres, an elder care information and referral programme, an employee health care centre, wellness programmes, a 77 000 square-foot recreation and fitness facility, and numerous other work-life programmes.

Many other large companies, including some in South Africa, are making concerted and creative efforts to build relationships with their employees that foster both well-being and productivity. At a glance, the 2007 list of Best Employers in South Africa share a number of distinctive features. Employee development features high on their list of HR priorities as do a surprising number of Well-being and Work/life Balance factors. At number one on the list, Shell prides itself on generous maternity benefits, flexible working arrangements, a strong emphasis on the greater good and contribution to the community at large.

Others on the list including Microsoft, Vodacom and Ernst & Young pay far more than lip service to the commonsensical awareness that physically healthy employees are also happy employees. Microsoft has an on-site gym with personal trainers available morning and evening, as well as meal allowances for employees and a philosophy that work should be an extension of home.

Vodacom places emphasis on work/life balance, allowing employees to work from home. And in support of wellness, sponsors employee sporting activities. Netcare believes that the nursing shortage cannot simply be addressed by increasing nurses' salaries and Edcon emphasises values, including valuing people and treating staff like customers.

Ernst & Young has an on-site health and wellness facility with services such as massage, yoga and Pilates classes, a dietician and a biokineticist. They have invested in a People Well-being Programme and offer both flexitime and flexi place options to 20% of their employees. The company sees *relationship-building* opportunities as one of four key factors which make it an attractive workplace.

Jenny Greyling, E&Y Associate Director: "We look at career holistically because we understand that people today are not so much interested in climbing a hierarchy as they are in developing new skills."

E&Y recognised the importance of knowledge to the new economy as early as 2000, realising that since people and their ideas are key, recruitment and retention are vitally important. Although E&Y employs over 1800 staff in SA, availability of professional talent is a huge constraint. The changing demographic of their employees – with Generation X comprising over 50% of staff complement – has posed another challenge.

In response to the change in expectations of their workforce, E&Y put in place various work/life balance initiatives and made some fundamental changes in the way employees are managed. In so doing, they looked to conduct research into what graduates named as priorities in deciding which job to take. Work/life balance featured high on the list of priorities and as a result, E&Y introduced flexible working arrangements. Consequently, turnover has reduced from 25% in 2002, to just 15% in 2005 (Harding, 2006).

Many other South African companies have recognised that in our context, going the extra mile to retain skilled employees is even more critical, given our country's critical shortage of skills and the cost of replacement.

"The best companies have certain common traits," says Anne Tsui. "They don't treat people casually. They put a very high premium on valuing the employees."

Despite all these efforts, are these companies succeeding in making their employees any happier and any more productive? Can anyone be truly happy? And can true happiness make a difference to employee commitment? To get closer to the answers, we first need to define employee commitment and to understand the nature of true happiness.

In attempting to define commitment, it is important first to understand that loyalty and commitment are not the same – and that a measure of loyalty

on its own is inadequate. Loyal people stop buying a brand, and they leave one company for another. Disloyal people often keep buying the brand, and they continue to work for the company, at least in the short term. This is because loyalty alone does not take into account the emotional and psychological attachments people have/don't have. This is where the concept of commitment comes in.

The employee commitment measure applied in the studies that have been used in this paper takes into account that an employee *can be committed to a company but not really committed to their job* or an employee can be *really committed to the work that they're doing, yet have relatively low commitment to the company*. Both commitment to the company and commitment to type of work are measured. In addition to employee commitment results, the studies used provide an overview of the drivers of commitment, as well as an additional suite of measures of Health and Well-being.

It is important to establish that the purpose of this research is not simply to learn how to hold on to loyal employees with no psychological or emotional attachment to their work or to the company. Clearly, if companies are providing all the perks, it makes it harder to leave and employees may ostensibly be loyal, although they may not necessarily be giving of their best to the company. In this context, low staff turnover is not a positive thing and can in fact lead to frustration and stagnation.

## What is true happiness?

The Ancient Greeks saw it as a gift from the gods. Today, particularly in Western cultures, it is considered a birthright. The 'pursuit of happiness' is entrenched, together with freedom and liberty, in the constitution of the United States.

Happiness obsessed - our relentless pursuit of happiness has somehow vulgarised and trivialised the notion of *happiness*. We confuse true happiness with transitory feelings of enjoyment or pleasure, based on immediate gratification (usually of some kind of physical need or desire) or the relatively short-lived satisfaction we experience through fulfilment of our competitive impulses to be smarter, richer, younger, thinner and higher on the corporate ladder than others.

Extensive research has been undertaken by Dr Martin Seligman, an American psychologist and author of the book *Authentic Happiness* into understanding both the psychological and biological factors that lead to happiness. Philosophers and religious leaders have provided convincing support to underpin the logic of positive psychology.

Dr Seligman, is a leader in the field of positive psychology, and has raised millions of dollars to fund research groups involving scientists around the world. As a result of research, he defines three parts to happiness: *pleasure* (closely akin to instant gratification); *engagement* (involvement with one's work, life partners, friends, family and interests) and *meaning* (living out one's purpose or using one's personal strengths to serve some larger end). Of the three, pleasure is the most short-lived and least consequential (Seligman, 2002).

Thomas Miller, an American researcher conducted extensive research in conjunction with Life Magazine, surveying over 2000 adults in their homes to find out more about what best determines someone's happiness with his or her quality of life. He determined that happy people have different attitudes and priorities to unhappy people.

*They garner great joy and emotional support from their partners, while at the same time lacking the tunnel vision focus on money that consumes most everyone else....their contentment comes from a very different set of personal priorities – a set of priorities that places an emphasis on self-fulfilment and interpersonal relations, not on monetary or material goods* (Miller, 1996).

## Is happiness really a driver of commitment?

In order to confirm or dispel my hypothesis that real happiness and well-being are the new drivers of commitment, I looked at a range of datasets from employee commitment studies undertaken between 2004 and 2007. The surveys were conducted amongst staff in a professional services environment with a sample of 1200 employees, robust enough to test my hypothesis. None of the studies used were specifically designed to confirm this hypothesis; however, the attributes rated by respondents could be grouped so that they corresponded with Seligman's definition of real, more lasting happiness; in particular *Engagement* and *Meaning*.

To establish the relationship between *commitment* and *happiness*, the correspondence of responses by committed employees to a range of attributes were ranked according to importance. The attributes were grouped into themes following qualitative content analysis involving several colleagues in this arena of research. The themes were as follows:

1. Happiness experienced as a sense of engagement
2. Happiness experienced as a sense of purpose or meaning
3. The role of health and well-being as a driver of commitment

Friends or family to turn to	<i>Happiness experienced as a sense of engagement</i>
Company sees people as vital	
Strong networks/relationships	
Involvement with work	
Feeling valued at work	
Fitting in with the company culture	
Alignment with company values	
Colleagues interested in my well-being	

Life has meaning and purpose	<i>Happiness experienced as a sense of purpose or meaning</i>
Satisfied with my achievements	
Strong beliefs	

I feel alive and energetic	<i>Health and well-being as a driver of commitment</i>
I take care of my health	
I feel well and in good health	
I have a varied life	
I have enough fresh fruit and vegetables in my diet	
I have enough leisure time to be happy	
I am physically fit	

Four techniques were used to analyse these attributes which are outlined below.

Referring first to Figure 1, we have a battery of 20 statements related to the corporate environment (including compensation and the like).

Employees had to state whether they agreed or disagreed with each statement. This data has been analysed using a statistical technique called Targeted Bootstrapping (TABOO). In essence, TABOO aims to eliminate the effects of multi-collinearity and truly determine which factors could be leveraged in order to increase the variable concerned (in this case, commitment to the organisation).

What it shows is that the softer issues (such as ensuring that employees feel valued and that they fit in with the corporate culture and values) have more impact than ensuring each person is fairly paid. Unfortunately, this dataset (for a large corporate) did not have attributes specifically related to well-being but other happiness research looked at suggests that feeling valued correlates highly with well-being (Seligman, 2002).

Figure 1



Moving now to Figure 2, we show the output of a simple association question. Here I show the number of committed people who self-report each attribute. It is quite clear that the employee who is committed to the organisation has a high level of well-being, support and strong beliefs. These employees state that they have a strong network to turn to in times of trouble, they are very open to change, believe that they have something to contribute and that their life has meaning.

Two-thirds of committed employees state that they generally feel well and in good health. If we analyse this same data as percentages in the other direction, we again see that people who agree with feeling well/healthy and those with strong social networks and beliefs are more likely to be committed to the organisation. Again, this supports the argument that if the organisation can provide an environment that supports better work/life balance and well-being, this relates to higher levels of commitment and lower levels of staff turnover. The relationship, from practical experience and anecdotal evidence, may appear to be a causal one.

Figure 2

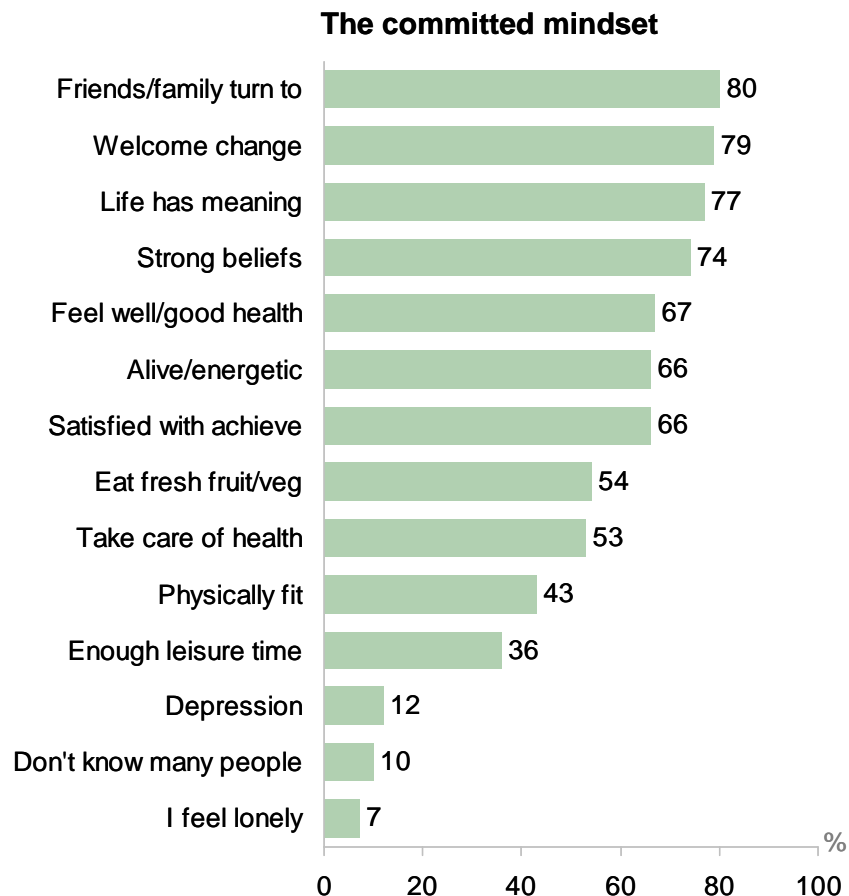
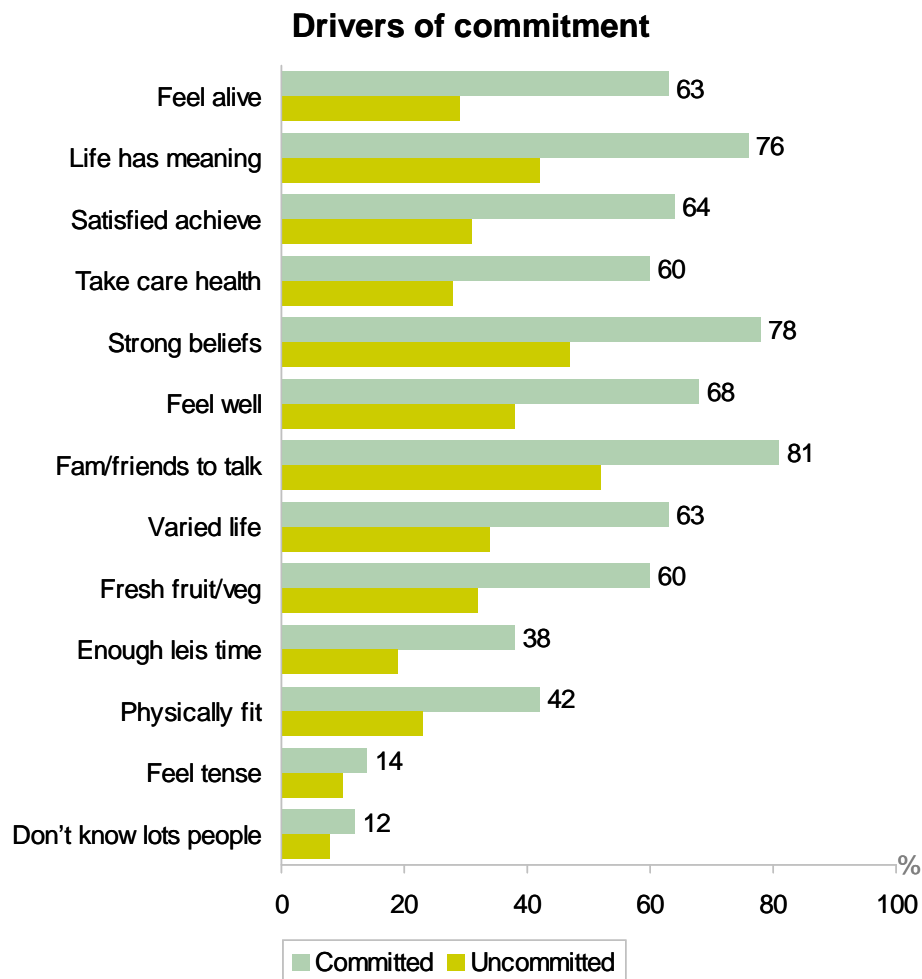


Figure 3 refers to a dataset which represents a smaller organisation that has had a more holistic approach to staff motivation (as proposed in this paper). Here we show the differences in mindset between those employees who are committed to the company and those who are not. Where there is a larger difference, we can infer that this is a factor contributing to commitment. We have ranked the factors by the size of the difference in association. Once again, the output indicates that factors such as strong belief systems, satisfaction with life achievements and taking care of one's health are all associated with higher commitment to the organisation. Committed people are thus more likely to describe themselves as feeling well, as actively taking care of their health and having a varied life.

Figure 3



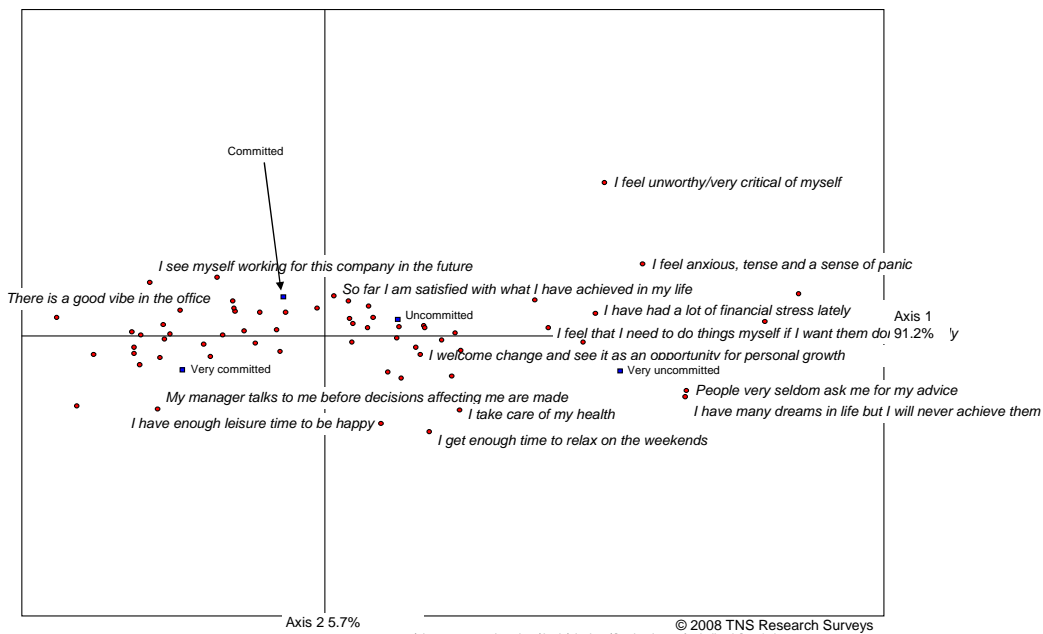
Simply put, if employers wish to create an enabling environment for *real happiness* in the workplace, the results of my research show that they

should focus on the following key areas: engagement, meaning and well-being. These factors contribute to *harmony with self* in terms of realising one's life purpose or finding meaning in one's life and *harmony with others* in terms of relationships, contribution and a sense of engagement with others. All of these elements have also been shown to be strong drivers of employee commitment.

The final analysis conducted in order to understand the drivers of a happy and healthy emotional attachment to the company was a perceptual map. The variables relating to people's perceptions of work, relationships and well-being have been mapped using correspondence analysis to arrive at the results in Figure 4 below.

Almost all the variation in the map (91.2%) is explained by the x axis, therefore yielding a continuum which gives further substance to the significance of health and happiness factors as drivers of commitment.

Figure 4



By summarising the inertias of each, we can arrive at a list of the top 22 attributes driving this axis – which I will describe as the Happiness Continuum (see Table 1). I have grouped these as they relate to the key *happiness themes*, namely engagement, meaning and well-being and in the case of negative attributes, disagreement by committed employees is reflected.

Interestingly, 15 of the top 22 drivers of commitment in this continuum relate to one of the three happiness factors. The other seven relate to recognition, fair pay and regular feedback from the manager. This further emphasises the need to recognise that these attributes should not be relied on exclusively and that the 'harder' more tangible elements of the employee relationship, such as fair compensation, increases, bonuses and opportunities for advancement in the company should also be in place.

Table 1 – The *Happiness Continuum* sorted by attribute

<b>Engagement</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Well-being</b>
I feel valued as an employee	My job is very routine and boring (Disagree)	I experience feelings of depression and hopelessness (Disagree)
I feel that I need to do things myself if I want them done properly (Disagree)	I have many dreams in life but I will never achieve them (Disagree)	Working at this company is very stressful (Disagree)
I see myself working for this company in the future	I have strong personal beliefs	I have had a lot of financial stress lately (Disagree)
I have friends and family to turn to whenever I need them	My ideas and suggestions are valued	I feel anxious, tense and a sense of panic (Disagree)
My manager talks to me before decisions affecting me are made		I find I am doing too much (Disagree)
People at work have a real interest in my well-being		

## Are unhealthy employees eating away at your bottom line?



It is estimated that 50 to 70% of all disease is associated with modifiable health risks (such as unhealthy eating habits) and, as such, may be prevented. The healthier the employee, the more likely they are to be at work. Smoking, obesity and physical inactivity are not only impacting on the health of our employees, but the health of our balance sheets. To illustrate: obese employees cost U.S. businesses an estimated \$12.7 billion in health care, sick leave, and life and disability insurance (American Journal of Health Promotion, 2003).

Aside from obesity and its impact on business, a TNS survey conducted in June 2004 showed that 20% of the UK population had taken time off work in the preceding five years due to backache, fatigue, depression or anxiety, with those suffering from depression taking an average of 36 days off over five years. Further afield, as many as 10% of the Dutch population are on anti-depressants. In the U.S., an OECD study illustrates that health spending has grown 2.3 times faster than the economic growth rate, rising from 13% of GDP in 1997 to 14.6% in 2002 (Langham & Blakemore, 2005).

There is growing evidence although no conclusive findings, that happiness and an optimistic outlook influence health, and vice versa. Happiness and longevity have also been linked by scientists. And avid exercisers will attest to the power of the endorphin – not only does it make us feel good, but now, it is proven to make us live longer too by having a positive impact on DNA .

The relationship between health and happiness is a circular one, so the healthier you are the happier you are likely to be, and the happier you are the healthier you are likely to be. The implications for employers are that happy people are less prone to illness, workplace stress and burnout.

In a study conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health, the impact of job strain on 21 290 female nurses in the U.S. showed that the women most at risk were those whose jobs were very demanding and who had very little control. Since happiness and having a sense of control over one's life/work are closely linked, it can be inferred that stress and unhappiness were identified as risk factors. These risks were shown to be further exacerbated in women who had little social support. Again, it can be concluded that unhappiness due to lack of engagement or lack of strong relationships, is a health risk (news.bbc.co.uk).

Dr Sheila Keegan has been researching well-being, happiness and wealth in the U.K. for 25 years. Last year she presented a paper at the annual MRS conference on the topic of Gross National Happiness in Bhutan, a tiny Himalayan kingdom with a per capita income of just \$2 a day. Despite this apparent poverty, both health care and education are provided free, infant mortality has decreased and life expectancy increased. The country is committed to preserving its environment and natural forests and has a carbon negative footprint. Her conclusions are that the Bhutanese have been putting into practice what we all know, but choose to ignore. And part of what we know is right, is a healthy lifestyle.

*I do not want to reduce happiness to a treadmill, but it is important to acknowledge that you cannot live in Bhutan without being fit. People walk. And walk. They climb mountains because they have to. Many villages are built at high levels or on the sides of mountains. And the Bhutanese have a very healthy, mainly vegetarian, diet. If we are to believe the many studies that indicate that exercise is an effective antidote to depression, then it is little wonder that the Bhutanese are happy (Keegan, 2007).*

While the simplicity of the Bhutanese may captivate the imagination, the question is also being asked "Is well-being the new religion?" And this is not a religion for the poor. Indeed, worshipping at the altar of well-being costs money in order to afford the kinesiology, yoga, reiki, reflexology, NLP, massage, counselling, and other 'individualistic, self-focused pursuits' it calls for. Some companies (let us call them the early adopters of the corporate world) are increasingly prepared to invest in it, primarily because it works.

## *Can't buy me love...?*

So far we have seen some evidence in the data that financial drivers of commitment may be of lesser importance to employees than others that relate to engagement, purpose and well-being. My findings are supported by studies for Weight Watchers and Norwich Union in the U.K. These qualitative studies, conducted by Campbell Keegan were ongoing for a year and a half and revealed "unexpected patterns of feeling amongst High Net Worth individuals which suggests that, not only does wealth – beyond a certain, quite modest, level – not make you happier, but it correlates with 'un-happiness' in the form of raised anxiety and a far greater tendency to live in a mid-term projected 'future', eschewing 'today' and its possibilities" (Keegan, 2007).

This finding is supported by results from the 2007 City & Guilds Happiness Index which show that U.K. workers earning between £10k and £15K per annum rated their jobs 10/10 while those in the £40k to £45K bracket seemed to be the least happy, rating their jobs only 3/10 on average. Furthermore, the Happiness Index shows only 17% of employees (n=1000) agreeing with the statement that "Being adequately financially rewarded" is the most crucial element for happiness in the workplace.

An opinion poll by GfK NOP for The Happiness Formula television series on BBC Two provides further evidence that Britain's happiness levels are declining *despite* rising income - a trend that is already well documented in the United States. (The GfK NOP opinion poll for The Happiness Formula series was conducted by telephone. The fieldwork was carried out between 28 and 30 October 2005. The sample size was 1001 adults aged 15 or over, and the margin of error was +/- 3%.)

Polling data from Gallup throughout the 1950s shows higher happiness levels than today, suggesting that extra wealth has not brought extra well-being with the proportion of people saying they are "very happy" declining from 52% in 1957 to just 36% today. Research suggests that once average incomes reach around £10 000 a year, extra money does not make a country any happier.

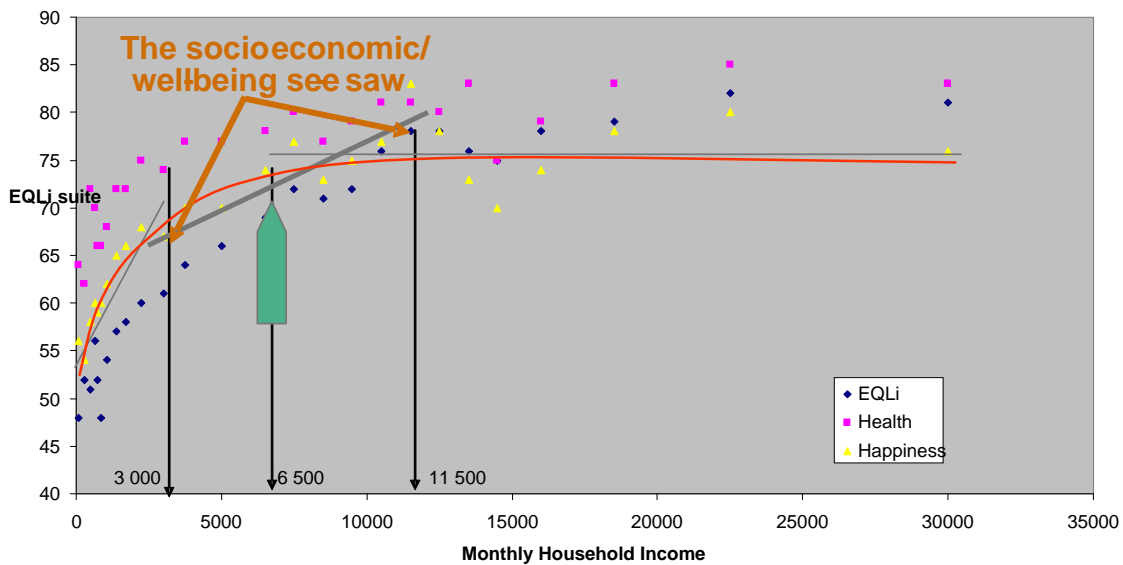
In South Africa, TNS Research Surveys has been doing research into well-being and happiness for a number of years.

Here is the list of major contributors to well-being and happiness that has emerged in the past few years:

- Basic infrastructure – water, sanitation, power, hot water, communications, transport
- A varied life with many activities
- Health – exercise, reduced stress, adequate nutrition, mental activity, a healthy orientation in running one's life, moderate drinking, better environment and reduced pollution, adequate leisure time, good support systems, adequate sleep
- Networks – acceptance, belonging, respect, close and fulfilling relationships
- Optimism – active life, mental activity, direction and purpose in one's life, realisable dreams and ambitions, satisfaction with achievements, respect of others
- Dignity and self-esteem – avoidance of disparagement and denigration, recognition of people's 'human-being-ness'
- Employment – especially work that challenges one without being too daunting and work that is not below one's skill level
- Time for reflection on one's life

Money is not on this list. Of course, money plays a role, but only up to a certain point. One can think of this as the 'socio-economic/well-being' see-saw. Below about R3 000, needs are heavily influenced by wealth. Health, in particular, rises very quickly with the addition of relatively small amounts of money emphasising the need to address poverty alleviation with all speed. Happiness levels also begin to rise quite quickly at this bottom end of the income spectrum, levelling off at around R3 000 per month per household. As income rises, the fulfilment of basic infrastructural needs begins to be displaced by a greater variety of needs. Happiness levels off at around R7 000; once R11 000 is reached, money is key to a much smaller group of people and decisions – overall quality of life becomes steady and it is things such as recognition, a sense of direction and purpose and of achievement, the helping of others - these become what drives the individual (Higgs, 2008).

Figure 5



Despite all this evidence, employers still seem to rely heavily on money and promotion when it comes to retaining their people. HR practitioners and consultants may be to blame. HR professionals consider competitive salaries (59%) and career-development opportunities within the current organisations (47%) as the most effective employee retention strategies (Heathfield, 2008).

More money often yields positive results in the short term, but it is a quick fix, partially because people are designed to perpetually remain on the *hedonic treadmill* and partially because it does not address the root causes for unhappiness and low commitment. Studies show that aspirations also rise with income and like proverbial rats, we run faster and faster and so do our aspirations (Kahneman, 2002).

Creating an enabling environment for our employees to experience happiness in different ways does seem to be more challenging and somehow rather 'touchy feely', but in the long run, it will yield positive results as has been shown by the importance of such attributes as drivers of commitment.

## Just *who* are we trying to please?

I came to terms quite recently with the fact that I am not, strictly speaking, a Baby Boomer. It happened quite by chance; my former boss Butch Rice commented: "You either work to make money or to have fun, and if you are doing neither, then you had better change what you do." That made me think very hard about the people we employ in our company nowadays. And about myself...

Would this statement hold true for any of them? Would it hold true for me? And when he said "...to have fun" was he talking about real happiness? To "make money" given the evidence I have presented thus far, should be of little significance to any of us. Or should it?

Quite by accident, I found out more about myself, seeking clarity about my generation and what makes us happy, and learned that I am part of a "lost generation", a "large, anonymous generation" with an "unrequited craving" (for happiness, perhaps) and "unfulfilled expectations" (<http://en.wikipedia.org>).

Generation Jones, or the Shadow Boomers as my generation is also called represents the last wave of babies, just before The Pill, born between 1954 and 1965. Sad as my generation may seem, when I found Generation X described by its "lack of optimism for the future, nihilism, cynicism, scepticism, alienation and distrust in traditional values and institutions", I felt a little comforted.

In France, the term *Génération Bof* is in use, with 'bof' being a French word for 'whatever,' considered by some French people to be the defining Generation-X saying. Cynical Dilbert comes to mind.

*They have trouble making decisions. They would rather hike in the Himalayas than climb a corporate ladder. They have few heroes, no anthems, no style to call their own. They crave entertainment, but their attention span is as short as one zap of a TV dial. They hate yuppies, hippies and druggies. They postpone marriage because they dread divorce. They sneer at Range Rovers, Rolexes and red suspenders. What they hold dear are family life, local activism, national parks, penny loafers and mountain bikes. They possess only a hazy sense of their own identity but a monumental preoccupation with all the problems the preceding generation will leave for them to fix* (Time Magazine, 16 July 1990).

Generation Y, on the other hand, know what they want. They are sceptical about what they hear and see in the media, having access to huge sources of information via the internet their whole lives. The fact that this generation has more economic independence than their parents ever did and is, in most ways, more self-sufficient than any preceding generation is validated by Harris' Interactive YouthPulse<sup>SM</sup> studies. A 2003 study confirmed that the influence that Generation Y has on the economy is immense. According to this study, Generation Y earned \$211 billion and spent \$172 billion annually. The study was conducted online in the United States in June 2003, amongst a nationwide cross-section of 3432 members of Generation Y, aged 8-21 years. And what does this seemingly 'together' generation want from the workplace? One thing is certain - they will make an informed choice when entering the workplace.

*They do place a great deal of importance on personal happiness, having lived their lives in a very robust economy (Grollman, 2000).*

Looking at all of this, the question comes up: which strategy should one adopt to increase happiness in such a way as to meet all these different need sets and mindsets? Furthermore, whilst a number of economic factors have contributed to the demise of lifetime employment with one organisation, most notably this demise has been occasioned by the employees themselves. So what is the point of employers seeking commitment, if most employees simply don't need or want it any more?

I believe the answer to this lies in a new and different kind of commitment that has little to do with 40 long years of loyal service. We, as employers, will have to work harder for less. We will have to content ourselves with the workplace equivalent of 'quality time'.

Many employers have already been compelled to make a new plan to delight Generation X but they will need to be even more creative for Generation Y who is, from an employer perspective, more puzzling and difficult to integrate into the workplace than any generation that has preceded them. This influential generation will have a similarly significant impact on workplace trends, and employers will need to be wide awake and keep it 'real' and straight when attempting to engage the new generation employee.

Table 2 – Summary of generational attitudes and influences

	<b>Baby Boomer</b>	<b>Gen Jones</b>	<b>Gen X</b>	<b>Gen Y</b>
Born	1942-1954	1954-1965	1965-1978	1978-1984
Childhood	Father knows best, mother may stay home, "happy families" idyll	Brady Bunch - but divorce more prevalent	Divorced parents, latch-key children	Both parents work, likely to be divorced
Attitudes to work	Security important – may worry about retirement – can they afford to retire? Ageism in the workplace	Need to make a contribution	Not interested in climbing ladders, loyal service, reaping rewards at retirement – they work to have a life	Employment market saturated, started to work part-time as teenagers to supplement pocket money
Shaping events and circumstances	Walk on the moon, sexual freedom, anti-apartheid movement, women's movement, protests and riots, recreational drugs	Watergate, Soweto Riots, Border war and call-up, anti-apartheid movement/ protests	Mass media, AIDS, the Cold War and technology	End of apartheid, grew up in an expansive global economy
Key traits	Experimental, individualistic, entrepreneurial, social cause oriented	Pessimistic, distrust government, general cynicism, Restlessness. Creative and flexible	<i>Whatever</i> Easily bored – they want options and choices. Resilient, realistic, low key	Optimistic, know what they want, independent thinkers, sceptical of media, socially aware and confident
Happiness	Fun, escapism, short-lived	Unrequited	"What's that?"	Birthright
Money	Important, means security, investment for old age	Balance between personal fulfilment and financial gain	Money less of a motivator than time	Wealth and fame
Famous people	Bob Dylan, Hillary and Bill Clinton, Oprah Winfrey, Richard Branson	Barack Obama, Nicolas Sarkozy, Bill Gates, Spike Lee	Jennifer Aniston, Ben Affleck, Leo Di Caprio, Tracy Chapman, Tiger Woods	Anyone can be famous on Facebook or UTube

## How can we delight you? New ways to ensure workplace happiness, or are they?

The prospect of delighting our cross-generational employees may seem a daunting one and indeed, a variety of strategies will be required if we are to delight them all. Where will we focus first, and whose happiness is most critical to us? Ultimately, what are we going to do that is *new*?

The most practical starting point in coming up with a plan to improve happiness and commitment in the workplace is to look for the common threads – and a convincing selection of these have emerged in the data to point us directly at what I will now label as: *The Happiness Factors*. Ironically, Employee Commitment studies seldom include age as a demographic, and an insight from this paper would be the value of incorporating employee age in our metrics. Certainly, this would enable a more targeted approach when suggesting which of the Happiness Factors is more salient to each generation.

Let us recap: the objective of this paper is to establish whether or not *real happiness*, underpinned by well-being, makes a difference to commitment in the workplace.

It has been shown that the certain issues relating to the experience of happiness (either as a sense of engagement or as a sense of purpose) have the potential to influence commitment more powerfully and lastingly than issues such as salary and opportunities to advance. These include:

- Feeling valued
- Fitting in with company culture
- People being seen as vital to the company's success
- People at work have a real interest in my well-being
- Having control over the work I do

Clearly, the happiness factor in question here is engagement.

It has also been shown that committed people associate strongly with the following attributes:

- My life has meaning and purpose
- I am passionate in what I feel and what I want to do in my life
- So far I am satisfied with what I have achieved in my life

The happiness factor in question here is meaning or purpose.

Committed people are also more likely to associate positively with attributes relating to health and well-being such as:

- I take care of my health
- I feel well and in good health
- I feel alive and energetic
- I have enough leisure time to be happy
- I consider myself physically fit
- I include lots of vegetables, fruits and salads in my diet

And here, the happiness factor is health and well-being.

So, how does leveraging these Happiness Factors lead to successful businesses?

### ***Happiness Factor # 1 – Engagement/Relationship***

This is the happiness factor where managers play the leading role. Not only can they contribute significantly, on a day-to-day basis, to a person's sense of being valued, but they can also ensure that employees feel they have control over their own work. Managers can destroy happiness and commitment by holding on to old ideas and paradigms, and refusing to relinquish control.

Old ideas to get rid of:

- *People and their problems are not our business*
- *I can't trust anyone to do the job as well as I would do it*

New ideas to adopt:

- *A manager's primary job is to build strong relationships with employees*
- *Letting go is more important than being in control*

Strong relationships with colleagues and friends have been shown to be fundamental to happiness experienced as a sense of engagement. In the workplace, one of the most critical relationships is with one's manager or supervisor. People leave managers and supervisors more often than they leave companies or jobs and in order to correct this there are various

interventions that should be considered. These include developing managers' EQ and 'soft' skills and incorporating 'soft' skill ratings in appraisals so that managers are measured based on employee feedback regarding skills such as caring, communicating, keeping commitments and praising their employees.

Seemingly mundane things that managers do can have great impact on their workers according to Professor Teresa Amabile of the Harvard Business School. She shows how people's emotions and perceptions of their work environment permeate the daily work experience and affect performance. An example of the influence of these feelings on performance is her finding that if people are in a good mood on a given day, they are more likely to have creative ideas that day, as well as the next day. "There seems to be a cognitive process that gets set up when people are feeling good that leads to more flexible, fluent, and original thinking, and there's actually a carryover, an incubation effect, to the next day," she says. This notion is reinforced by Csikszentmihályi's research into happiness and his concept of *flow*.

Using a daily electronic diary method to identify behaviours at a very granular level amongst a sample of 238 professionals in 26 project teams, Prof. Amabile found five behaviours that leaders or managers exhibit which have a positive influence on people's feelings. These are:

- Supporting people emotionally
- Monitoring work in a positive way (giving positive feedback or more information on how to do the work better)
- Recognising good performance, particularly publicly
- Consulting with people and respecting their opinions
- Collaborating – rolling up your sleeves and spending time with somebody on the actual work

Conversely, behaviours that impact negatively on people's feelings of happiness include:

- Too much or too little guidance
- Checking work too often or not often enough and giving unconstructive feedback
- Avoiding or creating problems

*I would encourage leaders, when they're about to have an interaction with somebody, to ask themselves: Might this thing I'm about to do or say become this person's "event of the day"? Will it have a positive or a negative effect on their feelings and on their performance today?* (Amabile, 1999)

### ***Happiness Factor # 2 – Meaning or Purpose***

This is the happiness factor where we all roll up our sleeves and get involved in good work outside of the workplace. It is also the more introspective factor where we discover why we are here.

Old ideas to get rid of:

- *Corporate Social Investment = company donation*
- *If employees want to be do-gooders, they must do good on their own time*

New ideas to adopt:

- *Corporations can do well by doing good*
- *Employees who understand their purpose impact positively on those around them*

Community involvement by companies plays a far more positive role than simply helping the needy – not only for the organisation but also for its employees. By enabling its employees to become involved in community initiatives, companies demonstrate positive values to their employees, many of whom may be aligned with such values. Allowing time off to do volunteer work has even more impact as it allows employees the opportunity to experience real happiness at a meaningful level, on company time.

Community support work has a circular impact, on the outside as it pertains to the positive impact the company is making and the attendant benefits to corporate image, and on the inside, in the goodwill and close relationships generated by colleagues working together toward the greater good.

The second piece of this happiness factor involves finding life's meaning. Mention this in the workplace and you may be on shaky ground. Although it may seem rather prosaic to say that meaning in life is the most

important thing you can have, how many of us venture to discover or reconnect with our life's purpose? How do we do this? There are many techniques, courses, journeys of self-discovery and wilderness quests which can assist us in uncovering 'Why we are here'. This touches on our individuality, unique abilities and innate strengths. As Nietzsche said: *He who has a **why** to live can bear almost any **how**.*

Viktor Frankl wrote *Man's Search for Meaning* in 1946, after surviving the Holocaust. The founder of Logotherapy and Existential Analysis, Frankl believed that our main motivation for living is finding meaning in life.

*If a prisoner felt that he could no longer endure the realities of camp life, he found a way out in his mental life - an invaluable opportunity to dwell in the spiritual domain, the one that the SS were unable to destroy. Spiritual life strengthened the prisoner, helped him adapt, and thereby improved his chances of survival (Frankl, 1946).*

Under these horrific circumstances, if meaning could play such a powerful and life-affirming role, finding one's purpose in infinitely less hostile circumstances must surely lead to extreme happiness of a lasting and deeply gratifying quality that can only impact positively on those with whom one comes into contact. The committed employees who attest in the surveys that "My life has meaning and purpose" could be having that impact on their colleagues every day in the office. Companies may already be acknowledging this at a subconscious level as there are some forward-thinking ones venturing on the fringes of positive psychology and logotherapy in their self-development offerings to employees. However, it will possibly be a very long time, if ever, that the more extreme forms of self-discovery workshop enter the mainstream curricula of the workplace.

Although the exact date is unknown, it is widely held that the following advertisement appeared in *The Times* to recruit crew members for one of Ernest Shackleton's Antarctic expeditions: *"Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success."* 5000 applied, 28 were chosen to accompany Shackleton on his journey to the South Pole. Maybe this reflects how people long for heroic adventure and will search for meaning and an escape from drudgery no matter the odds.

What is meaning other than a yearning within us all to be the best we can be, to go beyond the ordinary and leave behind a legacy? To feel alive? These things are possible even in the safe, air-conditioned confines of our offices.

### ***Happiness Factor #3 – Health and Well-Being***

This is the happiness factor where an apple a day comes standard.

Old ideas to get rid of:

- *Sick leave, workman's compensation and medical aid – that's as far as the company goes*

New ideas to adopt:

- *Co-responsibility with employees for keeping themselves and the company healthy*

A traditional Chinese belief is that you pay your physician so long as you remain healthy. As soon as you become sick, payment stops. When it comes to the world of work, being healthy certainly is worth the investment. Providing opportunities at work to focus on fitness and health is considerably less costly than coping with the consequences of ill health.

Simple initiatives such as health fairs at work where basic health screening is provided on site to employees, not only helps to raise awareness, but can also save lives where people are alerted to serious health risks in time. Typically, basic health screening would include testing cholesterol levels, blood sugar levels, blood pressure, body fat and body mass index (BMI). Usually, health professionals will review the screenings with individuals and provide some basic advice on how to improve scores. As modest and straightforward as an initiative like this may seem, it confirms to the employee that the company has a real interest in his or her well-being which, as we have seen, is an important driver of commitment.

There are many other health and fitness initiatives that can be implemented at relatively low cost in relation to the benefits. We have seen that many top companies in South Africa are adopting a more holistic and proactive approach to wellness in the workplace. From personal trainers to stress management advisors, the greening of the corporate landscape is more and more evident. However, how do we know if we really are making a difference if we are not measuring the impact on our people? Many companies measure commitment and satisfaction. Very few truly understand the health and well-being issues simmering below the surface of their workforce, and the impact of these on productivity levels. This is a new direction where we as an industry could be leading by example.

Before concluding, I would briefly like to suggest that certain strategies may be more relevant to one generation rather than another. We have looked at certain universal *happiness factors* that can be leveraged across all employees in our workplace; now let us take a more targeted approach.

Table 3 – *Happiness Strategy* - summarises differentiating values and need sets which define the various generations making up the majority of our workforce and proposes a range of organisational responses to each of these. The emphasis remains on the ‘softer’ aspects of the employer/employee relationship.

While the Baby Boomers and Jonesers cannot be ignored, international employee commitment research shows that commitment tends to increase with age, tenure and seniority. The implication is that Generation X & Y may not be as easy to please and will require higher maintenance. While this approach may be criticised for stereotyping, the intention is rather to assist managers in coming a little closer to treating others, not as *we* want to be treated, but rather as *they* want to be treated.

Table 3 – Happiness Strategy

	<b>Baby Boomer</b>	<b>Gen Jones</b>	<b>Gen X</b>	<b>Gen Y</b>
Born	1942-1954	1954-1965	1965-1978	1978-1984
<i>Engagement/ Relationship needs/values</i>	They may be the managers but may not have the skills to manage the Xs and Ys. They may also feel threatened and wonder "Who is looking out for me?"	They have realistic expectations about workplace relationships. Can be suspicious and cynical, self-centred and noncommittal	Don't like to be stereotyped or characterised. Want to be looked at as individuals.	This is the new 'me' generation. Not looking for career paths, looking for life paths.
Response	As the managers they might find themselves in a lonely place. When they leave, knowledge will be walking out the door – honour this and partner them with people who will carry the torch forward	Be honest and involve them. Enable them to use their strengths and perseverance	Create a sense of community and <b>spend time</b> building personal relationships, getting to know the individual. Be straightforward and personal. Don't watch over their shoulders	They need high maintenance management and mentoring. Build genuine relationships and <b>tell the truth</b> . Treat with respect, as a colleague not an intern
<i>Meaning/Purpose needs/values</i>	Want to learn more and contribute more to the community	Social and ethical dimension important to employer brand too*	Work does not define their life – they work to have a life. Value their goals and achieving them	Always questioning why? Expect more from their jobs and their lives than previous generations
Response	Support their ideals and initiatives, particularly when it comes to community giving	Create the opportunities for <b>volunteering</b> and rediscover idealism	<b>Flexible working arrangements</b> and generous leave. Respect their personal goals	Work must be alive and meaningful – unique spirit and values evident** Celebrate their ideas
<i>Health and Well-being needs/values</i>	Health awareness and concerns increase as aging looms	"I may be 40 something but inside I still feel 18"	Leisure time, environmentally friendly products	Burn-out potential due to lifestyle and work demands
Response	More specific wellness issues addressed. Experimental, individualistic, so will adapt to new alternative well-being ideas e.g. yoga at work, meditation etc	No intention to retire and grow old – so fitness, health, vitality all top of mind. Could be the early adopters of new initiatives and champions of well-being	Well-being on company time so ensure work pressures allow for this	Balance issues including sleep, diet (esp. eating more regularly). Nap rooms at work and meal vouchers for more healthy eating alternatives

\*Project Britain – research conducted by Carat Ltd, 2007

\*\*[www.management-issues.com/2006](http://www.management-issues.com/2006)

## Concluding remarks

Happiness is, as Freud said, something essentially subjective. *It is not an externally focused goal such as money, status or achievement. Understanding happiness as a state of being, to be developed internally, spiritually, in relation to others, does not come naturally to most of us in the affluent world* (Keegan, 2007). So, really, shouldn't employees just be left alone to get on with it? If it is commitment we want, have we not seen a number of other drivers that are far more in our control? Is this all just too 'touchy feely' for the world of work?

I don't believe so. Having explored the relationship between employee commitment and the happiness factors – engagement, meaning and well-being - I can only conclude that these factors may not necessarily be the *New Drivers of Commitment* for companies in a new age, since they have been around for a long time, even though they have never been given the importance that is their due. What is *new*, however, is that we are starting to understand these factors and appreciate their powerful contribution to organisational success.

I have proposed a new direction, and it may well be a hazardous journey, but also may lead *to honour and recognition in case of success*. For the happiness factors to succeed, managers will have to relinquish control to a far greater extent, and spend a lot more time building relationships; companies will need to create an environment where people can find meaning and feel alive; where they are encouraged to deploy their real strengths and interpersonal virtues such as kindness, gratitude and the capacity to love, for these are the virtues most strongly linked to happiness (Seligman, 2002). A measure of our proximity to this new enabling state of grace may well be our comfort levels when speaking of these virtues in the context of work. Finally, and perhaps easiest to achieve of all, work and well-being should be like flip sides of the same coin – a new currency for the workplace.

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