
The M⁵ Model

Building Positive Intelligence in Organizations

By Karen Noble

Introduction

One can scarcely pick up a newspaper or read the online blogs without coming across the topic of happiness/well-being and its professed importance to individuals and organizations. The terminology and concepts can be confusing, however, and we are not always certain what to do with these apparently important but conceivably “fluffy” ideals. Yet the basis of these concepts is anything but fluffy, and their foundations are firmly planted in the science of positivity which includes Positive Psychology, new economic theories, and mathematics. While we may refer to our capacity for positivity as ‘positive intelligence,’ it is not a measurement of the functionality of the brain, but rather a positive/negative ratio that predicts the well-being of individuals and teams. Chamine (2012) defines it simply as, “. . . the percentage of time your mind is acting as your friend rather than your enemy” (p. 7).

This article will introduce you to the M⁵ model and help you discern the relevant data of the science and art of happiness/well-being, while expanding your awareness regarding positivity as a way of thinking and being that is of critical importance for the resilience and future sustainability of organizations.

The Case for M⁵

The rate of change in the way we conduct business is rivaling that of the industrial revolution. The next generation of the work force is placing more emphasis on

realizing potential and purpose. Organizations are leading with values; “sharing” is a movement and includes work environments, cars, bicycles, farm co-ops, and open source code. The lines between work and life are blurred. How we define and measure success is also changing at nearly every level.

Organizations need to think and behave differently as the very concept of work is re-invented and evolves. We need to include workers differently while accounting for time zones, technology, and expectations. Increasing positive intelligence at an enterprise level enables the organization to harness its potential by empowering individuals to do what they do best. The organization optimizes its diverse components while simultaneously learning to bounce forward in the face of failures. This new construct offers a view from which we can apply some hard, scientific data to otherwise “soft” discussions and solutions around such topics as culture.

OD is evolving as well; it is necessarily dynamic, and applications and engagements may consist of a one-time consultation or may drive long-term, systemic change. A practitioner is as likely to be facilitating a small workshop with participants in Cairo via Skype as playing the role of executive trouble-shooter with the leadership team in the boardroom.

I believe the M⁵ model has significant implications for OD and how we work; it is the lens through which we view our internal and external constituents, especially as the next generations of the work force

arrive with new and very different expectations of work and jobs.

Background of the Movement

The growing movement around happiness and well-being represents the intersection of the new field of Positive Psychology and the ground breaking theories emerging in the field of economics.

In 1998, the American Psychological Association (APA) expanded the organization's goal to include the exploration of "what makes life worth living and building the enabling conditions of a life worth living" (Seligman, 2012, p. 1). By 2003 Losada would discover a mathematical ratio of 3:1 positive-to-negative interactions as a tipping point above which teams functioned as high-performing. Collaborating with Losada, Fredrickson applied the mathematics to her "broaden-and-build" theory and revealed how positivity opens us by *broadening* our minds and our hearts and by *building* our resources, transforming us for the better. She found that positivity consistently enables individuals, teams, and marriages to flourish – the higher the positivity, the more open and resilient the relationship(s).^a Positive intelligence is

the more individuals valued other rewards, i.e., time with family, travel, etc. Easterlin was joined by other "new economics" leaders such as Layard, Kahneman, and Marks who openly questioned the morality of focusing solely on utility and challenged governments to commit to more comprehensive policies regarding the well-being of its citizens beyond GNP. Layard indicates, "Our increasing tendency to do the best for ourselves is doing us no good" (2005, p. 198). Nations began measuring the well-being of their citizens with such tools as the Happy Planet Index (HPI),^c the Genuine Progress Indicator System of Accounting (GPI),^d and the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index^e among others. Inevitably similar indicators have been finding their way into organizations with tools such as the Happiness at Work survey (more on this later).

This intersection of Positive Psychology and economic science along with the changing expectations of individuals toward meaningfulness and purpose has

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influenced by environment, up-bringing, and DNA; and importantly, positivity can be learned.

At the same time, the "Easterlin Paradox"^b challenged the foundation of economics by asserting that more is not always better. In fact, Easterlin found that once material wealth met a threshold of basic fundamental needs, happiness did not much vary. The more wealth accumulated,

created an opportunity to re-define and prioritize the well-being of individuals, organizations, and nations.

Development of the M⁵ Model

A number of renowned professionals have developed key concepts and methods of implementing personal happiness/well-being and influencing positive intelligence.



Figure 1. Well-Being Culture – M⁵ Model

For instance, Layard uses the acronym GREAT DREAM for his ten actions; Marks and the New Economics Foundation outlines five recommended actions; and Seligman delineates five elements of well-being in his acronym, PERMA (see Table 1, next page). OD practitioners will see the potential of extending these elements into organization-level solutions. Familiar models and methods are still relevant as we view and apply them through the lens of well-being with a goal of growing high-positivity organizations.

The M⁵ Model outlined in Figure 1 consolidates the best thinking and concepts regarding the application of positivity/well-being. It provides a practical road map to organize and define actions for building concepts of positive intelligence into OD initiatives and organizations. OD theories and tools are still relevant; we simply apply them through a lens of positivity.

Applying the M⁵ Model

At the heart of the M⁵ Model is resilience/sustainability. As the outside elements are consistently demonstrated in the organization, the result is an enterprise that has the competency and capacity to meet the challenges inherent in the environment and market, thus resulting in a more sustainable future. The components include:

- » **Meaning.** Fostering an organizational culture of people who feel valued and whose jobs have meaning results in

Table 1. *Key Concepts for Implementing Personal Happiness/Well-Being*

Lord Richard Layard's GREAT DREAM (http://www.actionforhappiness.org/)	The New Economics Foundation (NEF) Centre for Well-being's Five Actions.	Martin Seligman PERMA (Seligman, 2010, p. 16)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Giving: Practice altruism. » Relating: Connect with people; happiness is contagious. Research shows that the happiness of a close contact increases the chance of being happy by 15%. » Exercising: Find an activity that suits you. Only 10% of our happiness is directly influenced by outside sources (like income and environment), 50% is innate disposition or upbringing, and 40% is directly attributed to our daily choices—so just by exercising, you have a significant opportunity to impact that 40%. » Appreciating: Be mindful; notice the world around you. » Trying Out: Be curious. Keep learning. » Direction: Set achievable goals; find something to look forward to. “Often, the most enjoyable part of an activity is the anticipation” (Achor, 2010, p. 52). » Resilience: Find ways to accept failure, disappointment, or crisis and bounce forward. We often cannot choose what happens to us, but in principle we can choose our own attitude to what happens. » Emotion: Go out of your way to experience positive emotions such as joy, gratitude, contentment, inspiration, and pride. Develop a habit of looking at the positive in situations. » Acceptance: Be comfortable with who you are. When we stop comparing ourselves to others, it helps us also accept others for who they are. » Meaning: This is about being connected to something bigger than yourself, be it a religion, work that makes a difference, or the job of parenting; it is something that confirms that it's not all about you. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Connect: Engage with the people around you. » Be active: Go for a walk or run; find an activity that suits you. » Take notice: Be curious; savor the moment; appreciate what matters. » Keep learning: Try something new – never stop learning. » Give: Do something nice for someone; volunteer; get involved in your community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Positive Emotion: A cornerstone of well-being theory; happiness and life satisfaction are subjective subsets. » Engagement: It is the opposite of being bored; rather it is about being absorbed. » Positive Relationships: Simply put, this is about other people. » Meaning: Belonging to and serving something you believe is bigger than yourself. » Accomplishment: Achievement for its own sake.

organizations that are better able to attract valuable talent, sometimes defying the odds with salaries that are on the lower competitive end.

An example of this is Adecco, a career/placement services firm, that was ranked 16th on the 2013 Career-Bliss Happiest Companies in America list,¹ even though its average salary was in some cases up to \$50,000 lower than the average paycheck at companies at the bottom of the list. The company credits their employees' pride in their work and the opportunity for

growth and development as integral to employee loyalty. People stay; and when companies retain good employees, it impacts the bottom line.

OD interventions are inherently about relationships of individuals, teams, and the community. Strong relationships create meaning, and OD has the potential to intentionally identify and communicate how each individual job adds value to the overall organization's vision/mission.

Meaning may be cultivated through the collective support of a community cause or a local fund-raiser that builds camaraderie and connection that makes a difference.

Creating meaning at work is

also about identifying and leveraging strengths whether at the individual or team level. This strength-based emphasis changes the tone of the environment. Easy-to-use resources are available online at such locations as the University of Pennsylvania's Authentic Happiness site as well as the Action for Happiness connection.^f

» **Motivation.** OD has an opportunity to prioritize positive intelligence in the workplace and influence functional managers, training and development areas, and HR to build important organizational competencies. A highly positive enterprise designs policies to enrich jobs, listens to employees

1. <http://www.careerbliss.com/facts-and-figures/careerbliss-50-happiest-companies-in-america-for-2013/>

regularly, recognizes achievement consistently, and is adept at the use of stretch goals. At a recent networking dinner a bright young man matter-of-factly explained how he had left his technology job in the fashion industry in NYC because he wasn't challenged; he simply wasn't busy enough -- and the human brain hates boredom! When asked why he did not just stay and work on his own side business if his employers were aware and willing to pay him, he rationalized that he risked getting

time, and other factors such as level of enjoyment.

He found that a focused mind is a happy mind. He categorized the tracked activities/thoughts by levels of mind wandering and found that those identified as "not mind-wandering" contributed most to whether a person indicated they felt happy in the moment. It turns out that mindfulness is simultaneously a key contributor to productivity and happiness. Fredrickson also indicates that, "Mindful

Google with bowling alleys and ping pong, they can encourage development of innocuous cubicle exercises and stretches or promote creative management practices such as "moving meetings" that meander around the city when weather permits. While it may seem frivolous to some, the business rationale for such policies is serious -- to generate creativity and innovation.

» **Mentoring.** In the context of growing positive intelligence, mentoring is knowing how and when to coach to help another develop their potential. Annual or semi-annual performance appraisals are under fire. Rather, organizations are heading toward in-the-moment coaching that instills better decision making every day. Building mentoring capacity that is aligned with the vision at all levels drives individuals and organizations to more clearly understand their role in the organization and better meet their potential. According to Fredrickson (2009, p. 201), focusing on high-quality connections generates life-giving relationships that incorporate:

- Respectful engagement – being present, attentive, and affirming
- Affirming encouragement - being supportive of what the person is doing – helping him/her succeed
- Trust – believing and demonstrating that this person will meet your expectations
- Play – making time to have fun and connect without an agenda

A Case Study: Applying Positivity to an Organization Assessment

As OD practitioners, we do not need to hit our clients over the head with the positivity approach; rather, we can insert it in opportune ways and still achieve great impact. In a recent engagement, I was able to introduce a happiness-based survey into a larger project focused on building a passionate service culture. While the purpose remained directed at service excellence, the client ultimately recognized the need to build a culture of connection, innovation,

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too far behind professionally without a job that pushed him to learn the latest tools and develop his skills.

» **Mindfulness.** Organizations often think of mindfulness as "soft" or "fluffy," but it is far from it. Neuroscience has shown the positive impact of mindfulness on the brain's capacity to make decisions. It is gaining notoriety through new research and publications such as Goleman's most recent book which is fully dedicated to the topic of focus and mindfulness.⁸

Killingsworth (2012) found that mindfulness is a significant contributor to people feeling more productive. He developed a smartphone application called Track Your Happiness that queries over 15,000 people in 83 countries at random intervals throughout the day and night. He asks them to report their immediate mood with ranges from "very bad" to "very good," what they are doing at that moment in

awareness casts a wider, more accepting stance toward the present moment than is typical" (2009, p. 201). In short, it opens us to possibilities.

OD practitioners need to be aware of distractions in the environment that consume attention. We must inspire organizations to encourage more focus and provide the time/space for the practice of mindfulness. Consider that General Mills has a meditation room in nearly every location.

» **Movement.** A highly positive organization optimizes its talent by providing clear pathways for organizational movement/advancement. OD practitioners have the opportunity to charge HR and its leadership to differentiate their organization with radical programs that develop individual and team potential.

Movement also refers to physical activity, which stimulates cognitive abilities and creative thinking. While all company environments cannot be

and empowerment, and increase positive intelligence.

A private University in Manhattan was struggling to adopt consistently great service experiences for its user bases: students, staff, and faculty. Legacy systems and complex relationships were preventing the organization from making the significant progress they desired.

As we defined the current state by consolidating existing data from student and faculty surveys, stakeholder interviews, and user journey maps, we also fielded a staff survey called Happiness at Work (H@W).^h This survey was designed to assess the well-being culture of an organization.

We chose to implement this survey for a number of reasons:

- » The well-being of staff was key to the delivery of quality service at the University. The staff team was the connector of relationships, processes, and policies.
- » Accuracy and ease of use was essential. The H@W survey differs from engagement and climate surveys in that it centered on the personal experiences and emotions of the individual rather than a corporate perspective. This was reflected in the construct of the questions; for instance, the H@W survey asked, “Do you feel you have control over the important elements of your job?” rather than the more corporate version, “Does the organization empower its people?” It was the H@W roll-up reports that provided insights into area- and organization-level perspectives. This personal experience approach reduced individual projections and allowed for more accurate data that presented a “mirror” reflection of the organization. The results were available immediately and were presented in clear, practical visual reports.
- » We were looking for a holistic approach. The H@W survey was based on a dynamic model of well-being that recognized happiness as an ever-evolving, dynamic experience that included personal resources, the organizational system, functioning at work, and ultimately the experience of work.ⁱ

The energy around the survey was obvious, and over 10% of the recipients

responded in the first hour. We reviewed the results and identified those areas needing immediate action or medium/longer term effort. While many of the recommendations were classic OD interventions, they were focused around increasing the organization’s positive intelligence within such categories as Open, Co-create, Play, and Center.

Learning More

Positive intelligence continues to emerge as a significant force in the well-being and sustainability of organizations for the future. Research supports the principles and values of building a well-being culture based on increasing the positive intelligence of the organization; and resources available to OD practitioners are expanding.

Webinars and online groups are available, many at no cost. The Association of Change Management Professionals (ACMP) recently hosted an educational webinar entitled *The Neuroscience of Cultural Change*. In 2013, the OD Network of NY (ODNNY) sponsored events that included such topics as The Art and Practice of Mindfulness and Designing Spaces for Positive Impact. Numerous LinkedIn groups discuss the impact of happiness and well-being including postings by Tim Brown, CEO at IDEO; Daniel Goleman of EI fame; and Arianna Huffington of *The Huffington Post*.

Other publications range from foundational books by Martin Seligman, Richard Layard, Shawn Achor, and Nic Marks to the HBR issue entitled, “The Value of Happiness: How Employee Well-being Drives Profits” (Jan./Feb. 2012). David Rock’s Neuroscience Group offers a brain-based coaching program that helps build high-PI organizations^j and Positive Acorn provides coaching workshops based on Applied Positive Psychology by Robert Biswas-Diener.^k

Conclusions

OD has a significant role to play as organizations as we know them are experiencing dramatic change. Organizations are evolving to become more collaborative, open,

and purpose-driven. As new well-being metrics influence priorities and public policy with potentially dramatically different expectations, organizations will inevitably be held to a new accountability. Innovative tools provide a new lens into sustainable culture and a credible way to measure and track it in organizations.

OD itself reflects this shift, and OD practitioners are exploring the next generation of tools, resources, and thinking. Positivity is at the heart of the convergence of the science and art of OD, and we cannot afford to ignore it, but rather embrace the opportunity as it builds resilience and drives the future sustainability of organizations.

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Notes

- a. In his 2004 landmark study on positivity, Marcel Losada identified the mathematical positive-to-negative feedback ratio of high- and low-performing teams (high 5.6:1, medium 1.9:1, low 0.36:1). In her book *Positivity: Top-Notch Research Reveals the 3-to-1 Ratio That Will Change Your Life*, Barbara Fredrick summarizes the research of Marcel Losada, John Gottman, and Roberts Schwartz and shows how their results consistently support the 3:1 positive-to-negative ratio in totally independent studies (p. 127–133).
- b. Developed by Richard Easterlin, 2009 IZA Prize winner in Labor Economics (2010, p. 3).
- c. Developed by Nic Marks and the New Economics Foundation (NEF), the Happy Planet Index (HPI) is a leading global measure of sustainable well-being: <http://www.happyplanetindex.org/>.
- d. Mark Anielski presented the Genuine Progress Indicator System of Sustainability and Well-Being Accounts (GPI) at the Fourth Biennial Conference of the Canadian Society of Ecological Economics in Montreal in August 2001. It is a tool designed to measure and track the human condition beyond GNP.
- e. The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index is an ongoing daily assessment that captures data on life evaluation, physical health, emotional health, healthy behavior, and work environment of individuals in the US: <http://well-beingindex.com/>.
- f. Martin Seligman developed the University of Pennsylvania's site: <http://www.authentic-happiness.sas.upenn.edu/default.aspx>. This includes the "VIA Survey of Character Strengths" which may be used to effectively coach individuals or teams. Lord Richard Layard encourages usage of the no-cost tools available at: <http://www.actionforhappiness.org/take-action>.
- g. Daniel Goleman's book, *Focus: The hidden driver of excellence*, was released in October 2013.
- h. Based on over 10 years of experience, Nic Marks and Happiness Works have extended the well-being metrics approach utilized in the HPI (Happy Planet Index) to organizations. The result is the Happiness at Work (H@W) survey: <https://app.happinessatworksurvey.com/?a=nobleconcepts>.
- i. The dynamic model on which the Happiness at Work Survey is based includes:
 - » Personal Resources—examines how life is treating the employee overall and provides insight into whether the organization was hiring for a positive, well-being disposition.
 - » Organizational System—explores how employees experience their workplace and provides insights into the alignment between work and vision, mission, and values.
 - » Functioning at Work—delves into actually doing the required work and includes such topics as ability to be themselves, feel in control, have a sense of progress, and quality of relationships at work. This area is integral to understanding how employees experience the culture and its specific areas of challenge and excellence.
 - » Experience of Work—probes into feelings about day-to-day working
- j. David Rock is founder of the Neuroscience Institute and is the author of several books including *Quiet Leadership* (2006), *Coaching with the Brain in Mind* (with Linda J. Page, 2009), and *Your Brain at Work* (2009).
- k. *Positiveacorn.com*—Positive Acorn is an organization led by Robert Biswas-Diener, professor at Portland State University and passionate researcher and author in the positive psychology field. His focus is on the practical application of Positive Psychology and its impact on SWB (subjective well-being).

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life including pride, stress, boredom, and whether the job is worthwhile. This is about the opportunity to optimize day-to-day work engagement and productivity.