Happiness at Workplace: Case Study of Simplex Infrastructure Ltd.

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Abstract

In words of Aristotle "different men seek after happiness in different ways and by different means, and so make for themselves different modes of life". Psychological literature has shown that becoming happier doesn't just make one "feel good". Happier people are more sociable, energetic, cooperative and better liked by others. In becoming happier we boost our engagement with work and with other people and our physical and mental health. Even though genetics plays a role in experience of happiness, it has been proven that barring extreme, many of life experiences are in our control and we can change happiness levels by choosing activities and strategies we pursue. Healthy usage and development of strengths and virtues are key to good life- a life in which one can use one's signature strengths to bring authentic happiness. Thus based on these research findings the authors carried out a pilot study to measure the happiness scores of employees (supervisors) and identify the factors that were contributing to happiness at work and also those factors (organizational and personal factors) that organization needed to pay attention to and develop appropriate activities and strategies to enhance the overall organization happiness score. Further, the study also aimed to identify the relationship between employee years of experience and individual level of happiness.

Keywords: *Workplace, Happiness, Quality of Worklife, Professional life.*

About the Organization

Simplex Infrastructures Ltd. is a diversified company established in 1924 and executing projects in several sectors like Transport, Energy & Power, Mining, Buildings, Marine, Real Estate etc. Simplex is one of the construction leaders in India for nearly 90 years executing projects with consistent quality assurance, cost control and adherence to milestones in a safe environment as per the customer requirements. It promotes the culture of sharing rich and varied experience with staff members, as also with clients and thereby benefits and helps the growth of the construction fraternity and society at large. The Company has been closely associated with the country's infrastructure building with over 2600 completed projects spanning almost all the gamut of construction industry.

Introduction

The entire history of humankind has been the search for well-being, happiness and a good life. Abrahm Maslow worked towards actualization of one's potential and others like; Swami Vivekananda searched for peace in spirituality according to Barbara (2005). Fredrickson suggest that positive emotions lead to novel behavior and that over time, such actions lead to knowledge and social relationships. Compared to people in the other conditions, participants who experience positive emotions show heightened level of creativity, inventiveness and a big picture focus. Happiness as defined in literature, that is, in terms of frequent positive affect, high life satisfaction, and infrequent negative affect. These three constructs are primary components of subjective wellbeing or happiness (Sheldon & Kasser, 1998, 2001;

Sheldon & Lyuobomirsky, 2004).Existing evidence suggests that genetics account for approximately 50% of the population variation (Braungart, 1992. Lykken & Tellegen 1996) and circumstances account for approximately 10% (Argyle, 1999; Diner et al, 1999).As much as 40% is left for intentional efforts that can enhance happiness.

It's been seen some types of behavioral activity like; exercising regularly or trying to be kind to others, are associated with wellbeing(Keltner & Bonano, 1997) as some type of cognitive activity, such as reframing situations in more positive light or pausing to count one's blessings(Emmons & McCullough,2003; King 2001;Seligman 1991) and some kind of volitional activity, such as striving for important personal goal (Sheldon & Houser- Marko , 2001) or devoting effort to meaningful causes (Synder & Omoto, 2001).

However, Hedonic treadmill acts as an inhibitor to sustaining gains of happiness and a source of pessimism; it suggests that any gains in happiness are only temporary, because humans quickly adapt to change (Brickman & Campbell, 1971). Although new circumstances may temporarily cause people to become happier or sadder, they rapidly adjust and effect of happiness then diminishes or disappears completely. However, McCrae and Costa (1990) have shown close relationship between Big Five traits specially neuroticism and extraversion to Wellbeing. People tend to maintain a level of worry, rumination and guilt, as well as their level of social engagement, enthusiasm and self- confidence.

Sheldon & Elliot (1998, 1999) has shown that well being increases are most likely when a person chooses and attains self-concordant goals that fit to the intrinsic values, interests and motives of an individual. Also, Diener et al. (1991)-certainly moments in people's lives characterized by experiences of positive emotions- such as joy, interest, contentment, love, and the like-are moments in which they are not plagued by negative emotions such as anxiety, anger, despair. Consistent with this, the overall balance of people's positive and negative emotions has been shown to predict their judgments of subjective wellbeing. Researchers have documented that people experiencing positive affect show patterns of thought that are unusual (Isen et al., 1985), flexible (Isen & Daubman, 1984) providing correlation towards positive affect leading to broadening ones cognition. Hence, many Organizations world over are taking initiatives to create work outcomes for employees that lead to experience of positive emotions and happiness. Goal setting is done in a manner that work goals are aligned to intrinsic motives of their employees and enabling them a sustained level of happiness at work.

Models used in Measuring Happiness: Cross-Nation Study:

In the last few years, there has been an explosion of interest in producing measures of wellbeing and life satisfaction. Initiatives to develop sets of progress indicators are being run around the world, in rich and poor countries, at local, national and regional level, and by many different types of organizations including governmental agencies, non-profit foundations, academic institutions, and community groups. United Nations created the Human Development Index to track and compare the wellbeing of nations, using GDP, health and educational Achievement indicators. Bhutan adopted the much talked about Gross National Happiness Index. The Index has been developed to promote the principles of Gross National Happiness, establish benchmarks and track the policies and Performance of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Fig-1 Comprehensive Model of Wellbeing
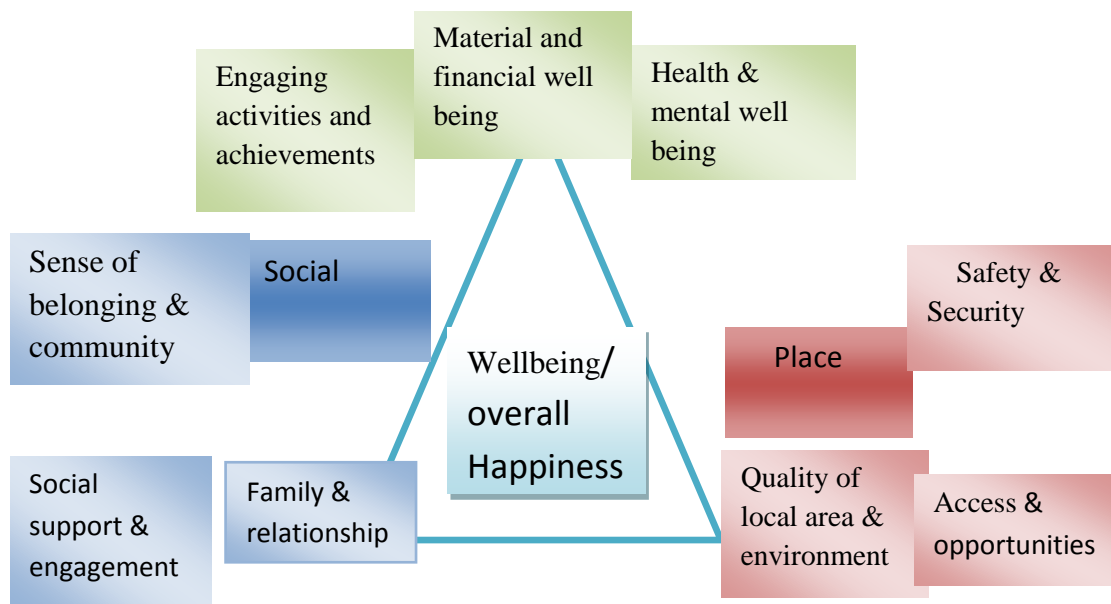
Importance of Factors that influence happiness: results of poll conducted (2013) by young Foundation (U.K)

1 Health 2.Family & Relationships 3. Religious / Spiritual Life, 4. Money and Financial situation, 5. Work Fulfillment   6. Community & friends, 7. Place to Live.
Therefore, this model concludes that, people tend to rate non-monetary aspects of their lives above their financial situation. Once basic needs have been met, increases in income are not mirrored by equivalent increases in wellbeing.

- This study is important as it has proven that work is a critical aspect of life that fuels wellbeing and boosts quality of life and there is a correlation between job satisfaction and life satisfaction. The Good Work Project found that job satisfaction is associated with opportunity for personal control and skill use; externally generated goals; variety; job security and income; physical security; supportive supervision; opportunity for interpersonal contact and social status. Professions that are repetitive and with limited opportunity for personal control are characterized by lower levels of job satisfaction. The experience of work – or lack of work – can be a key challenge to quality of life. A study from the University of Michigan found that people who are experiencing joy or contentment are able to think more broadly and creatively than people with negative emotions.
- Happier people miss work less often and receive more positive evaluations from bosses.
- Teams with sunny moods who encouraged each other earned higher profit and better customer-satisfaction ratings.
- According to a survey (November, 2013) by online career and recruitment solutions provider Monster Worldwide and GfK, an independent global market research company, over half of Indian workers (55 per cent) love or like their jobs a lot,

placing India at third position in international happiness ranking, behind Canada (64 per cent) and the Netherlands (57 per cent). The international survey that polled more than 8,000 workers in Canada, France, Germany, India, the Netherlands, the UK and the US, said nearly one in five (18 per cent) love their jobs so much that they would work for free. Moreover, only 5 per cent of Indian workers admit they actively dislike their jobs and no Indian worker said they hate their jobs — the lowest percentage of all countries surveyed. The survey further said money does not buy happiness as those with medium level pay packets are happier than those with huge salaries. Three in five (60 per cent) of those with middle incomes say they like or love their job as compared to just over half (52 per cent) of high earners. Lowest earners are the least content with less than half (47 per cent) saying they are happy at work. Meanwhile, on the other end of the happiness spectrum, US respondents with 15 per cent giving their jobs a big thumbs down, followed by UK (12 per cent), Germany (10 per cent), France (9 per cent), Canada and the Netherlands (both at 7 per cent).

Objectives of the pilot study

1. To measure overall happiness level of employees (Supervisor level) of Simplex Infrastructure Ltd.
2. To measure work related factors of happiness and identify their relative importance with respect to most to least supportive factors.
3. Identify areas (individual and organizational) that can enhance the employee happiness.

Research Model

The model of present study is based on new economic foundations work with the UK Government Office in the area of wellbeing. The Happiness at Work Survey is based on a model of wellbeing developed for the UK Government Office of Science's "Foresight Programme". The model suggests that happiness and wellbeing are influenced by, and influence, multiple interconnecting factors. It is by developing a better understanding of these interdependencies that individuals and organizations can identify the changes that will create a happier and more productive workplace. The model describes how an individual's external conditions – such as their income, employment status, housing and social context – act together with their personal resources – such as their health, resilience and optimism – to allow them to function well in their interactions with the world and therefore experience positive emotions .The model shows how different aspects of our well-being interlink and how improvements in one area, for example, emotions felt while performing job and management system influence other parts of an individual's experience.
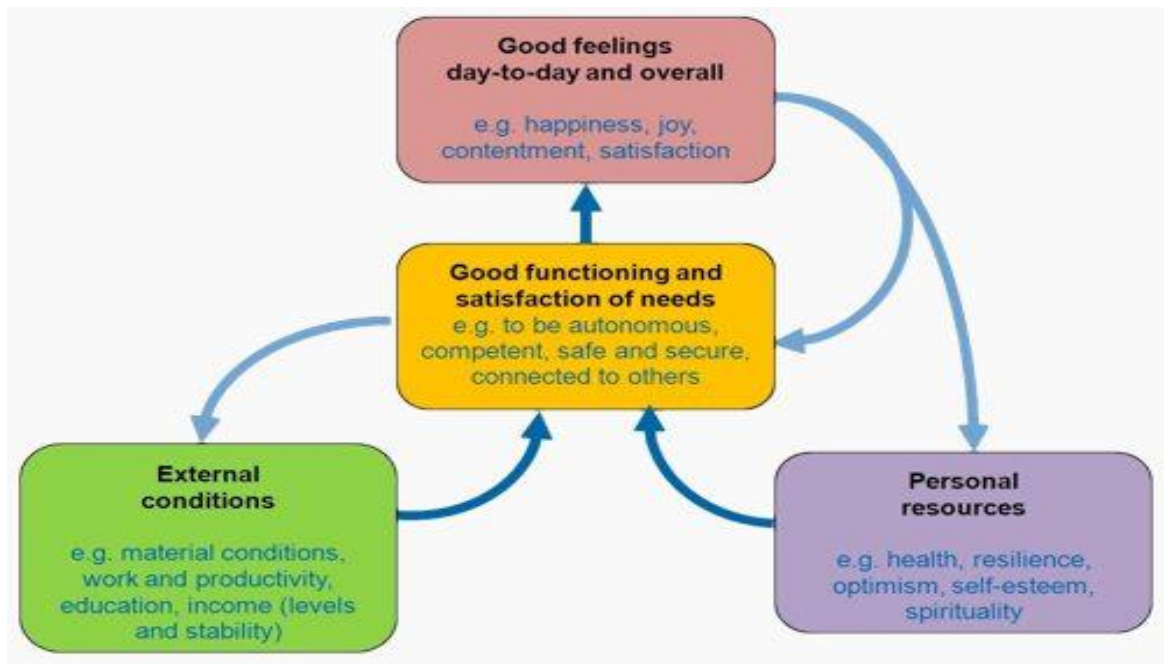
Source: www.nef.consulting.co.uk

Fig 2 : New Economic Foundations Happiness model

Research Methodology

A random sample of 25 male supervisors working at different project sites participated in this study. The demographic distribution varied in age (range from 24-47 years) and work experience (4 months -7 years).The participants work with different project teams. Valid NEF (New Economic Foundations) Questionnaire was administered using pencil-paper methodology. Responses to all questions, except those about demographic details are rated using seven point Likert type scale, for example; responses ranging from extremely happy to extremely unhappy. Questionnaires to all respondents were administered at one point in time to minimize situational effect on respondent feedback. Data has been gathered using an in-depth questionnaire which is intended to record responses as experienced at that moment. The NEF questionnaire explores four main work factors leading to happiness among employees at workplace, such as: Experiences at work, level of functioning at work, personal resources and organization system (main happiness factors) and each area has been probed further into other four important work related sub factors of happiness: -For example factor - Experience of Work is divided into sub factors- Positive/negative feelings, worthwhile work and engaging work. The objective of study was also to measure overall happiness score of employees (site supervisor) at group level. Therefore, the research method is descriptive and empirical in nature.

Result Summary

To arrive at individual happiness score, researcher has first calculated values for each four sub factors as given in the NEF model fig.1) Experience of Work 2) Functioning at Work 3) Organizational System 4) Personal Resources. Scores were calculated on the basis of cluster of questions exploring four sub factors within each main factor. For example   Factor

Functioning at Work factor is evaluated on the basis of responses given to questions about level of positive/ negative feelings generated at work i. e whether employee feels proud of the work one is doing, how much happiness and enjoyment one gets from work , to what extent work leads to stress and questions related to level of engagement i. e level of motivation experienced at work , so that employee feels absorbed in work and wants to do his best, feels ones work is worthwhile and satisfying.(As shown in table–1)Cumulative scores of responses to questions of each sub factor have been calculated using simple mean method. Further to arrive at main factor score we averaged the mean score by number of sub-factors. Example:

Mean Score of main factor Experience of work = positive feelings (6.3) + negative feelings (4.6) + Engagement (5.5) + worthwhile work (6.5) /4   = 5.7

Mean = sum of all elements/Number of elements

Exhibit 1. Individual Happiness Scores
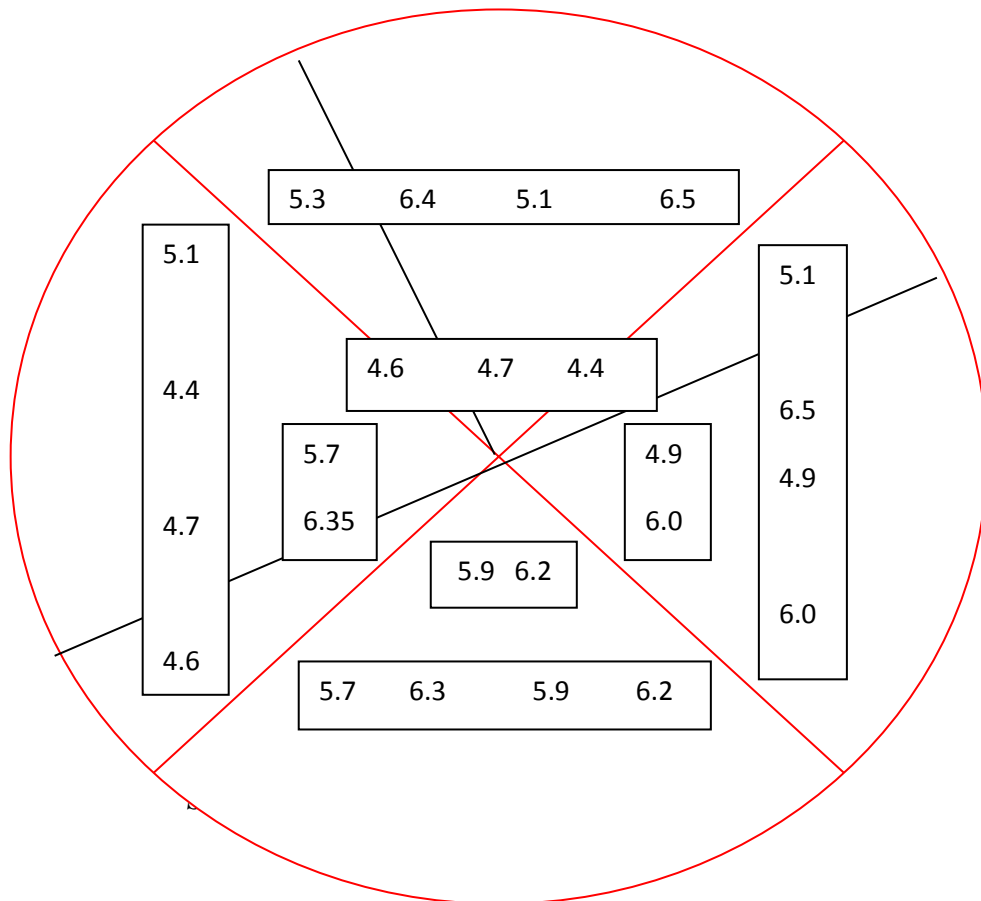
To further understand how each sub factor is impacting the happiness level of the respondents. The range of scores has been classified into very low, low, average, high and very high. Hence, if 1 be the minimum and 10 is the maximum score. The class interval = 10 − 1/7i.e 0.6 and find the median class interval to classify the scores.
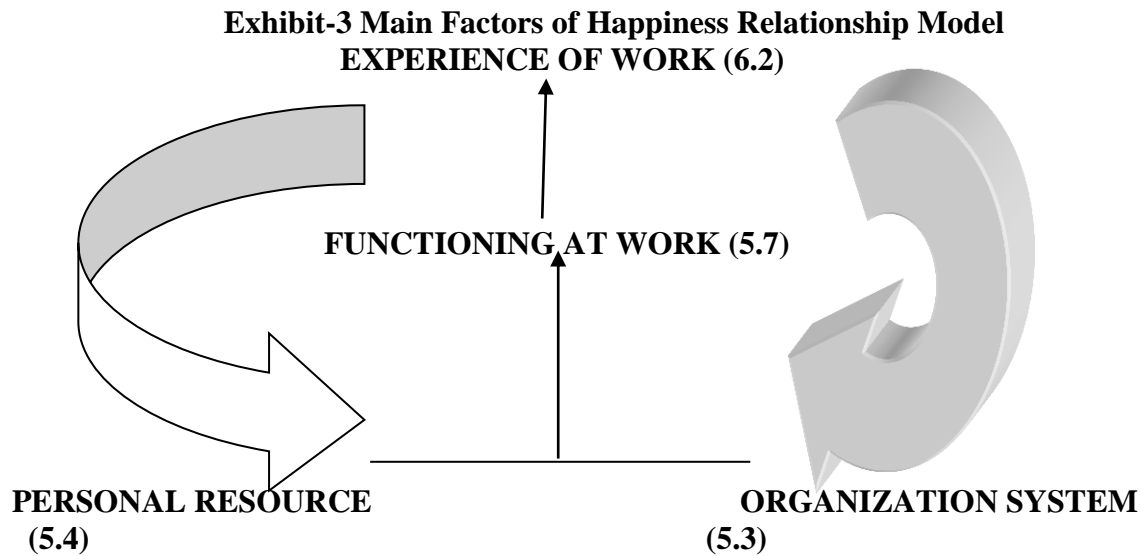
Individual happiness score Distribution

1	-	1.6
1.7	-	2.3
2.4	-	3.0--------------very low
3.1	-	3.7
3.8	-	4.4
4.5	-	5.1------------- low
5.2	**-**	**5.8------------- Median interval**
5.9	-	6.5
6.6	-	7.2
7.3	-	7.9------------ High
8.0	-	8.6
8.7	-	9.3
9.3	-	10------------ very High

The individual happiness score distribution as shown in Exhibit -1, reveals that40% of the respondents lie in low happiness scale, 16% in the median   and 44% of the group high level of happiness scores.

Exhibit-2			
Happiness depleting sub factors for SIMPLEX	Mean* Scores	**Happiness enhancing sub factors for SIMPLEX**	Mean* Scores
• Job design	3.9	Job importance	6.7
• Sense of Control	4.3	Job Engagement	6.5
• Work-life balance	4.9	Experience Positive feelings	7.26
• Confidence	5.0	Positive Relationships at work	6.2
• Happiness(personal)	5.1	Feeling of overall Progress	6.5
		Vitality	6.4

*(source: scores as per results shown in exhibit -1 and table-2)

Exhibit-3 Main Factors of Happiness Relationship Model
EXPERIENCE OF WORK (6.2)

FUNCTIONING AT WORK (5.7)

PERSONAL RESOURCE
  (5.4)

ORGANIZATION SYSTEM
  (5.3)

Source: Table -2, column A. Reference: nef Happiness survey model (2014)

The relationship model (exhibit-3) displays the mean scores of each of the four main factors impacting work happiness and interdependence of each factor in promoting overall employee wellbeing/happiness.

As may be inferred from the model, low scores of Organization System (5.3) are impacting the overall employee capacity to function at work. Score of **E**xperience of work factor being higher is supporting the personal resource factors. However, Functioning at Work factor and Organization System factor are mutually dependent. Therefore, interventions made in direction of improving constructive feedback, team management, job design, Trust (Organization System aspects) would eventually reflect in higher experience of Work scores.

Group enjoys high level of sense of organization pride and positive feelings at work (Experience of Work scores-6.2) among its employees and more so among employees with longer years of service. The coefficient of correlation between number of years of service and individual happiness scores is 0.49 which is positive , hence longer the tenure, creates more experience of happiness at work, however other factors like low trust, weak team management, relationships, difficulty in work life balance (issues related to personal resource and organization system factors) also need to addressed

Efforts made to enhance the employee's level of Experience of Work will further have positive impact on relationship and thereby individual happiness & confidence building. In spite of present economic climate and infrastructure industry facing low demand and growth problems simplex has shown a mean score of employee happiness, equal to 5.62 on a scale of ten, the reason may be its Goodwill and brand image, that people feel proud to work for the company and also because of regular training initiatives taken for all levels of employees

Suggestions

With right interventions at individual, team and organizational level the group happiness scores can be further improved.

Individual: Enhancing Confidence, Health, Work-life Balance, and Developing Strategies for coping work stress, hardship or trauma and engaging in happiness generating activities like expressing gratitude.

Team: Improving team member relationships, utilization of talents available in the group and constructive feedback to supervisors.

Organization: Improving job design issues like; workload and target balancing, creating newer two way communication processes, enhancing   managerial skills like - listening, coaching skills.

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Annexure

 a)Excel sheets –Table 1 (Individual main factor cumulative score)
 b) Table- 2(total sub factor score, Group happiness score)
 c) Meaning /Explanation of Main factors and their Sub factors as meant by researcher in questionnaire.

Annexure-c

Meaning of Main factors and their sub factors
1. **Experience at work**
Sub factors: 1a.positive feelings: experienced as one feels happy while doing work, work is enjoyable and brings organization pride.

1b.negative feelings experienced: due to stress, boredom and frustration at job.

1c.engagement: feeling of being absorbed and motivated at work.

1d.worthwile work: feel work satisfaction.

2. Personal Resources: It includes work life balance. How happy, healthy and resilient one is. It is the strength of ones relationships and physical health.

Sub factors 2a. Vitality – feeling energetic and sense of well being
    2b.Happpiness: being happy in personal lives
    2c.Confidence: Resilience to overcome problem that come up in life.
    2d. Work life balance: clash between responsibilities at work and home

3. Organization System: is about where we work and its impact.
Sub factors 3a. Job design- feeling towards pay, job security, goals
    3b. Management System- Feedback, level of trust, Team management
    3c.Work Environment-The surroundings and physical conditions that one works in and culture/values that support or hinder to do good work.
    3d.Social value- Feeling that work is connected to something socially meaningful.

4. Functioning at Work: is about what we are doing and how things are going to work. It encompasses being able to express ourselves with others as well as doing a good job.
Sub factors 4a.Self Expression- able to be creative at job, able to do what one is best at
    4b.Sense of Control- feeling of being in control over important elements of job
    4c.Sense of Progress- learning new skills
    4d. Work Relationship- Well Being at work and home. Having good friends and positive relations   with team members.