

Kelly Jubb

Happiness consultancy report

MACS325, “Happiness: investigating its causes and conditions”

Autumn session, 2011

Media and Cultural Studies, University of Wollongong

Subject coordinators: Chris Barker and Brian Martin

The happiness consultancy assignment had two parts. For details of the assignment see http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/MACS325_11outline.pdf

1. A report for an organisation, prepared by a team of students.

Bede Crasnich, Elise Harden, Kelly Jubb and Millie Robinson, working as a team, prepared a report for Access Community Group, in the form of a handout and a slide show. The handout and slide show are available separately.

2. Reflections on doing the consultancy, written separately by each member of the team as an individual task.

Kelly Jubb's reflections start on the next page.

This document is located at <http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/MACS325tops/>.

MACS325: Happiness: Investigating its Causes and Conditions

Happiness Consultancy- Reflection

Due: Wednesday 1st June, 2011

Completed by: student 3588671

**“Engagement and Happiness in the Workspace at
Access Community Group”**



In order to complete our happiness consultancy our group contacted Access Community Group. Access is a not-for-profit organisation with its head office in Railway St, Corrimal which is managed by a volunteer board of directors and currently employs about 26 staff. Access provides services to over 1500 clients throughout the Illawarra, Shoalhaven and Southern Highlands and was established in 1986 as a skill-share organisation, originally to provide training and support to the young people of Wollongong's Northern Suburbs and has now, in line with its vision, expanded, evolved and adapted to the needs of its communities with current programs focusing on:

- Local community advancement
- Skills development
- Disengaged people
- Youth and
- Environment

These programs are typically funded by local, state and federal governments and more information may be found at Access' webpage @ <http://www.acg.com.au/>. This group was chosen because we thought that a workplace that interacted with youth would be an interesting group of people to talk with in regards to our assignment of a happiness consultancy and also because we had a class member who had previously meet this group and we felt that this would aid in building rapport and comfort, themes that we thought important to complete our consultancy to a high standard.

Our group, after deciding that we would like to approach Access for our project assigned one member to contact Access via phone so that we could arrange a time to meet in person and find out more about their workplace and what went on there. Here we explained the idea of our project and consultancy and began to conduct our interviews with the manager and some other staff members present. Not all staff members could attend our interviews or complete our questionnaires at all times that we made contact with Access, however we managed to maintain consistent contact with at least five staff members throughout our project. We mainly gathered our information from interviews, questionnaires, observations and informal interviews that seemed to evolve as we meet Access each time and built on our relationship. We used the questions that were provided in earlier interviews and questionnaires to

explore in more detail themes that emerged and also after consulting with each other after every meeting with Access to interpret our findings. Our group communicated and worked together really well, being considerate of one another's views and ideas, and sincerely sought to understand the work space at Access, which made this an enjoyable experience.

Through our observations and interviews, (an example of typical questions explored can be found in Appendix A) we managed to get to know Access quite well and it became clear that there were mixed levels of interest in our project which reflected some of the conflicting personalities and approaches that emerged to be relevant to our project aims and to the theme that we picked in relation to happiness, (which I will write about later). Staff at Access are involved in a variety of roles ranging from program co-ordinators, team leaders, case managers, operations managers, leading green corps teams, to finance, HR and pay roll. Typical interactions with clients tend to be face-to-face and one-on-one with many clients being assigned to case managers with referral to participate in certain programs. Staff are normally recruited through a screening process that has been self designed by the team at Access, something which they take pride in. On a scale of 1-10, (10 being the highest) the average happiness score was 8.4, with the reasons being that staff members enjoyed whom they worked with, the programs that were run there and the assistance that these programs offered the youth that they served. It was reported to be a passionate, flexible, challenging working space with great support from colleagues and management and with great opportunities for development. People enjoyed working in the community sector and having the opportunity to mix with local businesses and organisations. Although generally staff were extremely happy with the workplace environment there were reports of some "negativity from others" and a sense of stress at not being able to provide clients with the best care possible due to lack of resources. Statistical reporting that relied on outcomes of employment status caused strain for staff members who felt that positive outcomes were also reflected in the clients improving in social skills and finding more secure and safe housing. This statistical reporting also limited funding that was available for programs. The building at Access has limited natural light and is cold and reported by some to be "cluttered" and this caused discomfort- some thought that it could be more user friendly and structured to be a space more suited to youth, whom might want to interact there. Although generally the staff felt that they were supported by management and staff up the hierarchy, it was felt that the support from staff was not

always present during busier moments. The staff at Access felt that they were engaged with the local community, which provided support for their programs, through various events and activities such as Spring into Corrimal, which they host yearly in September, however that this could be improved. Although marketing strategies were in place they seemed to be at a stand-still due to pressing client needs and although staff were aware that applying more focus to marketing would increase the chances of business partnerships and funding sources they felt the client programs may suffer due to limits in time and resources.

Due to above mentioned information obtained from our interviews and observations at Access our group decided on the theme of engagement and how this related to happiness- particularly in the work place, as an approach in making recommendations for the staff members at Access. Engagement may be defined as a contextual, cognitive and behavioural aspect to well-being typically measured by factors such as concentration, involvement and enjoyment during the activity, (Vella-Brodrick, Park & Peterson, 2009). Engagement may also be expressed as empowerment pertaining to a role, or giving something ones "all", Prakash Pati & Kumar, (2010). Csikszentmihalyi simply refers to it as "flow", (2007). Engagement is though to be related to and influenced by cognition, self-efficacy, organisation and support from others, (Prewash Pati & Kumar, 2010) and exists in a symbiotic relationship with happiness, whereby increases in one will positively effect the other, such as the absorption contained within engagement contributing to increased creativity and concentration, which also correlate with happiness, (Saks, 2006). Engagement within the work place has become a hot topic in management, with an engaged employee being one who is fully involved in and enthusiastic about their work, with positive and/or negative emotional attachment being measures of ones engagement with the work role and the work place. An engaged employee feels a strong emotional bond to the company that they are employed with and therefore is more involved in what they can both take and give to the experience, (Konrad, 2006). With this theme in mind in conjunction with the information obtained about the work space at Access we developed three main recommendations that we thought may enhance happiness levels, for both staff and clients:

1. Access enhances the clients they serve via increases in positive life skills- not just via increases in employment status. We felt that if outcomes could be communicated in ways that acknowledged the improved social skills that youth

gain from these programs the holistic approach that Access offers in their services could be more widely recognised and appreciated in the local community. We suggested that client case studies feature on the website, in newspaper articles or on community radio and that youth be approached with the idea that they share their stories (for example at Spring into Corrimal) relating their experienced benefits of the programs on offer.

2. With resources focused mainly on benefiting the youth and clients of Access, marketing strategies had come to a stand still. Rebranding and repackaging Access in new and creative ways may make it more sellable and promote interest from local business' and willing volunteers. It also seeks to refresh and promote more confidently Access' image and services. We suggested that the website could be updated to be more interactive and structured to reinforce the holistic ethos of Access. Partnerships could be formed with other non-profit organisations who could support Access in their goals and a marketing student could offer their skills via an internship that could be organised via the University of Wollongong.
3. The current workspace at Access could be greatly improved to encourage an engaging and happy workplace. A focus on creating a more comfortable work space may improve employee mentality, productivity and engagement levels. We suggested that to improve temperature levels an efficient air conditioner could be installed. To encourage a more productive and versatile workplace existing cubicles could be removed or rearranged to lessen obstructions, barriers and segmentation and to ensure minimal clutter "clean-up-hours" (or days) could be organised. It is also an option that the current premises be purchased and renovated, something which the team has been considering.

We also made some general recommendations regarding the skills of engagement and the benefits of engagement, (which can be found in our power point presentation) as an attempt to address some of the personality differences that seemed to be affecting the happiness levels in the workplace, eg: anonymous report of "negativity" and observed disinterest. Prakash Pati & Kumar, (2010) propose that variations in engagement are due to individual difference and that these individual differences do not have to necessarily get in the way of happiness.

We did not really encounter any difficulties with the team at Access, sometimes it took a few attempts to find a day that suited everybody to meet, which did cause some slight stress, however I think this was mainly due to other uni demands with assessments for all subjects getting closer to being due, rather than any major conflict- it is fairly natural to be busy. Access seemed genuinely interested in our project and was happy to talk with us about a variety of different things that were, at times quite personal and intimate, so I really appreciated that and did not take that for granted. The team at Access were extremely interested in our recommendations and loved that we had put in time and effort to assess their workspace and offer our thoughts. Feedback forms, (which can be found in our group assignment) revealed enthusiasm about the possible changes they could implement to make this a more happy and productive workplace and they said that it was great to have someone come into their workspace and reflect back to them information that they recognised as existing in their space with it being clear to them that we had thought in depth about it and cared. The only thing that they didn't like was that all staff members were not there to see it ! I felt sincerely happy that our report was welcomed and that these people felt that we had offered them something of value.

I think what I enjoyed most about this project was the level of intimacy and openness that we were able to encounter- both in our uni team and in the interactions with Access, I really revealed in and am grateful for that and am glad that I was part of such an experience. In fact, meeting with Access may continue into the future- they want us back there to help with a "Youth Engagement Program" !

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Appendix A: Interviews and Questionnaires

Happiness: Investigating its Causes and Conditions

- Age
- What does Access do?
- How long have you worked in or participated in Access ?
- Please describe what you do here
- What is a typical interaction between staff and clients ?
- How are staff recruited ?
- On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest) how would you rate your level of happiness when you are here at Access ?
- Why have you rated your happiness at this level ?
- What do you most enjoy doing here and/or what is the best thing about being here ?
- What do you least enjoy doing here and/or what is the worst thing about being here ?
- What would make you happier here and/or what could you do to improve things around here ?
- Do you feel that the local Corrimal Business community is aware of Access ?
Do you think Access is supported/ engaged with the local Business community? How would better engagement improve the way in which Access interacts with it's clients ?

Appendix B: Information sheet and Consent Forms

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

Information Sheet

for participants in the research project

Happiness: causes and conditions

being conducted by **Bede Crasnich, Elise Harden, Kelly Jubb and Millie Robinson** of the Media and Cultural Studies Program

Your participation is sought in a research project being undertaken by students of the University of Wollongong under the supervision of Professor Brian Martin and Associate Professor Chris Barker.

The project involves carrying out an assessment of the causes and conditions of happiness within an organization or amongst a community group and making recommendations as to how happiness of the group members could be increased. Students will write up a report of the project's methods and findings that will be made available to you.

It has been agreed with **Larissa Daniel of Access Community Group** that the project will involve:

Researching and giving a recommendations report on how to improve aspects of Access community groups' happiness levels.

The project will involve carrying out semi-structured interviews, or conversations, with consenting adult participants lasting approximately 30 minutes. You will be asked questions such as "What do you most enjoy doing here?" and "What would make you happier here?"

Your participation in this research is voluntary; you are free to decline to participate and you are free to withdraw from the research at any time. Your refusal to participate or withdrawal of consent will not affect your relationship with the University of Wollongong in any way. If you would like to discuss this research further please contact A/Prof Chris Barker on (02) 4221 3671 or Prof Brian Martin on (02) 4221 3763. If you have any enquiries regarding the ethical conduct of the research please contact the Secretary of the University of Wollongong Human Research Ethics Committee on (02) 4221 4457.