

Employee Well-Being in Higher Education – ‘GNH of Business’ in Hungarian

Andrea Bencsik, University of Pannonia, Hungary
Dora G. Kocsis, Freelancer, Hungary

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Abstract

The quantification of organisational happiness and wellbeing is a major challenge, not only in for-profit organisations, but also in educational institutions. A happy teacher is more motivated and committed to his/her teaching and learning activities. In the literature, research findings are mainly concerned with the wellbeing of students and learners, while the study of teachers remains in the background. The aim of the present research is to use a less known and less applied measurement method to identify the most important characteristics that most influence teachers' and professors' feelings of wellbeing. The study was carried out among institutions of economic higher education in a small country in Central and Eastern Europe. We sought a solution that could provide a holistic picture of the satisfaction and sense of wellbeing of teachers and professors working in the institution. The quantitative study involved 239 faculty members and 14 managers who completed questionnaires according to the 'GNH of Business' methodology developed in Bhutan. Following the logic of the method, 29 indicators were used to rate wellbeing based on individual satisfaction in 5 domains, followed by an organisational happiness index. The results show that organizational happiness is most influenced by non-monetary benefits in the area of quality of life, and trust is the most influencing factor within the psychological wellbeing indicator. On the side of organizational conditions, it is mainly managerial thinking and decision making that can raise the value of the organizational happiness index through the indicators of cultural and ecological diversity.

Keywords: Higher Education, Well-Being, GNH of Business, Trust

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Introduction

In recent decades, GDP has come under increasing criticism as a measure of the living standards of a country's population. Most of these criticisms have pointed out that many of the factors that characterise human well-being cannot be described by GDP indicators. This fact has prompted a reflection that focuses on how to better capture the so-called soft elements in addition to quantifiable factors. The result of this research is a set of indicators that more or less regularly measure the happiness and satisfaction of people and societies in different parts of the world. All of these indicators have also come in for a lot of criticism. These problems have led to the need to identify parameters that holistically express the quality of human well-being.

In addition to the research and recommendations of the past decades, there is a measurement system based on the Buddhist religion in Asian countries, known as GNH (Gross National Happiness). The GNH takes a holistic approach to measuring people's happiness and well-being. In our research, we aimed to find out whether the GNH logic can be applied in domestic contexts and what its version developed for organisational/business contexts shows. In a first phase, we tested the GNH in higher education in economics, targeting employees and managers of all higher education institutions involved in business education. The research used questionnaires developed by Bhutanese translated into English. Our research questions were:

- Q1: Is the original method developed for measuring GNH adaptable to domestic conditions without changes?
- Q2: What conclusion can be drawn from the results of the areas covered with regard to the strengths and weaknesses of higher education in business?

Theoretical Background

In order to move from GDP to the applicability of the GNH logic, it is necessary to go back to basics, by which I mean a brief overview of the shortcomings of GDP, followed by an outline of the basic idea of Buddhist economics as a prerequisite for the design of a system for measuring happiness. Since our study was conducted in the context of domestic higher education, we will give a brief overview of the current situation.

Gaps in GDP

GDP as a measure of the quality of social life has come under increasing criticism since the 1950s. The arguments put forward are summarised below (van den Bergh & Antal, 2014):

- GDP is not a measure of the benefits of market-related economic activities, but merely an estimate of costs.
- The positive correlation between GDP growth and perceived progress does not imply that GDP is an ideal measure of social welfare.
- The increase in GDP per capita and the associated increase in material consumption cannot compensate for the lack of basic needs.
- Between 1950 and 1970, GDP grew steadily in most Western countries, but social welfare stagnated and sometimes even turned negative.
- A clear shortcoming of GDP is that it does not capture the distribution of income, but only average income.
- GDP does not cover informal economic activities such as voluntary work, childcare or growing crops for own use.

- It is considered a serious shortcoming that the damage caused by pollution is not covered by GDP (van den Bergh & Antal, 2014).

In order to overcome the problems mentioned above, the development of the indicators already mentioned in the introduction has been prioritised.

Buddhist Economics

In his book "The Small is Beautiful" (2014), Schumacher contrasts his view of the work of modern and Buddhist economics.

According to the logic of modern economics, success is nothing more than the accumulation of wealth. The Buddhist view is the exact opposite, as it puts the human being first. Payutto (1994), in the work of a Buddhist monk, demonstrated the importance of the principles of moderation, contentment and non-dissipation, which are closely linked to economics and are really far removed from the modern consumption-oriented economy. Daniels (2007) emphasises sustainability, which is in line with the teachings of Buddhism, as moderation is considered important. According to Zsolnai (2011), the strategy of the Buddhist economy is built around the following 5 main components: minimizing suffering, simplifying desires, practicing non-discipline, sincere care and generosity.

GNH's calculation method allows for the assessment of both objective and subjective parameters, and its thinking is based on happiness as the result of the sum of measurable elements.

The Happiness

Aristotle used the term "eudaimonia", which is often mistranslated as happiness. In contrast to happiness, eudaimonia did not mean a variable state, but 'happiness' for the whole of life, the successful conduct of life, the good life (Warburton, 2005).

The three related concepts used in the study are satisfaction, happiness and well-being. All three concepts are difficult to define and there is no agreed definition for any of them, most of them being defined in terms of each other. Based on the literature approaches reviewed, their meanings are used in our study as follows.

Three levels of happiness can be identified. The first is pleasure, "hedonistic happiness", the level of *satisfaction*. The second is *well-being*, which refers to engagement and the release of feelings while completing a task or goal. This high level of experience is referred to as "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The third level corresponds to Aristotle's "eudemonia" (Irwin, 2019). This level of *happiness* is characterised by inner harmony, purpose in life, personal growth, constructive relationships, autonomy, and a general sense of psychological, physical and natural balance (Kopp & Pikó, 2006).

A GNH

The GNH indicator developed and used in the Kingdom of Bhutan is a good response to the criticisms of the soft indicators and a way to overcome their shortcomings. The indicator was first mentioned in the 1970s by the fourth King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck. According to him, the aim of a government should not be to increase the value of GDP, but

rather to increase the happiness of the country. The GNH takes a holistic approach to measuring people's happiness and well-being. It is composed of four pillars (Good Governance, Strengthening and Promoting Culture, Environment, Sustainable and Equitable Social and Economic Development), which can be further broken down into 9 areas. These are:

- Psychological well-being
- Health
- Time use
- Education
- Cultural diversity and resilience
- Community vitality
- Good governance
- Ecological diversity and resilience
- Quality of life

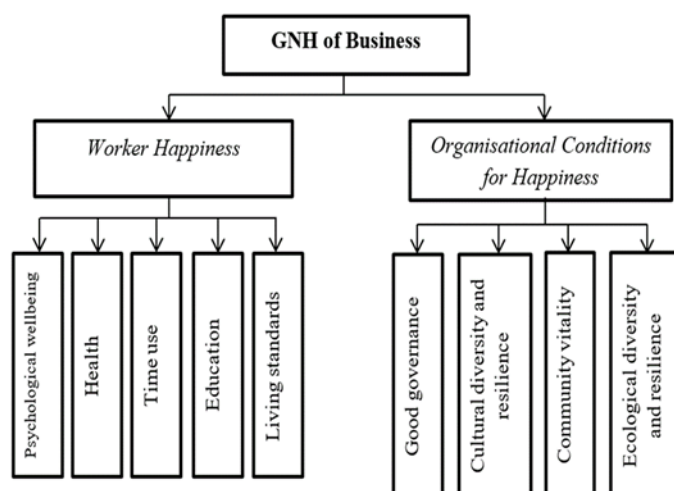
The 9 domains of the GNH are further divided into 33 measurable parameters, which are rated through standard questionnaire questions. Using this method, the contribution to overall national happiness can be identified at 3 levels:

- political/governmental, municipal,
- business and
- at individual level.

The original logic was developed at the societal level, but in recent years a way of calculating this at the organisational/business level has been developed and is what we have aimed to do in our research (Zangmo, et al, 2017). In both cases, we arrive at the calculation of the happiness index through the measurement of individual human happiness.

The GNH of Business (GNH of Business)

The business application was developed based on the 9 domains of the GNH, which were divided into 2 groups according to the assessment domains (see Figure 1): employee happiness and organizational conditions of happiness (Zangmo, et al, 2017).



Source: Zangmo, et al., 2017

Figure 1. GNH's business framework

Employee happiness represents employee satisfaction and happiness in each area of GNH. Through the organisational conditions of happiness, we obtain information about organisational behaviour and how this contributes to employee well-being and happiness (Zangmo, et al, 2017). All the areas presented here can be further broken down into indicators, which will be measured through questionnaire research.

No research has been found on the application of GNH to business (given its novelty and experimental methodology). Thus, the research we conducted can be considered as a pilot study.

Briefly About Higher Education in Hungary

Over the past 10 years, the situation in higher education has changed radically. The priorities of tasks, the means made available (funding), the legal conditions, the way in which the maintenance authorities manage and the instruments they use have all changed. The specialised structure has changed and all the institutions have become universities.

The changing expectations of teachers, the changing quality of the student population, and the struggle for talent are new challenges that are not attractive to young graduate students. Low salaries, lack of appreciation, increasing workloads, restrictions on research freedom and the exodus of young people are causing serious difficulties for university leaders. Happiness research on higher education is rare, and satisfaction surveys focus mainly on students. International studies have also mostly investigated student satisfaction. In many respects, the results of research on teacher satisfaction raise similar issues to those of the national studies.

In our view, the development of an appropriate measurement logic can provide a broader framework for the value transfer role of higher education. This framework is the measurement of organisational happiness, for the quantification of which we use the GNH philosophy presented above.

Material and Method

The research used the Hungarian version of the original questionnaires developed in Bhutan (GNH of Business), retaining all domains, indicators and questions for professional fidelity. In a few cases, corrections were necessary due to Western terminology, clarity or professional considerations (working hours [40 hours in our case instead of the original 48], wages [expressed in HUF instead of Bhutanese currency], spirituality [meditation instead of contemplation], scholarships [to raise opportunities in the home country]). Overall, the results of the questionnaire survey were calculated at the organisational level and can be interpreted as an indicator of organisational happiness. As individuals were surveyed, the calculations are first valid for individuals (employee happiness index) and then, based on the calculation method, the results can be interpreted at organisational level using the data from the questionnaires (rating the provision of organisational conditions) completed by managers.

Calculation of GNH at Business Level

The overall analysis methodology consists of three steps:

1. Defining and applying a compliance threshold (Employee happiness was assessed using 29 indicators, measuring 114 variables across five areas of the GNH.) Similarly, 20 indicators of organisational conditions with 102 variable measures were rated in 4 GNH domains. This step provides an opportunity to separate disadvantaged (unhappy) and non-disadvantaged (happy) workers based on the compliance threshold. Similarly, the adequacy threshold values in the areas of organisational conditions were examined for all 20 indicators. The summary of indicators and the application of adequacy thresholds are also used to assess organisational conditions and employee happiness.
2. Application of weights. (Workers scored on the basis of the compliance threshold - 0 and 1 values - are multiplied by the weights.) Two weights were used, the area weight and the indicator weight. The area weight was derived by dividing the total possible score (100) by employee happiness and organizational conditions. Thus, the weight for each of the areas used to assess employees is 20 (100/5), where 5 is the number of areas involved. In the assessment of organisational happiness, each of the four categories used to assess organisational conditions was given a weight of 25 (100/4), where 4 is the number of domains involved.
3. Summation and scoring (The value of the two previously calculated components was calculated by simple summation.) The value of the organisational happiness index is the weighted sum of the two components with equal proportions.

The aim of ensuring employee happiness is to achieve and maintain employee well-being. Employee happiness is also associated with improved productivity and investors nowadays see well-being and happiness as leading performance indicators.

For employee happiness, each employee's score on indicator i can be calculated using formula (1) below.

To calculate the business value, the employee happiness score is obtained by summing the weighted indicator scores for all employees and dividing by the number of all employees in the study (n).

A similar method is used to calculate organisational conditions (2), except that the calculation of average scores is not required, as indicators can usually be rated by a manager.

$$Whap = \sum_{i=1}^n wi xi \quad (1)$$

$$O =_{hap} \sum_{i=1}^n wi xi \quad (2)$$

where,

O_{hap} - the organisational happiness score

$Whap$ - employee happiness score

n - number of indicators

i - the i -th indicator

wi - *weight* of the i -th indicator

xi - value of the i -th indicator

The business happiness index is calculated as a weighted sum of employee happiness and organisational conditions. A 50:50% ratio is calculated for both components. The correlation used to calculate the business value:

$$H = 0.5 \times W_{hap} + (0.5 \times O)_{hap} \quad (3)$$

Authentication/Certification

Based on the calculated values, the business is classified as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories and indicators of organisational happiness

Score	Certification	Comment
≤ 40%	below average	requires immediate intervention
40-59.9%	average	intervention is needed in certain areas
60-79.9%	good	improving performance in certain border areas
Above 80%	very good	GNH certificate, both values must reach 60%

Source: Zangmo, Wangdi, & Phuntsho (2018) *GNH Certification*, Centre for Bhutan Studies & GNH

An overview of each area and an understanding of their impact on business operations will help you to formulate a development strategy, assess risk and plan for opportunities.

Conduct Research

The Sample

The survey was carried out in 2021-22 in the faculties of economics and in institutions of higher education in Hungary (61 faculties/institutes). The questionnaires were sent to the deans of the educational institutions online, with the request to forward them to the employees and to be filled in by them. The response rate was very low and 239 employee questionnaires (around 7%) and 14 manager questionnaires (around 23%) were collected.

Employee Happiness Survey

The calculation followed the same logic as the 3 steps described above. Then, the percentage of the compliance thresholds in each area was determined, i.e. the extent to which the employees in the study met the predefined compliance threshold. The weighted values for each area can be calculated separately and summed to give the employee happiness score in %. The 29 indicators of the questionnaire questions, the weights and the calculated values are shown in Table 2 (n=239).

Table 2. GNH areas, indicators and their weights with calculated values

Weight of area		Weighted value
Psychological well-being	20%	7.88
Health	20%	7.12
Time use	20%	9.17
Education	20%	6.95
Quality of life	20%	1.56
Employee happiness Σ		32.68

Source: own editing

The results of the table show relatively low but balanced scores in each area, with the exception of the area of living standards, where the rating is significantly lower than in the other areas.

Measuring Organisational Conditions

The picture of organisational happiness conditions reflects business behaviour and phenomena related to the social well-being of employees. The compliance thresholds are based on standards previously developed in Bhutan (Ura et al., 2015).

The areas and indicators of organisational conditions, their weights and the results of the survey are summarised in Table 3 (n=14).

Table 3. Weighted values of organisational conditions

Category	Category weight	Weighted value
Good governance	25%	21.72
Cultural diversity	25%	11.89
Community vitality	25%	16.93
Ecological diversity	25%	7.83
<i>Organisational conditions for happiness</i> Σ		58.37

Source: own editing

The rating for organisational conditions is significantly higher, almost double (58.37%) the score for employee happiness.

Based on the aggregated results, the happiness index is representative of the economic education in higher education in Hungary, with a weighting of 50-50%:

$$H = 0.5 \times 32.68 + 0.5 \times 58.37 = 16.34 + 29.19 = 45.53\% \quad (4)$$

The score obtained is close to the lower end of the average category, as shown in the evaluation Table 4, which means that intervention is needed in some areas. The critical areas can be seen from the aggregate area scores, but a deeper analysis of the differences within areas reveals further gaps.

Table 4. Result value category

Score	Certification	Comment
$\leq 40\%$	below average	requires immediate intervention
40-59.9%	average	intervention is needed in certain areas
60-79.9%	good	improving performance in certain border areas
Above 80%	very good	GNH certificate, both values must reach 60%

Source: own editing

Discussion

Using the Bhutanese measurement system, it was possible to quantify the value of the happiness index in 9 domains. The results of the research provide a starting point for assessing how colleagues in Hungarian higher education in economics feel, how satisfied and happy they are at work, while working, and to what extent the conditions provided by the workplace, management decisions and measures contribute to this.

Q1:

With the exception of some minimal wording (for reasons of clarity or technical considerations) or corrections to the measurement level, the indicators used in the questionnaires are suitable for measurement and rating under domestic conditions. *We consider this to be the most important result of the research, which confirms that the original objective has been met.*

Q2:

The analysis suggests that each of the employment areas needs more thought and attention, as they account for approximately one third of the 20% weights. There are small variations, but almost equal proportions of deficiencies, with the exception of one area, which is rated '*Quality of Life*'. Here they scored very low, which has long been a neuralgic point in higher education.

Indicators that show problems that can be linked to pay, other benefits, recognition. The shortcomings in the area of '*Psychological well-being*' also point to internationally confirmed problems. Overall job satisfaction shows mixed results worldwide, but employees reported higher levels of satisfaction with working conditions and facilities in the domestic context. Problems related to negative/positive emotions at work (anger, sadness, frustration, disappointment, frustration/forgiveness, pride, joy) are difficult to compare with previous research, as little information on this was found in the literature on higher education. One indicator of positive emotions was examined in an international comparative study of happiness in three countries, the results of which show that there is a downward trend in positive emotions due to increasing stress loads (Mark & Smith, 2012). The results of the present study show the existence of trust as a positive. Positive perceptions of organisational trust enhance employee performance, cooperation and the successful functioning of the organisation as a whole, indicating the presence of an ethical environment and employee engagement. As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, these soft factors are of particular importance in determining the final outcome. This is confirmed by another international study which found that organisational commitment and increased productivity are related to happiness (Dehaghi, 2012). In the area of "*Health*", stress is the main cause of unhappiness - which is related to the negative emotions reported in the previous area. In the area of '*Time use*', unhappiness is felt in the case of work schedules (often due to unpredictable and unusual tasks to be performed at unusual times). Flexible working hours is rated positively in the teaching circle, but the ratings of the non-teaching circle do not indicate clear satisfaction. In the area of "*Training*", the opportunities for development and training were rated very low, which in the light of the emphasis on staff's need to learn is a positive factor, but the lack of opportunities and funding for them is detrimental to the feeling of happiness. At the same time, scholarship opportunities were rated extremely highly.

In terms of organisational conditions, it is even more difficult to make comparisons with previous research because of the lack of studies. In our own research, the fact that the highest

scores were given in the area of "*Good Governance*" should be seen as a very positive fact. This is basically the result of the alignment of employment, workplace policies and regulations, turnover and income levels. The results of our research show that women and the younger generation are more dissatisfied, have less attention, fewer opportunities for advancement and leadership, and feel underpaid, which can be a major contributor to quitting.

The "*Community Vitality*" area also scored quite high, with community giving rated as the weakest indicator. Employees rarely volunteer, with the exception of activities related to promoting education. The two areas significantly under-scored are "*Cultural diversity*" and "*Ecological diversity*". The gaps in both areas are related to indicators on donations, promotion of national and cultural values and volunteering. In addition, there are serious problems in the area of the environment, insufficient attention to the release of harmful substances and their management, and shortcomings in donations/support in this area are also highlighted.

Conclusions

The research objective has been achieved, proving that the Bhutanese logic, the calculation method based on the developed value measurement questionnaire, can be well adapted to the domestic conditions and provides informative results that can be immediately used in everyday decisions for all interested parties, both professional and non-professional. In the research, we surveyed employees working in the economics faculties of Hungarian higher education institutions, aiming to identify the strengths and weaknesses of this segment of higher education, which can be used to improve employee happiness and its organisational conditions, and as a result to raise the quality of education and student satisfaction. In addition to the overall picture, it is also possible to compare individual institutions, if required, and by comparing the overall picture, managers of individual institutions can obtain immediately useful information. This will allow the development strategy to be formulated, risks to be assessed and measures to take advantage of opportunities to be planned more accurately.

The results confirmed a long-standing finding that there are serious gaps in higher education in terms of salaries, benefits and other recognition, and that there are serious gaps in the attention paid to voluntary activity outside education and to environmental protection. In Hungarian higher education institutions, insufficient attention is paid to issues such as stress and skills development. The results show that managers fail to recognise problems such as the pay gap between senior lecturers and newcomers, the gender pay and recognition gap, the chances of getting into management positions, and the need to empower young people to reduce the risk of losing academic talent. There is evidence of a significant relationship between organisational commitment and happiness, especially between happiness, effectiveness and organisational commitment (Dehaghi, 2012).

A limitation of the research is that, while all institutions in the field of economics launch questionnaire surveys, increasingly relying on the responses and supportive behaviour of staff from peer institutions, the helpfulness of managers (in forwarding questionnaires and motivating staff) varied widely, but in many cases could not be explicitly assessed as supportive. Thus, the responses are not representative, but the results obtained give a realistic picture of the institutions surveyed. This is confirmed by the almost identical ratings given by respondents from each institution in the areas covered.

Our future research will aim to apply the method to the business sector, which will allow us to determine the level of happiness of domestic businesses, thus allowing for comparisons between the organisations studied.

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