

Effects of Happy Workplace Program in Companies of Thai Garment Industry

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Abstract

This quasi-experimental research on the effect of happy workplace program (HWP) in Thai garment industry companies was aimed to study the changes among employees in regard to work skills, life skills, health behaviors and workplace promoting happiness factors. Two hundred and forty-one samples purposely selected from 3 sampled companies. Data were collected through a set of questionnaire and the happy workplace index checklist. Data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics and paired t -test. The results showed that the end of the program, the significant higher levels of work skills, life skills, health behaviors and workplace promoting happiness factors were found compared to before the program in all 3 companies. Thus, this program can be utilized in other similar industrial companies.

Keywords: Work Skills, Life Skills, Health Behaviors, Happy Workplace Program

Introduction

In Thailand, there were more than 36 million peoples in the working-age group, 15-60 years old, among this group about 16.9 million were working in the private industrial and service companies (National Statistical Office, 2015). Most of these people were facing with the adjustment problems of familiar migrated to live in slam areas and working with coworkers in companies. Due to the long period of time that they have to work in each day with many coworkers, happiness level of each worker was found to be lower than the average level, calculated from the total daily activities (Harvard Business Review, 2012).

Thai garment industry has been classified as the labor-intensive industry. There were more than 1.05 million workers being hired in 4,385 companies (Thai Garment Industry Development Foundation, 2015). These workplaces are the centers where the huge number of working-age group, spend a long hour each day at these places. Promoting health and happiness of workers has been proved as the effective strategy leading to high organizational productivity, workers' happiness and creativity in producing high quality job performance and participating in developing inspirations and other reinforcements for their coworkers and every level personnel in the organization (Srivastava & Kanpur, 2014).

According to the previous researches, there was a relationship between job satisfaction and happiness (Krause, 2014), the employees who had job satisfaction likely to produce high productivity (Wesarat, Sharif, & Majid, 2015; Zelenski, Murphy, & Jenkins, 2008). The factors related to the increased happiness and productivity were found to be the individual factors (Graham, Zhou, & Zhang, 2017; Demir, Özen, Doğan, Bilyk, & Tyrell, 2011; Goldgruber & Ahrens, 2010; Olsen & Dahl, 2010) in regard to perceives, work skills, life skills, health behaviors, working conditions, job characteristics, and health, and the organizational factors (Kaeodumkoeng & Junhasobhaga, 2017; Montano, Hoven, & Siegrist, 2014; Biggio & Cortese, 2013; Nielson, 2013) in regard to management system,

organizational climate, organizational environment, process and activity of happiness promotion in the organization.

The World Health Organization developed the guideline for organizational development emphasizing on providing the system for physical and mental prevention, promotion, and supporting employees' happiness with the aim to help employee to be healthy. Four important factors (Burton, 2010) were recommended to be developed; 1) the physical work environment; 2) psychosocial work environment; 3) personal health resources in the workplace; 4) enterprise community involvement. The Healthy Organization Promotion Section, Thai Health Promotion Foundation (TPF) has utilized and modified the processes for implementing happy workplace program (HWP) (Kaeodumkoeng & Junhasobhaga, 2015), five developmental processes as follows: 1) happy workplace vision; 2) workplace diagnosis; 3) HWP design; 4) HWP implementation; and 5) learn & share. Later, the promoting happy workplace model project of Thai Garment Industry Development Foundation has used those in carrying out the project.

As the outcomes evaluation, the concept of the company health check (Muylaert, Beeck, & Broek, 2007) had been applied in developing the happy workplace index (Thummakul, Kaeodumkoeng, Prasertsin, Sinjindawong, & Makmee, 2012) which is the instrument that can be used for checking and reflecting the workplace promoting happiness factors; 1) management: benefits, welfare system, admiration, career progress, etc.; 2) atmosphere & environment: role model, leadership, relationship, environment, etc.; 3) process: staffs, communication channels, learning management, etc.; 4) health: reduction of risk behaviors (smoking & drinking), exercise, safety, etc.; and 5) result: production, engagement, etc. The happy workplace index composed of 37 sup-indices and it has been used by many organizations.

However, for the previous studies, they still lack of the conclusions about the results of using happy workplace processes in Thai garment industrial workplaces that were carried out for six months. Therefore, this study was aimed to investigate the results of the happy workplace program in order to make the results be beneficial for developing the processes accomplished toward the goal set.

Methods

A quasi-experimental research, pretest-posttest three groups design was employed in 3 sampled companies, as the following processes:

Population and Sample

This study was carried out in the companies that participated in the promoting happy workplace model project of Thai Garment Industry Development Foundation. The research activities were implemented during July to December, 2016, in 10 companies, composing of 2,357 employees (Thai Garment Industry Development Foundation, 2015).

Purposive selection was used for selecting the sampled companies, with the following inclusion criteria: 1) the companies that produce similar type of products and services; 2) middle size company (51-200 employees); and 3) located in Bangkok Metropolitan Region. Three sampled companies were selected.

Two hundred and forty-one employees were selected using purposive sampling. The following criteria were used: 1) both male and female employees who had higher than 6-month-working experiences in the selected companies; 2) working at the companies participated in the promoting happy workplace model of the project; and 3) willing to participate in the program.

The research instruments were as follows:

1. Happy workplace program (HWP). There were 5 steps of implementing: 1) setting happy workplace vision which includes defining the meaning of a happy workplace, writing a

declaration, and making a picture of happy workplace; 2) workplace diagnosis: checking health status of the organization; 3) happy workplace program design: naming the program title, setting program objectives, time duration, evaluation methods; 4) happy workplace program implementation: program kick-off, implementing the plan, getting recommendations; and 5) learn & share: visit educational observation, academic meeting and reporting.

2. Questionnaire, composing of 4 parts:

Part 1 General information: gender, age, education level, work duration, monthly income. There are 5 questions in this part.

Part 2 Work skills. 1-5 work skills self-rating scale was used: major improvement needed, some improvement needed, meet expectations, often exceeds expectations, and consistently exceeds expectation. The score range was 0-4 and the totals of 10 questions were included.

Part 3 Life skills. 1-5 life skills rating scale was used: major improvement needed, some improvement needed, meet expectations, often exceeds expectations, and consistently exceeds expectation. The score range was 0-4 and the totals of 10 questions were included.

Part 4 Health behaviors. 1-5 practice frequency rating scale was used: did not practice, 1-2 days/week, 3 days/week, 4-5 days/week, and 6-7 days/week. The score range was 0-4 and the totals of 10 questions were included.

3. Happy workplace index checklist. 1-5 checklist rating scale was used:- without any system, with system, carrying on activities, activities were evaluated, and using evaluation results for development. The score range was 0-4, with 5 aspects of 37 questions.

The quality validation of the instrument was done as follows: 1) Content validity was checked by three health promotion experts and revision was made in accordance with the recommendations. 2) Reliability of the questionnaire was done by having the revised version from 1 try-out with 35 sampled employees who were similar to the study samples. Analysis of each variable's reliabilities was done by applying Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The reliability values found were as follows: work skills= 0.791 and life skills = 0.873.

Data collection

1. Collaborating with the sampled companies and the study samples in order to clarify research objective, research procedures and time duration;
2. Having the samples signed the consent forms;
3. Collecting data from the samples, the 1st collection was done in July, 2016 and the 2nd collection was done in December, 2016.

Data analysis

General characteristics of the samples were described in terms of frequency, mean, and standard deviation (SD). The comparison of variable' mean score between before and after the program was analyzed by using paired t -test.

Ethical approval

The research proposal was reviewed and approved by the Ethical Committee for Human Research, Faculty of Public Health, Mahidol University, Bangkok Thailand, as the official document: MUPH2016-068.

Results

Most of the samples were females (76.6%), age 26-44 years (63.6%) with the minimal age of 18 and mean age of 35.30. High percentage of them finished secondary school (40.9%) while 39.1 percent finished primary school. About one-fifth of the samples had working duration of “<1 year” and 39.5 percent had working duration of “>5 years”. Seventy-two percent got the average monthly income of “not higher than 10,000 baht”. See Table1.

Table 1 General characteristics of the samples

Characteristics	Number and percentage of the samples			Total (n=241)
	Company 1 (n=67)	Company 2 (n=94)	Company 3 (n=80)	
Gender				
Male	5 (7.5)	19 (20.2)	29 (36.3)	67 (23.4)
Female	62 (92.5)	75 (79.8)	51 (63.7)	219 (76.6)
Age (years)				
18-25	1 (1.5)	3 (3.2)	1 (1.3)	6 (2.1)
26-44	38 (56.7)	69 (73.4)	46 (57.5)	182 (63.6)
45-60	28 (41.8)	22 (23.4)	33 (41.2)	98 (34.3)
Min-Max	19-59	18-53	18-58	18-59
Mean, SD	37.31, 7.220	34.13, 7.858	36.10, 9.531	35.30, 8.115
Education level				
Primary school	37 (55.2)	24 (25.5)	33 (41.3)	112 (39.1)
Secondary school	27 (40.3)	37 (39.5)	34 (42.5)	117 (40.9)
College and higher	3 (4.5)	33 (35.0)	13 (16.2)	57 (20.0)
Work duration (years)				
< 1	18 (26.9)	17 (18.1)	16 (20.0)	60 (21.0)
1-4	17 (25.4)	38 (40.4)	38 (47.5)	113 (39.5)
> 5	32 (47.7)	39 (41.5)	26 (32.5)	113 (39.5)
Min-Max	0.6-20	0.6-18	0.6-14	0.6-20
Mean, SD	5.63, 5.491	5.47, 5.520	3.76, 4.116	4.55, 4.012
Monthly income (Baht)				
< 10,000	57 (85.1)	41 (43.6)	74 (92.5)	206 (72.0)
10,001-15,000	8 (11.9)	26 (27.7)	5 (6.2)	45 (15.7)
> 15,001	2 (3.0)	27 (28.7)	1 (1.3)	35 (12.3)

Comparative analysis of work skills, life skills and health behaviors mean scores of 3 sampled companies, before and after the program

Work skills: After the program, the changed work skills were found among the sampled employees whereas the significantly increased work skills were found in all 3 companies ($p=0.000$, $p=0.006$ and $p=0.003$ respectively). The increased work skills mean scores of almost all aspects were found especially in regard to “communication with supervisors and coworkers”, “functional duty expertise” and “using working instruments and equipment”.

Life skills: After the program, the changed life skills were found among the sampled. The significantly increased life skills mean scores were found compared to before the program in all 3 sampled companies ($p=0.018$, $p=0.021$ and $p=0.027$). The increased life skills mean scores were found in almost all aspects of life skills expect the aspects regarding “providing Assistance or expressing sympathy with colleges/coworkers or supervisors/ department heads”, and “ability of moral and ethical self-regulation”.

Health behaviors: The changed health behaviors of the samples showed that the samples’ health behaviors mean scores of the 3 sampled companies’ measures after the program were significantly higher than before the program ($p=0.040$, $p=0.022$, $p=0.035$). However, health behaviors mean scores of two aspects were found to be increased significantly in regard to “no violent expression during stress/ anxiety/ irritability” and “sleep and rest for more than six houses per day” but the other was found to be decreased. See Table2.

Table 2 Mean Score, Standard Deviation, and Paired T-test Analysis on Work skills, Life skills, and Health behaviors of 3 companies, before and after the program

Variables	n	Mean	SD	t	df	p-value
Work skills						
<i>Company 1</i>						
Before	67	26.75	3.800	4.811	66	0.000**
After	67	28.27	3.556			
<i>Company 2</i>						
Before	94	30.12	3.838	2.824	93	0.006*
After	94	31.11	3.617			
<i>Company 3</i>						
Before	80	29.64	4.686	3.121	79	0.003*
After	80	30.70	4.385			
Life skills						
<i>Company 1</i>						
Before	67	27.01	4.651	2.433	66	0.018*
After	67	28.00	3.887			
<i>Company 2</i>						
Before	94	28.50	4.465	2.350	93	0.021*
After	94	29.36	4.224			
<i>Company 3</i>						
Before	80	27.84	4.250	2.256	79	0.027*
After	80	28.64	3.671			
Health behaviors						
<i>Company 1</i>						
Before	67	15.15	5.483	2.094	66	0.040*
After	67	15.64	5.265			
<i>Company 2</i>						
Before	94	15.73	5.416	2.325	93	0.022*
After	94	16.53	4.295			
<i>Company 3</i>						
Before	80	17.83	5.336	2.142	79	0.035*
After	80	18.50	4.201			

* <0.05 ** <0.001

Comparative analysis of workplace promoting happiness factors mean scores of 3 sampled companies, before and after the program

Workplace promoting happiness factors: After the program, it was found that mean score of workplace promoting happiness factors in all 3 companies were significantly increased and significantly higher than before the program ($p=0.012$, $p=0.000$, and $p=0.003$). After the consideration of each aspect of the workplace promoting happiness factors was made and the ranking order was done from the highest to the lowest, the orders were as follows: process (58.33%); management (57.20%); atmosphere and environment (55.10%); health (52.20%); and result (50.10%). See Table3.

Table 3 Mean Score, Standard Deviation, and Paired T-test Analysis on workplace promoting happiness factors of 3 companies, before and after implementation

Workplace Promoting Happiness Factors (100 scores)	n	Mean	SD	t	df	p-value
<i>Company 1</i>						
Before	67	26.97	9.011	22.107	66	0.012*
After	67	52.60	7.234			
<i>Company 2</i>						
Before	94	48.56	11.813	10.053	93	0.000**
After	94	71.70	11.180			
<i>Company 3</i>						
Before	80	27.03	9.215	23.712	79	0.003*
After	80	56.16	6.748			

* <0.05 ** <0.001

Discussion

The study of the effects of happy workplace program in companies of Thai garment Industry had carried out by employing 5 steps of happy workplace processes as follows: 1) setting happy workplace vision; 2) workplace diagnosis; 3) HWP design; 4) HWP implementation; and 5) learn & share. The program was implemented for 6 months. The samples were composed of 241 employees from 3 sampled companies who were selected in accordance with the inclusion criteria set. The similar characteristics found among the samples were; most of them were females, average age of 35.30 and had working experience of 4.55 years. The different characteristics found were: education level, the number of the samples employees in companies 2 had finished “College and higher” was higher than those in company 1 and company 3; and monthly income, higher number of the samples employees in company 2 had clearly higher monthly income than those in other 2 companies. See Table 1.

After the program implementation, work skills of the sampled employees in the 3 sampled companies were found to be significantly increased compared to before the program. This finding was agree with the study of Oswald, Proto & Sgroi (2014), Lazar, Ossoian & Ratiu (2010), and Zelenski et al. (2008). The increased work skills mean scores was found in almost all aspects of work skills, especially the aspects in regard to “communication with supervisors and coworkers”, “functional duty expertise” and “using working instruments and equipment”. This finding revealed that the happy workplace program implemented in the sampled companies of Thai garment industry was effective. In these 3 companies, the employees performed their tasks by setting mutual daily on target performance, for example, they have to finish sewing 2,000 bags by 11.00 a.m., etc. The result from mutual cooperation among employees was the payment in accordance with the on-target performance. It was found that the level of changed work skills in company was higher than the change found in company 2 and 3. This finding should be due to the fact that the work skills mean scores of the company 1 measured before the program was lower than of the company 2 and the company 3 (M= 26.75 compared to M= 30.12 and M= 29.64).

In regard to life skills, the significantly increased life skills among the samples in 3 companies were found after participated in the happy workplace program. In general, the increased life skills mean scores of almost all aspects were found especially in regard to “good communication with family members”, “good communication with coworkers”, and “providing assistances and expressing sympathy to colleagues and coworkers”.

The emphasis on making the balance had created the development of both work skills and life

skills (Burton, 2010) and this situation made the managers accepted and agreed to joint and support the happy workplace program. However, the low mean scores of life skills were found in regard to “long life learning” and “management for the balanced income and expense” This finding was congruent with the study of Graham et al. (2017), Demir, et al. (2011), and Zelenski et al. (2008) who found that most of employees did not have adequate income and often had problem about the expense for family’s health.

In regard to health behaviors, after the program the sampled employees in all 3 sampled companies were found to have significantly higher health behaviors mean scores than before the program especially in regard to the following aspects: “no violent expression during stress”; “do not drink alcoholic beverages” and “do not smoke”. However, low health behaviors mean scores were found in regard to consumption of sweet and high fat foods, and exercise continuously for 30 minutes. These behaviors should be developed continuously because they affected health status (Kaeodumkoeng & Junhasobhaga, 2017; Goldgruber & Ahrens, 2010; Olsen & Dahl, 2010) as well as the medical expense of the companies. However, the health behavior changes found were low which should be due to the fact that the change of health behavior usually needs longer time and there is a need to get more academic support in order to get continuous development.

The previous studies, showed that the important personal characteristics for developing happy workplace such as positive actions, positive emotions, trust attitude, pro-social behavior, and health status (Goldgruber & Ahrens, 2010; Olsen & Dahl, 2010). Among those factors mentioned some of them have a two-way interaction, whereas one factors may cause happiness and happiness, at the same time, causes happy and healthy body, etc (Biggio & Cortese, 2013; Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2013).

The change of happiness promoting factors, ranked from highest to lowest, were as follows: process (58.33%); management (57.20%); atmosphere & environment (55.10%); health (52.20%), and result (50.10%). Health activities organized in the sampled companies were found to be increased in accordance with the plane developed. These activities had been effective in balancing the samples perceptions and learning. Besides, the companies’ managers had declared the policy supporting the activities as well as using measures that led to explicit actions. The important changes found were the friendly and more communication channels were created in every organizational level, especially the positive relations and working climate, positive actions (thoughts, speeches and manners) which were helpful to build positive atmosphere and environment for effective working climate and good relationship between personnel. This situation helpful creating good results in the companies. The condition of workplace promoting happiness factors that were checked by the happy workplace index had helped the sampled employees understand current situation of workplace promoting happiness factors_and the employees could work cooperatively in planning activities and guidelines for promoting various aspects. This situation was similar to the previous studies which were found that these factors are conducive to promoting happiness in workplace (Kaeodumkoeng, et al., 2015; Montano, et al., 2014; Biggio & Cortese, 2013; Nielson, 2013). It can be indicated that the happy workplace program was effective in developing potentiality of the HWP staff in the 3 sampled companies within limited time frame. The evaluation made at the individual level showed that there were significantly positive changes affecting individual factors which include work skills, life skills, health behaviors, working conditions, job characteristics. This finding was congruent with the previous studies (Kaeodumkoeng & Junhasobhaga, 2017; Graham et al., 2015; Demir et al., 2011; Goldgruber & Ahrens, 2010; Olsen & Dahl, 2010) in which those factors mentioned were found to relate with health.

In regard to the processes implemented in this program, the research team had worked cooperatively with the happy workplace program Team whereas most of the team members

work in the human resource (HR)/ human resource development (HRD). Departments who were responsible for taking care of the personnel as well as having basic knowledge and skills related to training, therefore, they could learn rapidly. Besides, these persons had a chance to learn from their colleagues and friends from other companies, so the change of happiness promoting factors were found in all 3 companies especially in companies 2 where a high level of changed factors was found. This finding should be due to the fact that the sampled employees in company 2 had higher education level than other 2 companies. Besides, according to the study of Goldgruber & Ahrens (2010) who made a systematic literature review and found that the program that emphasized on organizing a variety of knowledge enhancing activities in the workplace showed the development of health behaviors and health status of workers (Kaeodumkoeng & Junhasobhaga, 2015).

However, due to the slightly differences of basic contexts of the companies and of the characteristics of the happy workplace program team, for example, situation of the problems, job characteristics of employees knowledge background of employees supports provided by organization administrators, etc. These factors mentioned could produce different results. Therefore, there is a need to plan the program activities and to exchange opinions and information with the academic facilitator team regularly in order to modify the action plan and to select the activities appropriately with the company. This will be helpful in developing better psychological work environment. Better psychological work environment depend also on the factors in regard to organizational environment and management system as well as characteristics of employees.

Being and working together in a workplace, each worker need to try, more or less, to adjust and maintain the balance in order to be with and work with other workers happily. Each person needs to develop work skills and life skills. The ease and difficulty may vary from one to another. In order to be together with other person happily, personal characteristics, skills for developing good relationship to work together smoothly, and organizational environment conducive to adjustment and maintain the balance of all related factors. Therefore, happiness at work can be developed basically on the achievements of both the individual and organizational levels.

The workplace needs to promote their personnel ability to take care of their physical health as well as mental health, have quality of working life, being aware of the decent work, and developing a balance of work and life. The development must be done in both work skills and life skills which then can lead to personal behavior changes, development of collective behaviors of organizational personnel, development of good health culture in workplaces, and higher job quality along with paying attention on workers quality.

A happy workplace needs to have five internal factors: 1) management: taking care of benefits, welfare system, rewarding, and career path/ progress; 2) atmosphere and environment: the managers are the good models, leadership, relationship, and environment; 3) process: happiness promoting committee, emphasizing activities on developing human capital, communication channels, promoting learning; 4) healthy: physical and mental health: lowing health risk behaviors (smoking, consumption of alcoholic beverages, exercise, lowing accidents; and 5) result: organizational commitment, lowing turnover rate and productivity (Kaeodumkoeng, et al., 2015; Thummakul, et al., 2012). Therefore, workplaces are the important sources for learning work skills and life skills together with other persons as well as the places for combining knowledge and work abilities in order to create benefits for organizations and society.

Recommendation

1) The happy workplaces program was effective in helping the sampled employees participate in thinking and implementing various activities with the support provided by the HWP staff.

It was found that the processes were effective in designing the activities appropriately with the company contexts including efficient communication, learning and sharing. Therefore, this program can be utilized in other companies with similar characteristics and contexts. 2) In promoting health of the employees in companies, it is necessary to develop employees work skills, life skills, and health behaviors along with the management of environmental factors, in order to help employees learn and process self-reliance. 3) The accomplishment of a happy workplace program for employees depends largely on the perceptions and declaration of explicit policy of the top manager, the intention of HWP staff, as well as their desire to learn, communication skills, transferring knowledge, and working cooperatively with hearts and hands of personnel in every level of the organization.

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