

Gross Organisational Happiness (GOH): An Extension of the Gross National Happiness (GNH) Concept

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Abstract

This paper introduces the concept of Gross Organisational Happiness (GOH), an analytical tool that businesses, organisations, and communities could implement as a way to improve their working environment and productivity. The analogy of a structure of a house is used to describe the link between GNH, GOH and Gross Organisational Happiness Data System (GOHDS). Currently, the GOH concept is largely conceptual because its empirical evidence is limited to the findings of a case study. However, the potential exists for GOH to be widely applied in businesses to enhance the conventional profit-based notion of success. One obstacle of GNH to date has been its apparent lack of practicability, and so the new GOH expands upon GNH. This article first examines the meaning of 'happiness', its relevance to the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) and how it has led to the new concept, Gross Organisational Happiness (GOH).

Keywords: *Paradigm shifter, Gross National Happiness, Gross Organisational Happiness, data system, material and mental well-being.*

The Idea of Gross National Happiness (GNH)

Nestled in the high Himalayas and wedged between two Asian giants, China to the north and India to the south, is the tiny Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan, with an area of 38,394 square kilometres and a population of 762,939 (National Statistical Bureau, 2014). Bhutan has adopted a unique development philosophy. In 1972, the King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, first advanced the visionary statement that Gross National Happiness (GNH) is more important than Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Since then, GNH has had deep roots in Bhutan and is a core element of all strategic development plans, policies and programmes. Any project that fails the GNH Policy Screening Tool is not readily accepted and must be harmonised with the GNH principles (RGoB, 2013). GNH is 'development guided by human values' (Wangchuk, 2009). The philosophy of GNH is underpinned in a long

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philosophical tradition that recognises the integrated nature of happiness and well-being and it does not draw on any western influences (Bates, 2009; Hargens, 2002; Priesner, 2004; Planning Commission, 1999).

The Superiority of GNH over GDP: Happiness as the Goal of GNH

Happiness is an aspiration of every human, but it can also be considered as a measure of social progress (World Happiness Report, 2013). The search for happiness is a concern in numerous cultural and religious traditions (Choden, 2012). The cornerstone of GNH as a development philosophy is the visionary emphasis that it places on wellbeing and happiness at the centre of societal development. The essence is that ‘happiness’ must be the goal of GNH and that it is the responsibility of the government to create enabling conditions for citizens to pursue happiness (Thinley, 2005). It was under the wise and dynamic leadership of His Majesty the Fourth King that Bhutan charted a unique path to development and modernisation called Gross National Happiness (Ministry of Education, 2010, p.3).

GNH does not challenge the concept of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the traditionally accepted measure of societal happiness. It merely questions the prevailing norm of using GDP alone as a measure of societal progress, and it articulates an understanding of development that incorporates multiple and interrelated social, political, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions. As Bhutan’s former Prime Minister Thinley said in 2014, *“It is not one or the other. The pursuit of GNH does not require the abandonment of the indicator GDP. GDP is a useful indicator.”*

However, GDP is increasingly subject to criticism as a measure because of its primary focus on wealth creation. Calls for a shift to a paradigm that is holistic,

sustainable, and involves an inclusive development process are increasing (RGoB, 2013). Given that one of the foremost aspirations of humans is to lead a happy life, happiness should be one measure of social progress (World Happiness Report, 2012).

‘Happiness’ is a subjective notion that depends on many factors and conditions. It is a much debated and controversial concept; yet there appears to be a growing general consensus among academics that happiness can be viewed as ‘a subjective experience of positive affect’ (Donnelly, 2004,p.384), that GNH is an ‘average of individual measures of happiness within the citizens of the country’ (Donnelly, 2004) and that it depends on context and perspective (Sherab, 2013). GNH, as an extension of Buddhist philosophy, can be pursued as a public policy goal that emphasises the role and significance of practice of Buddhism, which is primarily aimed at achieving a balance between the material and spiritual aspects of an individual’s life (Choden, 2012).

Bhutan’s Prime Minister, Tshering Tobgay, in his talk ‘*Happiness Matters: Tshering Tobgay at TEDx Thimphu*’ said, referring to and quoting such experts as Dan Gilbert (*Why we are happy?*), Nancy Etcoff (*Science of Happiness*), Sigmund Freud (*Pursuit of happiness*), Matthieu Ricard (*Habits of happiness*), Chip Conley (*Measuring what makes life worthwhile*) and Silver Donald Cameron (*The pursuit of GNH*), that his own search ultimately took him to spirituality and happiness.

I am convinced that there is GNH for everything – GNH for democracy, media, farming & ICT. There is so much of GNH going on in Bhutan that we are convinced that we are happy ...really, really happy. Happiness is a place and that place is Bhutan... This is a number, an interesting number. This number is

quoted in our Constitution. 65 is the retirement age of our public servants. In fact, our Constitution says even His Majesty the King must retire at 65. It so happened that he retired at 51. Anyhow, I am 46 and I was just introduced. I am 46 and I know that I will retire at 65. With that knowledge in my mind I should tell myself 'if happiness matters and happiness will matter when I am 65 and I am retired', how should I live now so that when I am 65 I am retired and I can be retired happily. Am I going to invest in building a sense of security, am I going to invest in a sense of identity and am I going to feel myself with a sense of purpose – security, identity and purpose – important for happiness and happiness matters (April 27, 2012).

Experiences from developed countries have indicated that too much emphasis on Gross Domestic Product has failed to bring universal happiness amongst their citizens (Dixon, 2004; Duncan, 2010; Easterlin, 2003; Fishman, 2010; Hewavitharana, 2004). Increasingly, scholars from a wide range of disciplines believe that the traditional economic approach to development has failed to adequately measure the progress of a nation, resulting in diminished happiness and well-being (Bandyopadhyay, 2005; Bracho, 2004; Braun, 2009; Eda Hiro & Oda, 2008; Johnson, 2004) and that a new holistic development paradigm is needed that would overcome the inadequacies of GDP.

Too much emphasis on GDP has heightened human greed, which has resulted in unsustainable growth with little or no regard for the needs of the future generations (Sherab, 2013). Increasingly, that focusing solely on GDP leads to the grand accumulation of national wealth mostly in the hands of a minority elite of the global population, with dissatisfaction spreading elsewhere across the globe

(Choden, 2012). This is why Bhutan's GNH approach to development is increasingly considered as an alternative approach to progress (Braun, 2009). It aims to achieve economic progress that is based on moral and ethical values and that 'actions based on good moral values are promoters of happiness while immoral actions are depressants of happiness' (Sherab, 2013). Indeed, the most recent GNH survey showed that Bhutanese are happier today than before, and that this could be safely attributed to the deliberate and conscious pursuit of happiness as the goal of Bhutanese development strategy (Kuenselonline, 2015).

Scholarly research on the 'economics of happiness' indicates that happiness will not replace income-based measures of welfare, but instead complement other measures of well-being (Frey & Stutzer, 2002; Graham, 2005). The paradox of rising income without any corresponding rise in reported happiness exists in the developed as well as the developing and transitional economies (Easterlin, 1974, 1995, 2001; Inglehart & Klingemann, 2000; Oswald, 19997; Veenhoven, 1973). This empirical evidence is confirmed in United States data, first reported by Easterlin (as cited in Choden, 2012).

Superiority of GNH over GDP can be inferred from the words of the President of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, *"For years statistics have registered an increasingly strong economic growth as a victory over shortage until it emerged that this growth was destroying more than it was creating. The crisis doesn't only make us free to imagine other models, another future, and another world. It obliges us to do so."* (cited in Hannaford, 2009). This appears to be in agreement with what Joseph Stiglitz (2011) had to say, *'GDP has increasingly become used as a measure of societal well-being, and changes in the structure of the economy and our society have made it an increasingly poor one. It is time for our statistics system to put more emphasis on measuring the well-being of the population than*

on economic production.’ In essence, what would distinguish GNH from GDP is that the former may be considered as a holistic, sustainable and inclusive growth model taking in to account both the material as well as mental well-being while the later focuses only on wealth creation (Thinley, 2005).

However, Wangcha Sangay (July 9, 2015 Facebook post) takes issue with the claim that everyone aspires to be happy; he contends that the Fourth King was not grappling toward an unfathomable state of utopian happiness on earth, but merely the comfort and convenience of the masses. He asserts that GDP only indicates the grand accumulation of national wealth (which is mostly found in the hands of the upper echelon of the world including in Bhutan), the Druk Gyal Zhipa was more interested in raising the socio-economic standard of the masses. These words of his best describe his view of happiness:

Harnessing happiness dimension is a tall order. And happiness is abstract so it is felt differently by different individuals. I do not believe that everyone genuinely aspires to be happy in like manner. If such a fallacy was a fact the world would be in far better shape. People would be less hungry for power and less driven to subjugate the other. Happiness is definitely not centred on an individual aspiration. That's why I find it rather naive on part of many self proclaimed happiness authors declaring that every individual aspires to be happy. It is actually more correct to assume that everyone aspires to be successful or famous than happy. Success and fame bring in a level of satisfaction and pride just as wealth and materialism promote convenience and comfort. However success, fame, wealth and other materialism do not necessarily usher in that '

state being of happiness. 'The King of GNH philosophy was not promoting or propagating a unique philosophy termed 'happiness' when he said that the happiness of his subjects was more relevant than gross national product. He was not grappling for that unfathomable state of utopian happiness on earth. What he meant was that comfort and convenience level of all his subjects were more important to him than the statistic figure of GDP or GNH.

His assertions appear to be in agreement with Frankl's (1985) statement: "Happiness cannot be pursued; it must ensue. One must have a reason to 'be happy'. Once a reason is found, however, one becomes happy automatically...A human being is not one in pursuit of happiness, but rather one in search of a reason to become happy" (p.22).

King Jigme Singye Wangchuck: The Paradigm Shifter

The much revered Fourth King, who may very aptly be called the GNH King is, without doubt, a paradigm shifter. He has offered, not only for Bhutan, but for rest of the world, a new and transformative option for development. He changed the language of development discourse, and his philosophy of GNH remains one of the dominant development models for the world. A growing body of research indicates the limited interconnectedness between happiness and financial wealth (e.g., Easterlin, 2005; Inglehart al., 2008; Layard, 2005; Luttmer, 2005), and Simon Kuznets' position that it is not how much the economy is producing, but what it is growing which matters (Hayward & Colman, 2013).

The GNH philosophy implies a balanced and holistic approach to development (Thinley, 2005). Hence, the collective happiness of the Bhutanese people is addressed directly through public policies in which projects and programmes are

essentially designed through the lens of happiness. As such, the philosophy of GNH poses a challenge to the discourse in orthodox developmental theory because it calls for a paradigm shift from purely materialistic concerns to a melding of material development and the holistic well-being of its citizens (Bakshi, 2004; Eda Hiro & Oda, 2008; Ura & Galay, 2004; Wang, 2008; Willenswaard, 2008; Worcester, 2004) and the environment.

The Bhutanese national goal of promoting happiness has prompted government leaders, economists and scholars alike to rethink their own development approach in the 21st century landscape of rapid globalisation (Priesner, 1999; Tideman, 2004; Whitehouse & Windrel, 2004). Numerous researchers assert that it is worthwhile for the governments to pursue policies that promote happiness (e.g., Bok 2010; Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs 2012).

Frey and Stutzer (2002) argue that the extent to which people are happy or unhappy is an essential quality of the economy or society and that the state of the economy strongly affects people's happiness and note that so far, Bhutan is the only country that pursues happiness as a central policy goal. Accumulation of wealth is not the desired end of development (Namgye, 2010).

Bhutan's long-term development vision, Bhutan 2020, outlines the centrality of GNH as an official strategy for pursuit of happiness, which it has worked hard to implement in its people's daily lives:

The concept of Gross National Happiness was articulated by His Majesty to indicate that development has many more dimensions than those associated with Gross Domestic Product, and that development should be understood as a process that seeks to maximize happiness rather than economic growth. The concept places the

individual at the centre of development efforts and it recognizes that the individual has material, spiritual and emotional needs. (Planning Commission, 1999: p.10 -11).

GNH has four pillars, nine domains and seventy-two indicators (Ura, Alkire, Zangmo, & Wangdi, 2012). The four pillars are (a) sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, (b) environmental conservation, (c) the preservation and promotion of culture and (d) good governance. Each is being developed as a set of independent but integrated policies and plans. The four pillars constitute the material and non-material dimensions of happiness that have a high degree of relevance and importance in Bhutan, and continue to be recognised as the broad strategic framework through which national development initiatives operationalise GNH (GNH Commission, 2009).

GNH is increasingly discussed at international level as one of the most exciting alternative development measures of societal well-being (Fleurbaey, 2009; Tideman, 2011). Bhutan's former education minister said, "The good thing is that GNH is the image of our country. It is our North Star. We sail our ship in faith and hope" (Powdyel, 2007, p.11). In recognizing the importance of educating every Bhutanese citizen on GNH values and principles, the Education Ministry introduced the 'Educating for GNH' (EGNH) programme throughout its education system in 2010 (Sherab, 2013). The vision of EGNH programme is to produce graduates...

Who are genuine human beings, realizing their full and true potential, caring for others –including other species – ecologically literate, contemplative as well as analytical in their understanding of the world, free of greed and without excessive desires; knowing, understanding, and appreciating completely that they are not separate from the natural world

and from others; – in sum manifesting their humanity fully (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 5).

However, a recent evaluation of this programme showed that many teachers, who should be the main change agents, lack appropriate understanding of the EGNH's intent (Sherab, 2013). This is, of course, a cause for concern for everyone, and all stakeholders will need to take appropriate action soon.

In concert with rigorous research and review, the development of this paradigm has resulted in GNH now being nationally applied; it influences national decision making in Bhutan, and therefore, by definition, requires a national effort in order to measure its impact.

The manner in which the goal of GNH (happiness) is pursued in Bhutan can be best understood from the following words in a speech delivered in 2009 in India by King Wangchuck at the Madhavrao Scindia Memorial Lecture, entitled Changing World and Timeless Values:

...for my nation, today GNH is the bridge between the fundamental values of Kindness, Equality and Humanity and the necessary pursuit of economic growth. GNH acts as our National Conscience guiding us towards making wise decisions for a better future. It ensures that no matter what our nation may seek to achieve, the human dimension, the individual's place in the nation, is never forgotten. It is a constant reminder that we must strive for a caring leadership so that as the world and (our) country change, as our nation's goals change, our foremost priority will always remain the happiness and wellbeing of our people – including the generations to come after us.

The Idea of Gross Organisational Happiness (GOH)

Gross Organisational Happiness (GOH) represents a new extension of the concept of GNH, downscaled from the national level to the organisational level. It is an innovative tool drawn both from Data Science and GNH to create a GOH index. An organisation's GOH index is a subset of GNH and, if validly measured, can be aggregated with the GOH measures from other organisations to directly contribute to the national GNH index. By using innovative data collection tools, GOH can be measured and monitored at much more real-time intervals than the current GNH surveys. Organisations might be even able to obtain daily reports of happiness at the organisational level.

An Analytical tool for a Gross Organisational Happiness Data System (GOHDS)

GOHDS is a combination of both process and analytical tools that enables users to identify relevant indicators from the 72 indicators that emerge from the 9 domains and 4 pillars of GNH. In brief, GOH can be accessed through the Gross Organisational Happiness Data System (GOHDS) that brings technological tools, people and processes together. Although GOHDS is still in its infancy, it will be developed further and it should contribute to the existing quantifiable knowledge that happiness has a direct and positive correlation with the success of an organisation.

The GOHDS process is simple and involves the following steps:

- (i) Take Action – Go about one's normal day actions with mindfulness, make each action count
- (ii) Reflect – Take time to stop and reflect on what one has done

- (iii) Log and Tag – Log the details of what one has done over the last few hours, scoring it for happiness and tagging it to the relevant GNH indicators
- (iv) Review – Review the real-time graph that the system displays to see one's balanced effort in achieving high level goals
- (v) Repeat – Repeat the process

If these steps are followed, by the end of each day individuals will know how their time was utilised, how happy they felt about it, and how it relates to GNH. These GOHDS data can be aggregated over time for individuals, organisations, or communities, and then the government will be able to determine which of the 36 indicators are the most and the least commonly used. This will allow for the development of a more flexible and dynamic GNH index that can be refined specifically for different environments within which organisations in Bhutan operate.

In other words, by using this system of GOHDS, the more relevant and specific GNH indicators could easily be tailored to varying organisational environments, such as finance, health, mining, farming, hydroelectricity, IT, and telecommunications. This exploration toward a better measure of societal wellbeing will involve the theory of social choice and the study of happiness and its determinants, among other approaches, along-with new developments in the philosophy of social justice and psychology of well-being (e.g., Fleurbaey, 2009).

In this way, GOH will be seen as a direction forward to enhance Bhutan's national identity as a country of GNH and to demonstrate to the rest of the world just what unity, wisdom, and imagination can do to transform the country and ultimately the world for the better. Perhaps a great idea from a simple mind in a tiny nation will transform the lives of millions. Like the Buddhist philosophy,

which offers more than a set of practices for mental development at an individual level providing a philosophical framework for creating happiness for society at large (Baker, Laird, & Lama, 2000; Loy, 2003), the application of GOH offers similar benefits at the organisational level.

The analogy of a familiar structure of a house can serve to link GNH, GOH and GOHDS to understand in the simplest terms the essence and implications of this new evolving concept of GOH. In it (see Figure 1), the GNH indicators, upon which the concept of GOH rests are the foundation. Above the foundation lies the floor, which is at the ground level but not as deep as the foundation; the GOH indicators are this floor. The walls of the house, in this analogy, represent the technology and process that support the GOHDS. The roof of the house, the pinnacle of this analogy, represents the GOHDS - the system that is the most important yet serves no purpose without the other components.

The analogy continues. The output of the GOHDS (Figure 2) is actually a GOH index which is derived through the usage of the GOH indicators; in the analogy, smoke emitted from the house chimney can be called the output. It extends to a small town of GOHDS houses that are collectively emitting a large amount of smoke, contributing to the overall smoke cloud of GNH. As opposed to the increasing environmental damage that increased emission of real smoke causes, having more of this type of GOH “pollutant” is perhaps what the world needs more of. It may be noted that unlike the industrial smoke, this eternal smoke is more likened to the fragrance from smoke sticks used in ancient civilisations or the smoke signals used more universally to indicate locations to the lost and lonely souls. A diagrammatic presentation (Figures 1 & 2) that ensues further explains the outcome and contribution of GOH/GOHDS to the overall GNH.

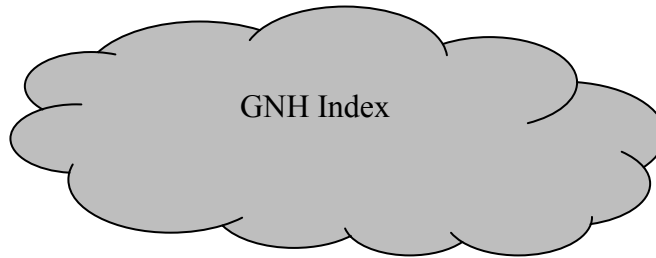


Figure 1: GNH Indicators: Foundations of GOH

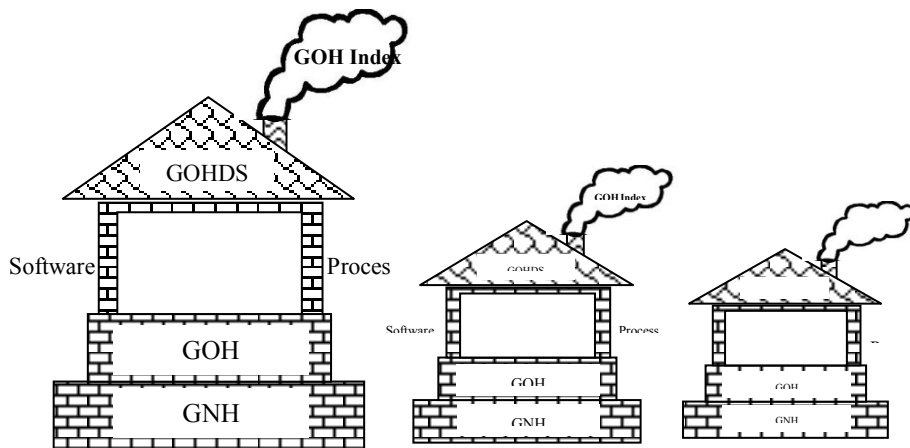


Figure 2: Analogy of GODHS

The empirical findings of the Case Study (Data Scientists Pty. Ltd) carried out by the author gave birth to this innovative concept of GOH and the scope of its applicability to other organisations. The impact of the GOHDS tool on the company's performance and on the well-being and happiness of those associated with the company is described in the words of Troy Sadkowsky, the CEO and founder of Data Scientists Pty. Ltd:

Practical Implications of GOH

The best shift that I have noticed since hiring a GNH consultant would have to be the increase in clarity in day to day business decision making. Our GNH consultant assisted us in applying unique techniques that ensure our processes and policies continually maintain a strong connection to our organisation's fundamental core values. Since the very first session I have felt a renewed confidence and certainty when it comes to making day to day decisions. Working effectively with data and technology means working in a highly changeable environment and continually making innovative changes. Therefore, it is invaluable to me to know that we can do this without compromising the organisation's fundamental core values. This brings a deep sense of unity to us as an organisation no matter what technological changes are happening.

Over the last 12 months, I believe our GNH consultant has been a major contributing factor to remaining on target and achieving our growth in organisational wellbeing. This has resulted in a 20% growth in staff and a 50% growth in revenue and has also given us a new metric and growth target in GOH (September 13, 2014).

These words amply describe the positive impacts of the application of the GOHDS on his company and possibly the same sort of benefits that can be reaped by other companies, organisations, and communities that use this newly developed concept and tool. But a beginning needs to be made.

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