

Interview with Jessica Pryce-Jones, CEO of iOpener

Interview by Juliet Norton



Jessica Pryce-Jones, CEO of iOpener, a human asset management consultancy, is the world's leading expert in raising productivity through the Science of Happiness at Work. iOpener works with organisations, teams and individuals to achieve a sustainable and positive change in performance.

Her new book, *Happiness at Work: Maximizing Your Psychological Capital for Success* was published by Wiley Blackwell in February in the UK and in the USA in April. It outlines what iOpener's approach is all about in a practical and easy-to-read way.

Pryce-Jones founded iOpener to help people to recognise and extend their capabilities. She believes that everyone has the ability to do more: the secret lies in inner momentum and formulating practical solutions. She is a frequent speaker and media commentator, having taken part as an expert in the BBC series *Making Slough Happy*, featured in a CNN special and written many articles about iOpener's work.

She lectures and teaches senior executives at London Business School, Chicago Booth, Oxford (Saïd) and Judge Business Schools. She also coaches senior executives and leadership teams. Her career started at Rothschild's Bank in Paris and she then spent seven years in the insurance market before starting working as a consultant.

Could you tell us a bit about your professional background before becoming the CEO of iOpener?

I spent ten years working in London, in Finance, so my professional background is much more numerical than psychological. After I'd had my first child, I was unable to negotiate part time working, so I decided I'd go back to school and get new training. I did a psychology degree and that was the beginning of me thinking that we need to be more aware of bringing these two worlds closer together.

What made you want to address the issue of happiness in the workplace?

It was a throwaway comment of one of my colleagues, who said: "In all the work that we do, what we are really doing is just enabling people to be happier, more confident, and to perform better". It was this throwaway comment, coupled with a roll-out that we were doing for an organization where they manage out the bottom 10 per cent every year, that clearly didn't make anybody happy – although it was supposed to be a very effective way of managing a business. It was those two things which kind of came together, and made me think that we need to think more about this.

How did you go about developing your methodology?

I realised that although I'd done a psychology degree, it didn't really qualify me to lead a research project, so I recruited somebody out of Oxford University to lead the research process. Through discussions with her, she suggested that we start with focus groups and build the project from the ground up; so getting the themes, extracting the themes and putting them in a questionnaire. We then tested the questionnaire and refined the questionnaire, tested again, refined again – so we ran three studies to test and refine the questionnaire and produce a five factor structure.

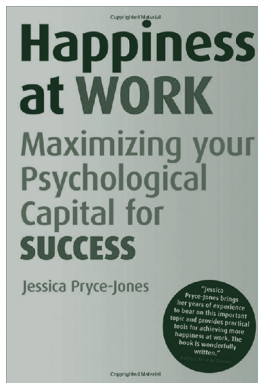
In your presentation at the 2010 CIPD conference entitled: “Why Happiness Makes Business Sense”, you discussed the performance-happiness model. Could you take us through this model?

The model, (which can be seen in Figure 1) is born of the factor structure, so it is statistics that drive the model. It is not just an invented “thing” which is shoehorned in, it is the data that describes the model. So, everything falls into five factors or five groups. Those five groups are what we call our five “C’s”. It is not happiness for happiness sake; it is happiness because it drives performance. I think that people have got it the wrong way round and think that if you perform well you will be happy. While doing a good job does make you happy, research has proven that happiness does come first, and happiness drives performance. The first of the five C’s is:

1. *Contribution*, which is about “what you do”. That consists of two pieces: first you have your goals and objectives, which make you feel secure in your job. It is then about feedback, appreciation and respect on the other side. Those are the things that seem to come more from the environment to the individual.

Figure 1





2. The second C is *conviction*, and that is really about motivation in the short term, because it consists of motivation, resilience, feeling efficient and effective and feeling that your work has a positive impact.
3. You then have *culture*, which is a feeling of fit inside an organization. It is not necessarily to do with what an organization is, it's whether you feel you fit inside it, so looking at organizational values, whether you like your colleagues, or have similar values to them.
4. The fourth C is *commitment*, which is engagement over the long term, because it has engagement as a facet of it, and the idea of doing something worthwhile. These are things which are more stable and occur over the long term. So you can hate your job, because you've just had a row with a colleague or something along those lines, but still feel that you are doing something worthwhile.
5. The last C is *confidence*, and confidence is really what it says on the tin. One of the key parts of that is around self belief.

So you have these five C's, which all come together, and around the edge of the circle you have pride, trust and recognition. You have these three because they lock on to all of the five C's. When we observe the data, we see that pride for example is associated with confidence, contribution, conviction etc., and the same applies with trust and recognition.

What can managers do to improve employees' happiness at work?

Our personal viewpoint is that happiness is owned by the individual, it is not owned by the manager. That is the main problem with engagement; that is falls on the shoulders of the manager. We would say that actually, it is up to the individual to approach their boss and tell them what it is that would drive their performance and make them happier. If people don't feel comfortable saying the word "happy", then they can talk about performance, because who is going to want to stand in the way of someone doing a better job?

So I would say: tell your team that their happiness is important to you and you would like to hear from them what would drive that. It is not about money or bonuses (which we can also see from our research); people realistically know what's going on and they don't need to be treated as infants. Times are tough and we all are aware of that, and most people want to put the good effort in. I would say that managers need to "responsible-ise" (for lack of a better word) your team to think about it for themselves and to come back to you as a manager with what matters to them. It is also about understanding that it is an individual thing, so what makes one person happy and perform well, won't necessarily make the next person happy and perform well.

Would you say that happiness is linked to engagement?

Of course they are connected, but the big difference is that we have seen is that happiness is not owned by a manager, it is owned by an individual and enabled by a manager. Engagement on the other hand is supposed to be owned by a manager and enabled by a manager. There is a difference in approach. We do see that there is about an 85 per cent crossover between engagement and happiness, but happiness seems to be that individual piece more, which really makes a difference.

The other thing is that happiness is more meaningful to most people. We don't have a lot of language around engagement, which tells you that it is less meaningful.

Do you think that Generation Y have higher expectations of the workplace than their predecessors?

Absolutely. We ran a seminar at London Business School with ten Gen Y-ers, flown in from all over the world: China, Russia, Pakistan, South Africa, USA etc. They were all high fliers and had been marked out as top performers. They were asked to prepare a 3 minute speech about what they wanted from the world of work. What was interesting was that eight out of ten

of them specifically talked about wanting to be happy at work. They were not shy about saying “happy”, and funnily enough, it’s the tail end of the Baby Boomers who don’t like saying that word, because when we came into work, we couldn’t say it. So, as a result of this, we have developed a cultural expectation of not talking about this thing, and having this stiff upper lip.

If you have been taught that feelings matter and that your feelings drive your actions, which is what Gen Y have been taught, you will then expect it in the workplace, so will go on to drive enormous change.

What kind of executive coaching do you offer organizations?

We offer executive coaching, team coaching and organizational development programmes, all based around our assessment tools. Driving change by looking at performance through the lens of happiness at work has been extremely well received. We are currently getting a lot of traction in the USA, as you might expect. The response has been extremely positive, because this represents a whole new way of doing things.

It never ceases to amaze me that you can be in a room with a team of senior executives who really don’t want to grind the word “happiness” out between their teeth. However, once you get them talking about it and getting excited about it, that always changes things.

For more information about iOpener, go to: www.iopener.com/

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