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**THE IMPACT OF MANAGER APPRECIATIVE COMMUNICATION  
ON EMPLOYEE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING BEING**

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**A Research Project  
Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graziadio Business School  
Pepperdine University**

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**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science  
In  
Organization Development**

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**by  
Matthew Bowman**

**August 2020**

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This research project, completed by

MATTHEW BOWMAN

under the guidance of the Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the faculty of The Graziadio Business School in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE  
IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

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Faculty Committee

Committee Chair, Gary Mangiofico, Ph.D.

Committee Member, Miriam Y. Lacey, Ph.D.

Deryck J. van Rensburg, D.B.A., Dean  
The Graziadio Business School

## Abstract

Communication and leadership are both important components of a successful organization and can play a role in an employee's psychological well-being. This study looks at managers communication and the real-life impact on an employee's experience at work and how it affects their happiness. This study uses a mixed methodology to build a foundation of data, each from the managers and employees' point of view to build context and generate a direction a manager can take when communicating with their staff. The manager and employee reactions showed a correlation between a manager's ability to communicate their appreciation to their employee. A relationship was found between an employee's psychological well-being and their managers appreciative communication. There was evidence of an increase in productivity when an employee felt appreciated. Although a manager's communication is not a unique variable in an employee's psychological well-being, it plays a role in developing a happier employee.

*Keywords:* Leadership, appreciative communication, psychological well-being

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Creating an efficient and motivated team is one of the most important goals for any manager. In order to create a productive team, the team must be motivated to complete the work, be mentally present in the workplace, and find purpose in what they are doing. In this instance, this 'motivation' will be viewed as what energizes, directs, and sustains human behavior (Zorn, 1998). For managers, the majority of the way in which they generate motivation for their employees comes from their communication, as communication results in roughly 70-80% of their daily work (Mintzberg, 1973). It follows that if managers shift how they communicate with their teams, and focus on positive points and re-affirm what their teams are doing, could this create a happier workforce? What would be the outcome if the majority of this communication was focused on their team's happiness, strengths, and creating optimism? In this study a manager's communication is examined, specifically based around appreciation of their employee's work, and its effect on happiness and productivity in the workplace.

In order to achieve more efficiency in teams, different studies have been done to lay the groundwork for what individuals need in order to be productive and efficient. Parker and Wu (2013) leaned in on the idea of team productivity and suggest that leaders play a large part with their staff in their organizations around the idea of proactivity and helping their employees create self-initiated behaviors rather than be told what to do. Leaders will need to take intentional steps to motivate their team's ability to be proactive for their desired outcomes and increase their team's capability. Seligman (1990) suggests that workplaces and schools see better performance when a combination

of talent and desire are apparent in their staff. When success is not apparent, it is usually attributed to a lack of talent and desire. However, failure can also occur if those two qualities are present; for example, when the individual has no optimism (in their work or project outlook) or feel that they can influence the outcome of the project. This is referred to as “learned helplessness.” Seligman (1990) talks about success in a different context, through happiness, or “learned optimism.” Positive psychology theory shows that the topics of optimism, hope, emotional intelligence, goal setting, relationship building, and positive change can be improved.

Happiness in the workplace is a benefit to organizations, as the happiest employees will take less sick leave than unhappy employees, are more energized, plan on staying longer at their organizations, and are up to twice as productive as their unhappy coworkers (Pryce-Jones, 2014). From a metrics standpoint, the happiest of employees are on task 80% of the time, compared to unhappy employees who are on task for 40% of the time (Pryce-Jones, 2014).

This study will focus on psychological well-being, how it can show up in the workplace, the positive effect it has on morale and productivity, and when integrated into their communication with employees can potentially lead to increased metrics of performance. The research presented in this study will utilize Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and positive psychology strategies to see if manager communication could create more happiness and, therefore, efficiency.

## **Background and History**

Leadership and communication have always been an integral part of developing organizations and teams and has been widely researched in a myriad of ways. Leadership

is a behavior that is enacted through communication and this communication shapes a leader's charisma (Holladay & Coombs, 1993). In addition, research conducted in the last few decades have shown that the relationship of the employee and their immediate manager is a key driver of the employee's attitude, effectiveness, and retention (Vidyarthi, Erdogan, Anand, Chaudhry & Liden, 2014). How the employee feels and expresses their work shows the emotional involvement to their role and responsibilities. The cognitive descriptor is defined by the individual's mindfulness, vigilance, and attention to their role (Kahn, 1990). Understanding how an employee works, and what motivates them is valuable knowledge. Managers have a large impact on this due to the amount they communicate with their employees on a daily basis.

### **Significance and Application**

Communication is a critical tool in the managers metaphorical "toolbox" and is the primary form in which their employees have visibility to them. It is used every day and in every type of interaction, whether it be face to face or through technological means. Communication is vital to an organization's success and it is important that its leaders are effective in motivating their teams and pulling out the productivity their teams are capable of (Fan & Han, 2018). Communication skills are typically related to a manager's performance and is a field of study for the manager to constantly be improving (Madlock, 2008). In this study we will focus on the theme of a manager's appreciative communication to create psychological well-being in their team and how impactful it can be. This topic relates to the field of Organization Development (OD) through one of OD's many focuses, workplace culture. This research will help shed light on the role of

happiness and the potential of its ripple effect in the workplace and add to the growing body of literature surrounding AI, leadership communication, and happiness.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to discover the impact that a manager's voice has. Does their communication have the power, through appreciative communication, to create a happier and more productive team? At this stage in the research, the managers communication will be generally defined as the vehicle in which the manager connects with and inspires their team. This thesis provides more insight into this topic by focusing on these three hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1: Appreciative communication with employees elevate their happiness and motivation.
- Hypothesis 2: People in leadership roles increase the perceived happiness, or psychological well-being of their teams through communication.
- Hypothesis 3: A positive focus within communication and feedback contributes to a better employee experience.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This research project is an exploration of manager communication with their teams in order to find ways to generate a happier, more engaged, and productive workforce. This study addresses a few questions:

1. What is the impact of a happier employee?
2. Does a positive focus within communication and feedback contribute to a better employee experience?
3. Can people in leadership roles increase the perceived happiness or psychological well-being of their teams through communication (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000)?

This chapter reviews literature about five different topics: leader and follower relations (teams and leader behavior), employee engagement, happiness/well-being, leader communication, and affirmative strategies (such as appreciative inquiry and positive psychology).

### Leader and Follower Relations

Individuals working together in teams has been a common theme in organizational life. Teams affect our everyday lives and are a function that we see in almost every facet of life. Effectiveness is an important topic in teams in order to turn an organizations input to outcomes and profit. There is also a rich history of research studying what makes teams effective (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006).

Teams in an organizational context are defined as two or more individuals who have specific roles and must define tasks underlying these roles (Baker & Salas, 1997). They must work together and coordinate in order to complete a specific goal or achieve a

desired outcome (Baker & Salas, 1997; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). Teams are distinguishable from other teams in their organizations based on their specific work requirements and their task interdependency (Baker & Salas, 1997).

As teams form, there is typically an identified individual who takes a leadership role, or someone who projects leadership qualities. Leadership is succinctly defined as the process of influencing and shaping followers' perceptions (Yukl, 2006; Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992). Leaders in organizational teams they are seen as influencers, motivators, and enable others to contribute towards the effectiveness of the organization or team (House, Hangers, Javidan, Dorman & Gupta, 2004). Leadership in organizations also directly (and indirectly) develops and defines structural forms, organizational culture, power distribution, and communication (Yukl, 2006).

In organizations, the teams that make up the departments and groups are individuals who all have needs that need to be met in order to be effective. To help create this efficiency, Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan, 2013) lays a simple groundwork. SDT suggests that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are needed in an employee to maintain their well-being and motivation in the workplace (Ryan, 2013). This process does not take place automatically, it sometimes requires outside environments (other individuals, sometimes leaders, or individuals in power roles) to step in and play a role. Just like flowers need sun and water to grow, meeting psychological needs can create an environment where the employee can develop (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). It is important to distinguish between need-satisfaction (well-being) and need-frustration (ill-being). For example, individuals could feel lonely if their need to be related is high yet their attempts to connect with others is being denied or connections in previous

relationships become deprived. This can bring about feelings of loneliness, rejection, and humiliation, leading to frustration (Frielink, Schuengel & Embregts, 2018).

The concept of relationships and attachment shows up in organizational life consistently. Attachment Theory was first developed by Bowlby (1969) in studies of childhood relationships and development. Attachment theory is described as how individuals develop relational attachments from repeated caring and supportive interactions with significant others (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall 1978). This concept was then adapted to the workplace and organizational landscape through Hazan and Shaver (1990) in their study of adult working relationships (Yip, Ehrhardt, & Black, 2017). It is defined in the workplace as a relational theory which explains how support, sensitivity, and responsiveness shown by key figures, including leaders/managers, can shape an individuals' willingness and ability to 'explore' their social environment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). More research on attachment theory shows an improvement within leadership, work relationships, mentoring, and workplace well-being, among others (Yip, Ehrhardt, & Black, 2017).

Between Self-Determination Theory and Attachment Theory, it is apparent how instrumental a leader's role can be to an employee and their work experience. There is a wealth of knowledge and research that has gone into studying leadership and how to be a more effective leader (Van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008). However, most of these studies have focused on the leader as an individual and the particular style in which that individual leads, rather than focusing on other aspects in this process. There have also been studies done on leadership as less of an individual focus, and more as a resource for a group or organization (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Researchers have seen successful

qualities of leaders as being predominantly ethical (Ruiz, Ruiz, & Martinez, 2010) and empowering (Hill & Bartol, 2016). Leaders are seen as influencers to their follower's environments and motivation (Dick, Hirst, Grojean & Wieseke, 2007; Niemeyer & Cavazotte, 2015; Yukl, 2006). This influence can be defined as influencing others to contribute to the goals of the group and organizing the pursuit of these goals (Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008).

Transformational Leadership theory (Bass, 1985) focuses on the idea of influence. This theory talks about four separate characteristics a leader should have. The first component of the theory idealizes influence and qualities that employees (or followers) would attribute to a role model and someone who does the right thing (a leader with strong values). The second is inspirational motivation, being able to communicate a positive vision and goals with high expectations of their team. The third focuses on a leader who is open to new ways of accomplishing tasks and encouraging others entrepreneurship. Treating employees as individuals, the fourth characteristic, is when the leader focuses on developing his teams' skills, through caring and compassion (Arnold, 2017).

A portion of communication from a leader is designed to inspire and motivate. If we are looking to define motivation, specifically employee motivation, we can look at Motivational Language Theory (Mayfield, Mayfield & Kopf, 1995; Sullivan, 1988) as a foundation. This theory suggests that,

1. What a manager says to an employee affects employee motivation. 2.

Managerial communication can be categorized in terms of three kinds of speech acts: (a) those that reduce employee uncertainty and increase his or her

knowledge; (b) those that implicitly reaffirm the employee's sense of self-worth as a human being; (c) and those that facilitate the employee's construction of cognitive schemas and scripts, which will be used to guide the employee in his or her work. 3. Managerial influence on employee motivation through communication is a function of the variety of speech acts that are employed. The more varied the speech acts, the greater the likelihood that the manager will influence employee motivation. (Sullivan, 1988, p. 104)

As Sullivan (1988) suggests, through these varied speech acts the employee can feel more of an impact from their manager. This ties directly to Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a way for individuals needs to be met. This theory suggests that individuals need to be reached through their autonomy, competence, and relatedness in order to contribute to their proactivity, integration, and well-being. These three components are supported through what Sullivan (1988) suggests in Motivational Language Theory. Although, if these psychological needs are not met, frustration can set in and create a sense of passivity, fragmentation, and ill-being (Ryan, 2013). As we can already see, cultivating employee motivation needs a multi-faceted strategy as it is not inherently sustainable and requires different parts of the employees psyche to be engaged.

All these theories provide context to the value a leader brings to their organization, but more importantly their team and how their actions can affect their employees. From the qualities listed from Self-Determination Theory to Attachment Theory, these concepts can help leaders understand the impact they actually have (Yip, Ehrhardt, & Black, 2017).

## **Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement has been described as the harnessing of members in organizations to their work roles where they employ and express themselves physically, emotionally, and cognitively to their role (Walden, Jung, & Westerman, 2017). How the employee feels and expresses their work shows the emotional involvement to their role and responsibilities. The cognitive descriptor is defined by the individual's mindfulness, vigilance, and attention to their role (Kahn, 1990). Employee engagement is often confused with organizational commitment, which can be considered a person's attitude towards their organization. The word "engagement" does not signify an attitude, it is the degree of other qualities of the employee, such as attentiveness and absorption in their role (Saks, 2006). Employees feel more inclined to repay their organizations, through their effort and focus, when they feel supported and invested in. This makes them feel more deeply connected to their roles and performances (Kahn, 1990). This feeling of support can also be driven through their managers connection to them (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). There are six requirements that organizations should provide their employees, according to Ruck and Welch (2012): clarification of the employees role, identifying the employee with the organization, showing and giving support, information that helps the employee understand the goals and strategy, giving them a voice, and providing job performance feedback. When these six components are felt, the result is a higher level of employee engagement (Ruck & Welch, 2012).

Building off of Kahn (1990), Rothbard (2001) suggested that two more components should be added to the idea of employee engagement in being physically, emotionally, and cognitively invested: attention and absorption. Attention refers to the

cognitive resources, including concentration and energy, one puts into their work.

Absorption is defined as the level of immersion that one has at work, how deeply involved they are, and how likely they are to be distracted (Rothbard, 2001).

When employees feel invested in, Social Exchange Theory (Saks, 2006) explains why they would want to give back. One way for employees to repay their organization is through their level of motivation and output. Employees will choose to engage at different degrees of intensity in response to the support they have received (Saks, 2006).

Combining the six components that Ruck and Welch (2012) suggest and the additional two from Rothbard (2001), the level of employee attention and engagement can be increased. When an employee feels invested in from these ways, the investment is returned in the form of their work output (Saks, 2006).

### **Happiness/Well-Being**

Throughout history there have been many philosophers that have researched or talked about their perspective of happiness. Buddha believed the path the happiness began with understanding the root cause of suffering, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali described it as the transformation of oneself and the realization that one is a spiritual being, John Locke coined the phrase “the pursuit of happiness” and followed along with the Greek writings of happiness as satisfaction or pleasure (Bhutoria & Hooja, 2018). The common ideology here is that happiness is both subjective and a choice. Ultimately, people are happy to the extent that they believe in themselves to be happy (Rego, Souto, & Cunha, 2009). Research has shown that the idea of happiness is universal, but that culture and society play large roles in how people view happiness (Pflug, 2009). Happiness in the workplace also plays a critical role in peoples lives. It can provide them with material,

social, psychological, and emotional resources to satisfy their primary and secondary needs (Rego, Souto, & Cunha, 2009). It has also been suggested that an individual will be more intrinsically happy if they are fulfilling a ‘calling’ or a connection between what they might deem their purpose to be and their tasks at work (Seligman, 2002).

Happiness is somewhat of an un-measurable term. Within organizational sciences, the idea of job satisfaction is more specifically a descriptor of one’s workplace happiness, not as an overall view of happiness in one’s life. For instance, using Motivational Language Theory, the goal is to increase the employees self worth in the workplace (where ideally this feeling would trickle into their whole life) (Sullivan, 1988). This leads to psychological well-being, which is operationalized as a broader description than job satisfaction and encapsulates an employee’s life at and away from their job.

Psychological well-being is a combination of the feelings of affective well-being, competence, aspiration, autonomy, integrative functioning, and satisfaction (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Warr, 1990). The descriptors of affective well-being are a major part of psychological well being, which is the frequent experience of positive affects and infrequent experience of negative effects (Daniels, 2000; Diener & Larsen, 1993).

One way to view affective well-being is relating specific experiences not only in terms of displeasure-to pleasure, but also through low-to-high mental activation (Warr, 2012). The feelings associated to this are described as Anxiety (activated negative affect), Enthusiasm (activated positive affect), Depression (low-activation negative affect), and Comfort (low-activation positive affect) (Warr, 2012). “Happiness” falls into the activated positive affect quadrant.

Psychologists have also focused on two other components of psychological well-being: hedonic and eudemonic (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The hedonic component is viewed as subjective experiences of pleasure, or the balance of the positive and the negative feelings and thoughts in an individual. In organizations, job satisfaction represents the hedonic approach to understanding an employee's psychological well-being: job satisfaction is defined in terms of their thoughts about their work situations (Grant, Christianson & Price, 2007; Weiss, 2002). The eudemonic component of psychological well-being is concerned with fulfillment and the awareness of human potential. This is defined by the employees' feelings of fulfillment and purpose (Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). Hedonic descriptors are typically on the high end of feeling activated, and these feelings could be related to feeling alert and energetic. The opposite, according to Warr (2012) is low activation, with the feelings of fatigue or sluggish. To be high on well-being is to be simultaneously low on negative emotion and high on a positive one (Wright, Cropanzano, & Bonett, 2007).

The topic of happiness relating to efficiency has been questioned since the 1930's with the concept that the happier the worker is, the more productive they are. This concept has important implications for management and strategies in the workplace. The concept is the idea that happier people will be more productive (Zelenski, Murphy, & Jenkins, 2008). Research found that employees more prone to negative emotions were more likely to use confrontational interpersonal tactics to produce negative emotions from peers (Bolger & Schilling, 1991). Also, less happy employees are more vulnerable to threats, acted more defensive, and were pessimistic. On the other hand, happier employees are helpful to co-workers, more confident, and sensitive to opportunities

(Cropanzano & Wright, 2001). Multiple studies have linked happiness to job performance (productivity), and in similar findings, they noted that happiness should instead be considered psychological well-being, as scholars prefer the term well-being to avoid the imprecision captured by the looser term *happiness* (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000; Wright, Cropanzano, & Bonett, 2007; Zelinski, Murphy, & Jenkins, 2008). For the sake of this research, we will view happiness as psychological well-being and look to help provide more of a basis for theories that look to connect psychological well-being to job performance, efficiency, and productivity.

One of the many ways that happiness or psychological well-being has been measured is through the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 2002). This questionnaire is a widely used scale to assess personal happiness that measures through 29 items. These are measured through a Likert-scale covering topics such as sociability, sense of control, mental alertness, self-esteem, optimism, and empathy (Hills & Argyle, 2002).

The Positive Affect (PA) and Negative Affect (NA) Scale, also known as the PANAS, is a 10-point scale that is a self-reporting tool used often in psychology for many different populations based on the difference in culture and language (Watson & Clark, 1994). It helps assess moods that are consciously felt and present (Masih et al., 2019). There are a few forms of this scale such as the PANAS-X, which is an expanded version of the original PANAS, that measures 11 distinct affects: Fear, Sadness, Guilt, Hostility, Shyness, Fatigue, Surprise, Joviality, Self-Assurance, Attentiveness, and Serenity (Watson & Clark, 1994). The I-PANAS-SF is short for International Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scale – Short Form, which was designed to be simple and

easy to use cross culturally as the PANAS alone has the most validity in North America (Karim et al., 2011). Words such as “determined, enthusiastic, or happy” would fall into Positive Affect, whereas descriptors such as “ashamed, upset, or sad,” would be in the Negative Affect list (Watson & Clark, 1994). Although Positive Affect and Negative Affect seem like opposites, research suggests that these two ideas operate independently and are not on the same “axis” (Bhutoria & Hooja, 2018). In this study, I will use the PANAS to assess an individual’s happiness, a mood, after communication with their manager (Crawford et al., 2009).

### **Leader Communication**

Internal communication, also known as employee communication, is a central process where employees share information, create relationships, make meaning, and construct the organizations culture and values (Berger, 2008). Internal communication is one of the most powerful and dominant activities in an organization because it helps employees coordinate, make decisions, solve problems, and proceed through change management processes (Berger, 2008). The internal communication system in organizations is significantly affected through organizational hierarchical communication. This is represented through leadership as a top-down (or sometimes bottom-up) communication strategy between the layers of executives, managers, and supervisors (Whitworth, 2011).

Immediate supervisors are the information source preferred by employees, which in turn means that they have more credibility with their employees than the senior executives (Larkin & Larkin, 1994; Whitworth, 2011). In order to have a larger impact on their employees, communication competence and style of a leader’s communication are

extremely valuable and can shape follower perception through the information communicated (Men & Stacks, 2014). If leadership is defined as the process of influencing and shaping followers perceptions (Yukl, 2006; Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992), then when leaders clearly and persuasively communicate an idea or vision they are able to gain the confidence of their employees or followers (Holladay & Coombs, 1993). Additionally, when leaders are able to communicate effectively, usually containing relational (affective) and task (content) components, satisfaction increases in their follower's experience (Madlock, 2008).

In order to create these higher levels of satisfactions, employers have been 'job crafting,' which is the idea of modifying tasks or psychologically reframing job tasks in order to better suit the individual, and their perceived purpose, in doing them (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). For instance, redefining tasks for nurses, rather than the perception that they are completing menial tasks for doctors, they can redefine their tasks to be seen as helping patients heal (Fisher, 2009).

Leader-Member exchange (LMX) theory is a view of leadership at the dyadic level of communication and suggests that leaders influence their employees (or followers) through a unique relationship built on trust between individuals (Vidarthi, Erdogan, Anand, Liden, & Chaudhry, 2014). This theory suggests that leadership is in the quality of the relationship between the manager and the employee (Vidarthi et al., 2014). Higher quality relationships between the leader and follower reflect stronger interpersonal attachment through a larger number of interactions. These relationships promote an increase in job performance, organizational commitment, and a supportive behavior towards the leader (Bauer & Erdogan, 2015; Liao, Liu, Li & Song, 2019). LMX

shows up differently between the leader and specific employees. In low-LMX relationships, relationships are looked at more contractually. Employees take on responsibilities they are “contractually” obliged to complete. In high-LMX relationships, the leader and their employees share similar goals and extend support to one another (Pan & Lin, 2018). These high-LMX relationships happen due to an engaged leader whose qualities are displayed by continued interactions with their employees while investing time and effort to make the employee feel valued (Gutermann, Lehmann-Willenbrock, Boar, Born, & Voelpel, 2017). As LMX theory does talk about qualities similar to transformational leadership, but there is a gap in the research where leadership communication and affirmative strategies effect employee psychological well-being.

### **Appreciative Strategies**

Communication from leaders to their followers, or employees, can make a huge impact on their behavior. Not only can leaders influence their employee’s perception of the organization, but this influence also directly (and indirectly) develops and defines structural forms and organizational culture (Yukl, 2006), not to mention employees’ emotions, attitudes, and behaviors (Pan & Lin, 2018). This study looks into affirmative strategies driven through communication. The two I will look into deeper are Positive Psychology and Appreciative Inquiry.

Positive Psychology emerged in 1998 when Martin Seligman was the president of the American Psychological Association. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) defined positive psychology as:

The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and

optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present). At the individual level, it is about positive individual traits: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level, it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic. (p. 5)

This theory has been researched to improve many qualities important to organizations, such as leadership, ability to initiate positive change, job satisfaction, work engagement, and well-being (Donaldson & Ko, 2010). Seligman and Peterson went on to further name 24-character strengths that were assigned to six virtues of a positive traits. These six virtues are 1. Wisdom and knowledge, 2. Courage, 3. Humanity, 4. Justice, 5. Temperance, and 6. Transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Positive psychology is not only isolated to organizational life, it is a field of thought that has proliferated both professional and personal environments (Morganson, Litano, & O'Neill, 2014).

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an organizational change model (Cooperrider et al., 2008) and has been applied to many contexts for individual philosophies within organizations as a process model (Doggett & Lewis, 2013; Naaldenberg, et al., 2015). AI is a strengths-based approach that is based around the idea that every organization is doing something that works. AI focuses on these strengths and uses them as the starting place for change, thinking of “what is” and exploring “what it could be (Doggett & Lewis, 2013). There are five core principles of AI as a basis for using it as a change management method. The first is the ‘constructionist principle,’ which suggests that our

knowledge of ourselves and the world is constructed through our interactions with others. We co-create our existence, through communication, with others around us – collectively giving meaning to everything in our environment. The ‘principle of simultaneity’ recognizes that inquiry and change happen at the same time and are not separate ideas. Simply asking a question creates change. The third, the ‘poetic principle,’ describes teams and organizations as endless sources for study and knowledge. As in, we can find whatever we want in an organization or individual: good and bad, right and wrong. This principle is centered around the idea of what we focus on creates our reality (Kelm, 2015). The ‘anticipatory principle’ suggests that organizations behave the way they do because they are being guided by their future goals. Making the future an emergent reality created by images in our present of what we think the future might look like (Kelm, 2015). The final principle, the ‘positive principle,’ is based on what is working in order to motivate others to do more of it (Cooperrider, et al, 2008; Doggett & Lewis, 2013). These five principles lead into the 4-D cycle: discovery, dream, design, and destiny (Curtis et al., 2017; Naaldenberg et al., 2015). The different stages of this cycle are described by Cooperrider et al. (2008) as:

1. Discovery. Appreciate and value the best of what is; what is positive about being here in order to act as a resource enable strategies later.
2. Dream. Imagine and envision what might be; what are we aiming to achieve.
3. Design. Co-construct how it will be in the future; what is realistic to achieve in the next six months?
4. Destiny. Learn, empower and improvise to sustain it, that is putting plans into action. (p. 35)

## Summary

There are a number of variables in creating a happy, productive, and motivated team -- employee autonomy, competence, and relatedness are the best way to motivate each individual on your team in order to get the productivity needed (Ryan, 2013).

Leaders need to keep these tactics in mind in order to generate their team's productivity and keep these individuals engaged. Internal communication is the fundamental way to do this, as communication is the key piece needed in disseminating information, moving through change process plans, and solving conflict (Berger, 2008).

Happier employees in a state of well-being are more productive. Their positive emotions tend to help with skill building, they are more helpful, more productive, and better problem solvers (Zelenski & Larsen, 2000). What can leaders do to maintain a level of happiness in their teams? Positive psychology and appreciative inquiry define these processes in a strategic way that gives a detailed step by step processes in how to steer a conversation towards an individuals or organizations strengths. The use of these strengths is likely to help lead to better levels of job performance due to it bringing about feelings within people of competence and being invigorated (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

## Chapter 3: Methodology

This purpose of this study is an exploration of managerial leadership communication and its impact on an employee's psychological well-being. This thesis seeks to provide more insight on whether using appreciative communication methods from managers promotes happiness (or psychological well-being) in their employees.

- Hypothesis 1: Appreciative communication with employees elevate their happiness and motivation.
- Hypothesis 2: People in leadership roles increase the perceived happiness, or psychological well-being of their teams through communication.
- Hypothesis 3: A positive focus within communication and feedback contributes to a better employee experience.

This chapter includes the outline of the research design, a description of the sample and research settings, an explanation of the different research methods that were used, a description of how the data will be analyzed, and an overview of the steps taken for the protection of the human subjects used in the project.

### Research Design

In order to determine the role a manager's communication has on their employee's psychological well-being, this study uses a convergent mixed method design utilizing both surveys and interviews. This mixed method research design involves the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data followed by rigorous methods of analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Psychological well-being is explored through a survey (Appendix A), the PANAS (Appendix B), and an interview (Appendix C).

The PANAS is a 20-question survey helps assess moods that are consciously felt and present (Masih et al., 2019) and is acceptable to use in many cultures due to its

straightforward and simple nature (Karim et al., 2011). This scale is designed to help indicate the level of subjective well-being for the individual taking it, which is an ideal fit for this research. This survey is compiled between two 10 item mood scales, one to measure positive affect and the other to measure negative affect. The design was approved by Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board and all the requisite training was completed prior to the research being conducted.

Qualitative data was gathered by conducting a structured interview with managers in a face to face meeting. These interviews utilized a script, in order to maintain consistency. A 10-question interview protocol for each manager was used (Appendix C). Managers were interviewed in order to generate more in-depth answers about their communication and leadership styles than a survey could provide. The information the managers provide was scribed by me, as well as recorded in order to maintain accuracy when coding.

Quantitative data was collected through conducting a 30-question survey protocol. The surveys were dispersed to the employees of the managers interviewed in order to collect relevant data to correlate between the quantitative and qualitative.

### **Research Sample and Settings**

The population of this study consisted of individuals on teams in organizations in Southern California, specifically the managers and their direct reports. These organizations were identified through a sample of convenience and with a snowballing effect from those already interviewed. The managers and employees were specifically chosen from different industries in order to gather a wider base of research, rather than a specific industry. The questions posed are intended to gather information about the

current practice of the manager and how the employees perceive it. All the individuals in these organizations have different structures in their team make-up, resulting in the employees working in different contexts with their managers, ideally providing a more diverse basis for the research. Inclusion criteria consisted of managers who oversee a minimum of eight employees with at least two years of experience. A population of 12 managers and their respective teams (N = 92), were recruited and intended for this study.

### **Data Analysis**

A convergent mixed methods design was used for this research. For the qualitative data, the data was analyzed by coding the data and collecting the themes and categorized by similarities. After the coding was completed, the quantitative database was grouped by each organization in order to compare the quantitative results to the managers qualitative interview responses. The qualitative findings were reported first and compared against the quantitative results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The manager interviews were collected and placed into the same group to create a broader variety for comparative analysis. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was utilized in order to note differences between organizations and the manager group. The Pearson's correlational analysis was used to notice similarities and differences between organizations based around the data collected in the surveys to find common themes and patterns. Comparative analysis used cumulative frequencies to notice and assess similarities between different organizational themes.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

Prior to the collection of data from any company, managers were contacted by me if they expressed an interest and a formal letter was signed for approval of the study in

their organization. Once approved, a formal correspondence went out to each individual on their team informing them of the study and instructing them on how to complete the survey.

In order to maintain the privacy of both the managers and their employees taking the survey, each company's data was saved in a different folder on my laptop and then migrated to an external hard drive with the data saved in different folders. The master folder was locked with a password, same with access into the external hard drive. On all the surveys and data gathered, all employee names were excluded and only the managers title was saved in their interview and survey results.

The researcher traveled to each organizations location to administer the interviews face-to-face or via video conferencing; notes were taken on my computer. Prior to collecting any qualitative information from the interviews, an introduction was read aloud to the participants:

I am collecting data in order to provide a research-based context for a thesis project I am completing as a part of obtaining a Master of Science in Organization Development from Pepperdine University. The interview is confidential – this means that I will not use your name, but I will use the information that you provide to inform my hypothesis. I will record your response to each question and read back to you what I have written, if requested. If I have misunderstood what you have said or inaccurately recorded your response, please let me know and we'll make corrections before moving on to the next question. Do you have any questions of me before we begin?

In order to keep the consistency of privacy, these interviews were administered in a private office, conference room, or private video conferencing room. There was no cost to the participant in this study nor was any incentive given for doing so.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the research methodology, design, sample and setting, and a description on how the data will be analyzed. I also described the actions that were taken in order to keep the interview and survey data private. An overview of the survey and interview strategies was given, as well as a descriptor of the PANAS test that will be administered. The next chapter will be an analysis of the data collected from these strategies.

## Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the results of the mixed methods study. These results give more data to support the findings of the hypothesis:

- Hypothesis 1: Appreciative communication with employees elevate their happiness and motivation.
- Hypothesis 2: People in leadership roles increase the perceived happiness, or psychological well-being of their teams through communication.
- Hypothesis 3: A positive focus within communication and feedback contributes to a better employee experience.

The data gathered for each of the two portions of the data collection (the interview of the manager and survey of their employees) are presented. The chapter ends with a summary.

### **Qualitative Data - Manager Interviews, Questions 1 & 2**

12 managers were interviewed with questions designed to pull out information regarding their communication style to their employees; more specifically, their style when providing appreciative communication (Appendix A). The first question in this interview was designed to understand the cadence each manager is communicating with their employees. The second question added data to their perception on how much they communicate with their team in an appreciative manner, as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Data from Questions 1 & 2*

	Daily	Weekly	Bi-weekly
As a manager/ boss/ leader, how often do you communicate with members on your team?	10	2	
How often do you communicate with your team in an appreciative manner?	8	3	1

N = 12

Participants provided more elaborate descriptions in their answers to these questions, giving more context and description on when and in what capacity they communicate to their employees. For Question 1, 10 managers communicated that they spend the majority of their days in communication with their employees. Although, there was not consistency here as other managers expressed that weekly team communication was enough.

A manager also expressed how important their answer was for Question 2, stating, “We do not pay attention to the positive stuff enough.” Another manager said, “If I want a team that will respect me, I need to recognize the little things and acknowledge them for us to continue to grow. I make an effort for them to be inspired and engaged.”

**Question 3**

For the third question, managers were asked to recall a time they communicated with a member of their team in an appreciative way and to express their observation of that employee the remainder of the day. In each example, managers expressed a variety of impacts, the most common being an increase in productivity and engagement (N = 9).

A manager described the impact as, “he (the employee) brightened up and it seems like

he feels supported. He seems more invested now in his work and in growing his knowledge base.” Another manager shared an example of the impact of their appreciative communication towards a few of their employees working on a project together,

I gave one of my teams a big assignment that was difficult for them... I brought them in and spoke to them for motivation. They bought in and came together to strategize a way to complete it. The effect of this conversation permeated the next few weeks and kept them engaged. To make them work together was very key and important for me as well.

The other impacts that were observed by the managers of their employees were a verbal response of appreciation, characterized as the employee verbally expressing their appreciation back to the manager (n = 4), a physical response, as in the employee softening their shoulders or giving a large smile (n = 4), and emotional responses, such as tears (n = 2). One of the managers who shared an example of an employee giving both a physical and engaged response said, “it’s the little celebrations that you do for your team that makes them loyal.”

#### **Question 4**

This question provided information to when these managers use appreciative feedback, and what those times might be. They expressed that this communication should be expressed in the moment (n = 5), with a couple (n = 2) stating that, “it’s always the right time.” Others wanted to make sure that their employees were in the right mental state and were present to the feedback (n = 4). They also noted that when an employee goes above their job duty is when appreciative communication should be used (n = 2). The use of gifts, or food, in conjunction with the appreciative feedback, “I know my team

well, and they are motivated by food. So, to appreciate them I'll buy them food or take them out to lunch." Another theme that was noted was giving this feedback to each individual employee subjectively based around knowing how the employee likes to hear praise (n = 3). To this point, a manager said, "It's not about the time of day, but about knowing them and when and where to acknowledge them. Whether it's one on one or in public. I just want to make sure it's acknowledged."

### **Question 5**

Looking at an appreciative communication intention was the focus for this question, in order to see if managers are using any tools or skills or to have a desired outcome from the communication. The answers given from the managers were themed into giving the communication in a sincere way (n = 5), to deliver impact to the employee (n = 3), to give this style of communication with a consistent frequency (n = 3), to make the employee feel important (n = 3), and to make their communication individualized to the employee their expressing their appreciation to (n = 3). One of the managers answered by saying, "I'll take the time to sit with them in their office to work with them on things. What's most important is that I'm there with them to work through it." There was only one manager who expressed a strategy in how the feedback is delivered to their employee, through "sandwich feedback," by saying, "I give them sandwich feedback, something good, something to work on, then something good. If you start with a positive, you can listen to the middle in a beneficial way."

### **Question 6**

This question was focused on the managers observation of their employee's demeanor and productivity after the appreciation was given. The answers given by the

managers were themed into three main categories: productivity boost after appreciative communication (n = 5), a verbal and physical response of appreciation back to the manager (n = 4), and a general positive increase was noticed (n = 4). Notable quotes from the answers were, “I think it creates a sense of belonging. I don’t have data points to support this, but I think when they see their work matters, they work harder,” as well as, “generally, it can be immediate on demeanor and helps productivity. I think people need the positive recognition to survive here,” and, “they are definitely more engaged and thoughtful. I can tell because they are starting to ask smarter or more intuitive questions. I find I have a more interactive opportunity when I jump in with the appreciation first.”

#### **Question 7**

Appreciative feedback examples were pulled from this question as it asked for a specific example based around the managers experience in communicating in an appreciative way with their employees. Specifically, it focused around the behavioral impact this style of communication had. The largest impact that was noticed was one of engagement (n = 9). Managers brought up instances where their employees would react by working harder to receive more of this feedback, expressed confidence through a stronger work ethic, would excitedly share the feedback they received with others, and that there was even a trickle-down effect where if the managers employee had employees, these individuals would increase their productivity as well. To these points, a manager expressed that, “I went to the effort to get an employee a wage increases without him knowing. When he saw that, he stepped up his efforts even more. Coming in earlier, working harder, working better with his teammates. I think what mattered most to him was that I cared to do it.” Out of these examples, managers also shared that they see a

“physical response,” as in the employee smiling, giving a hug, or even tears when appreciation was shared (n = 5). Other behavioral responses were brought up from the examples that were shared of a noticeable increase in trust from the employee to the manager (n = 2) and an increase in the relationship between the two individuals (n = 2).

### **Question 8**

On the flip side, I also wanted to understand the managers experience in providing “negative” feedback and their employees behavioral response because of it. Out of the 12 managers interviewed, seven of them were unable (n = 4) or would not (n = 3) provide an example of providing this feedback. The managers who would not provide an example stated that they found no value in giving this type of feedback to their employees, as they had not seen a shift from using it in the past. Although, I had a different manager express that this feedback is “easier to recall because it sticks in my brain.” From the managers that did have an example (n = 7), there was a large majority that expressed their employee responded in a way that was negative (n = 6), with one citing a positive change. They also noted that their employees were defensive in these conversations (n = 4) and two managers shared experiences of initial conversations with their employees that were eventually terminated (n = 2).

### **Questions 9 & 10**

These final questions were centered around what these managers thought were the most important qualities a manager could have in their communication, and then rated their communication based off of the qualities they noted. Table 2 shows these results.

**Table 2**

***Important Manager Communication Qualities***

Quality	Direct	Good Listener	Honesty	Consistency	Empathy & Vulnerability	Understand Employee	Candid & Transparent
Important Quality	5	3	5	4	5	4	6

N = 12

There was a wide spread of values expressed. These were grouped into codes based on where the myriad of values expressed would fit. The most mentioned quality was in “candid and transparent,” although only half of the managers thought this was an important quality in a manager’s communication. From these qualities, managers rated their communication skills in a Likert scale format from 1-5, 1 being poor and 5 being excellent. From this population, the majority of managers rated themselves as a 4 while the remaining rated themselves a 4.5 (n = 2). When the managers were asked why they did not rate themselves a 5, some managers expressed “there is room for improvement” (n = 5) while others cited a “lack of time” to have the conversations they need to have with their employees (n = 2).

**Quantitative Data – Employee Surveys & PANAS**

After the manager interviews were completed, their employees were surveyed based on a two-part survey. The initial part were questions directly related to appreciation and manager communication to generate a larger understanding of how employees view their managers communication in regard to their happiness and output. The second part was the PANAS which helped create a broader understanding of the emotional result

from their managers communication. The initial portion of this survey is seen below as cumulative data from the research from the twelve organizations in Table 3:

**Table 3**  
***Cumulative Employee Surveys***

(1 = not at all, 5 = most of the time)	1	2	3	4	5	MEAN
I am happy at work when my manager communicates with me in an appreciative manner	1	0	3	14	74	4.74
I am productive when completing my tasks and my manager appreciates that work	2	1	4	18	67	4.60
My manager communicates with me often in an appreciative manner	5	5	8	26	48	4.16
My manager communicates in a way that creates a satisfying work environment	4	5	9	25	49	4.20
My manager treats me with compassion and respect	1	4	7	14	66	4.52
On days when my manager communicates in an appreciative way, I am more productive	4	0	8	21	59	4.42
The way my manager communicates plays a large role in my work experience	1	4	7	21	59	4.45
I receive feedback on my work that makes me feel motivated	3	7	14	22	46	4.10
I feel motivated when I receive positive constructive feedback	2	1	4	20	65	4.58
I feel motivated when I receive negative constructive feedback	12	6	28	27	19	3.38
My manager plays a large role in my happiness at work	5	3	20	27	37	3.96

N = 92

Employees overall reported a higher level of psychological well-being from appreciative manager communication ( $M = 4.74$ ), which was the highest mean score of any of the collected answers. Employees also expressed that they felt more productive when being communicated with in this way ( $M = 4.60$ ). These two scores are meaningful, as “the way my manager communicates plays a large role in my work experience,” scored high ( $M = 4.45$ ), showing the value that a manager’s communication has in an employee work experience. Although “my manager plays a large role in my happiness at work,” scored lower ( $M = 3.96$ ) than the previous question discussed, even though it was predominantly positively reported. Interesting to note that the managers communication scored higher than when the question was more focused on the manager in general.

There is an interesting, positive correlation between employees being productive and their manager verbally appreciating that work ( $M = 4.60$ ) and a manager using appreciative communication towards their employees generating an outcome of higher productivity ( $M = 4.42$ ).

A comparison can be made between the two questions, “I feel motivated when I receive positive constructive feedback” and “I feel motivated when I receive negative constructive feedback.” The positive feedback question ( $M = 4.58$ ) had a higher average score than the collective answers for the negative feedback ( $M = 3.38$ ). It is interesting to note that the negative feedback answer elicits motivation from employees, just not at the same level as positive feedback.

Once this data was collected, Pearson’s Correlational Analysis was conducted between the relationship of each of the 12 organizations between two of the surveyed statements: “I am happy at work when my manager communicates with me in an

appreciative manner” and “I feel motivated when I receive positive constructive feedback.” This correlation was noted due to adding data between the relationship of a manager’s appreciative communication and how that communication impacts their employee’s motivation or engagement. The correlation between these two variables is 0.85, showing a very strong relationship between the responses to these two questions.

The second part of the survey, the PANAS, was presented to the employees to collect emotive data based around a manager’s communication. The prompt for this section was, “Recall times of when you have communicated with your manager the past few weeks and indicate below on each emotion listed for how you felt during those interactions.” The cumulative responses are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4*****Cumulative Employee PANAS***

<b>MOOD SCALE</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>MEAN</b>
INTERESTED (+)	2	3	11	41	33	4.11
DISTRESSED (-)	46	23	12	6	3	1.86
EXCITED (+)	5	8	28	37	12	3.48
UPSET (-)	58	17	12	2	1	1.57
STRONG (+)	5	7	25	33	20	3.62
GUILTY (-)	79	6	5	0	0	1.18
SCARED (-)	71	8	7	4	0	1.38
HOSTILE (-)	82	4	4	0	0	1.13
ENTHUSIASTIC (+)	3	6	23	37	21	3.74
PROUD (+)	5	8	18	28	31	3.80
IRRITABLE (-)	63	14	10	2	1	1.49
ALERT (+)	6	6	22	35	21	3.66
ASHAMED (-)	81	4	5	0	0	1.16
INSPIRED (+)	4	7	23	28	28	3.77
NERVOUS (-)	52	23	10	5	0	1.64
DETERMINED (+)	4	5	13	34	34	3.99
ATTENTIVE (+)	2	4	14	39	31	4.03
JITTERY (-)	66	13	10	1	0	1.40
ACTIVE (+)	4	4	24	29	29	3.83
AFRAID (-)	76	6	7	1	0	1.26

N = 90 (positive affect = +, negative affect = -)

The two highest reported responses were from employees noticing an emotional reaction being “interested” in the managers communication ( $M = 4.11$ ) and feeling “attentive” when the manager was communicating ( $M = 4.03$ ). Both of these moods were listed in the positive affect of the PANAS reporting. The two lowest reported responses

were from the employees not feeling “hostile” ( $M = 1.13$ ) or “ashamed” ( $M = 1.16$ ) after their manager had communicated with them. Feeling “guilty” was close in regard to the cumulative mean ( $M = 1.18$ ). All three of these moods were listed from the negative affect on this scale. Other emotions to score below a mean of 2.0 were “distressed ( $M = 1.86$ ),” “upset ( $M = 1.57$ ),” “scared ( $M = 1.38$ ),” “irritable ( $M = 1.49$ ),” nervous ( $M = 1.64$ ), “jittery ( $M = 1.40$ ),” and “afraid ( $M = 1.26$ ).”

All of the negative affect moods (distressed, upset, guilty, scared, hostile, irritable, ashamed, nervous, jittery, and afraid) presented were scored collectively below a 2.0 on the Likert scale, averaging out to a mean of 1.41. In fact, none of the organizations represented had a mean above 2.0 in regard to the negative affect, as Table 5 shows. Collectively, the positive affect mood items (interested, excited, strong, enthusiastic, proud, alert, inspired, determined, attentive, and active) had a mean of 3.80. The lowest scored of the positive affect items were “excited (Mean = 3.48),” and “strong (Mean = 3.62).” For the positive affect, only three organizations employees supported a collective mean above 4.0.

**Table 5**

***PANAS Mood Affect Per Organization***

<b>ORGANIZATION CODE</b>	<b>POSITIVE AFFECT</b>	<b>NEGATIVE AFFECT</b>
BLACK	4.16	1.40
BLUE	3.93	1.10
GREEN	3.62	1.37
GREY	3.42	1.34
ORANGE	3.80	1.64
PINK	3.89	1.46
PURPLE	3.30	1.82
RED	3.97	1.31
TAN	4.29	1.17
TEAL	3.46	1.51
WHITE	4.20	1.19
YELLOW	3.68	1.58

**Manager Survey**

The manager survey, the same as the employee survey, was scored once the managers were completed with their interviews. These scores are posted in Table 6.

**Table 6*****Cumulative Manager Surveys***

(1 = not at all, 5 = most of the time)	1	2	3	4	5	MEAN
I am happy at work when my manager communicates with me in an appreciative manner	0	0	0	3	9	4.75
I am productive when completing my tasks and my manager appreciates that work	0	0	0	6	6	4.5
My manager communicates with me often in an appreciative manner	0	1	2	7	2	3.83
My manager communicates in a way that creates a satisfying work environment	0	1	2	6	3	3.92
My manager treats me with compassion and respect	0	0	2	3	7	4.42
On days when my manager communicates in an appreciative way, I am more productive	0	0	1	4	7	4.5
The way my manager communicates plays a large role in my work experience	1	0	1	3	7	4.25
I receive feedback on my work that makes me feel motivated	0	1	2	6	3	3.92
I feel motivated when I receive positive constructive feedback	0	0	0	5	7	4.58
I feel motivated when I receive negative constructive feedback	0	2	4	5	1	3.42
My manager plays a large role in my happiness at work	1	0	1	3	7	4.25

N = 12

The mean responses are compared, in Table 7, to the employees mean responses to their completed surveys.

**Table 7**

***Employee/Manager Survey Side by Side***

(1 = not at all, 5 = most of the time)	Employee	Manager
I am happy at work when my manager communicates with me in an appreciative manner	4.74	4.75
I am productive when completing my tasks and my manager appreciates that work	4.6	4.5
My manager communicates with me often in an appreciative manner	4.16	3.83
My manager communicates in a way that creates a satisfying work environment	4.2	3.92
My manager treats me with compassion and respect	4.52	4.42
On days when my manager communicates in an appreciative way, I am more productive	4.42	4.5
The way my manager communicates plays a large role in my work experience	4.45	4.25
I receive feedback on my work that makes me feel motivated	4.1	3.92
I feel motivated when I receive positive constructive feedback	4.58	4.58
I feel motivated when I receive negative constructive feedback	3.38	3.42
My manager plays a large role in my happiness at work	3.96	4.25

Once all these surveys were complete, an ANOVA test was run to compare the differences between the overall group of surveyed employees within organizations to the manager group. The main research focus in this thesis is understanding if appreciative strategies to communicate with employees elevates their happiness and motivation. The ANOVA test was run based off the responses from the initial statement in the survey of, “I am happy at work when my manager communicates with me in an appreciative manner.” The test was not significant.

Comparing the two grouped results side by side shows similarities in answers and fewer discrepancies between the two collective mindsets of the groups. For instance, the two statements with the closest responses were the first statement (I am happy at work when my manager communicates with me in an appreciative manner) and the ninth statement (I feel motivated when I receive positive constructive feedback). When it came to largest differences, the two statements were “my manager plays a large role in my happiness at work” and “my manager communicates in a way that creates a satisfying work environment.”

### **Manager PANAS**

The PANAS portion of the manager survey was scored very close to what the collective employee results were. Collecting the scores for the positive mean of the ten separate emotions, the managers positive mean was 3.88, where their employees mean was 3.80. The negative affect mean for the ten emotions listed for the managers was 1.43, where the employees averaged 1.41. The manager results are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8*****Cumulative Manager PANAS***

<b>MOOD SCALE</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>MEAN</b>
INTERESTED (+)	0	0	1	8	3	4.17
DISTRESSED (-)	2	5	4	1	0	2.33
EXCITED (+)	1	0	4	6	1	3.50
UPSET (-)	6	3	3	0	0	1.75
STRONG (+)	1	0	1	7	3	3.92
GUILTY (-)	10	0	1	1	0	1.42
SCARED (-)	12	0	0	0	0	1.00
HOSTILE (-)	12	0	0	0	0	1.00
ENTHUSIASTIC (+)	1	0	4	5	2	3.58
PROUD (+)	0	1	1	6	4	4.08
IRRITABLE (-)	6	3	3	0	0	1.75
ALERT (+)	1	0	4	4	3	3.67
ASHAMED (-)	11	1	0	0	0	1.08
INSPIRED (+)	1	0	1	8	2	3.83
NERVOUS (-)	6	3	3	0	0	1.75
DETERMINED (+)	1	0	1	8	2	3.83
ATTENTIVE (+)	0	0	2	7	3	4.08
JITTERY (-)	12	0	0	0	0	1.00
ACTIVE (+)	0	0	3	5	4	4.08
AFRAID (-)	11	0	1	0	0	1.17

N = 12 (positive affect = +, negative affect = -)

Table 9 shows employee/manager PANAS side by side.

**Table 9**

*Employee/Manager PANAS Side by Side*

<b>MOOD SCALE</b>	<b>Employees</b>	<b>Managers</b>
INTERESTED (+)	4.11	4.17
DISTRESSED (-)	1.86	2.33
EXCITED (+)	3.48	3.5
UPSET (-)	1.57	1.75
STRONG (+)	3.62	3.92
GUILTY (-)	1.18	1.42
SCARED (-)	1.38	1.0
HOSTILE (-)	1.13	1.0
ENTHUSIASTIC (+)	3.74	3.58
PROUD (+)	3.8	4.08
IRRITABLE (-)	1.49	1.75
ALERT (+)	3.66	3.67
ASHAMED (-)	1.16	1.08
INSPIRED (+)	3.77	3.83
NERVOUS (-)	1.64	1.75
DETERMINED (+)	3.99	3.92
ATTENTIVE (+)	4.03	4.08
JITTERY (-)	1.4	1.0
ACTIVE (+)	3.83	4.08
AFRAID (-)	1.26	1.17

## Summary

This chapter presented the results of the mixed methods research study. Manager interviews were reported question by question, with corresponding illustrative quotes. The employee and manager surveys and PANAS results were presented. Using ANOVA, a manager's appreciative communication was not significant. Pearson's Correlational Analysis was used to determine a possible relationship between manager's appreciative communication and how employees feel motivated; a positive correlation was reported.

Each section of this chapter provided data relevant to each of the three hypotheses to build context for the conclusions in chapter 5. The next chapter provides a discussion of the results and conclusions followed by recommendations to managers and OD practitioners.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion and Discussion

This purpose of this study is to discover the impact that a manager's voice has. Does their communication have the power, through appreciative communication, to create a happier and more productive team? This thesis provides more insight into this topic by focusing on these three questions:

- Hypothesis 1: Appreciative communication with employees elevate their happiness and motivation.
- Hypothesis 2: People in leadership roles increase the perceived happiness, or psychological well-being of their teams through communication.
- Hypothesis 3: A positive focus within communication and feedback contributes to a better employee experience.

This chapter presents thoughts and conclusions of the mixed method study results including final opinions, recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for future studies.

### Discussion

Using a mixed methods approach for this research project allowed a multitude of different themes and data to surface when it came to manager communication. Managers expressed their thoughts verbally, and then more data was captured via survey in order to understand a broader picture of their communication style. The surveys allowed more data to be captured to add greater context to the qualitative data expressed from the managers.

The initial question posed in this thesis is the impact that a manager's communication has on their employee's psychological well-being and their productivity. The first statement posed to the employees in their survey, "I am happy at work when my

manager communicates with me in an appreciative manner,” had a mean of 4.74. Not only does the response show the level of importance of manager communication, but the variable of “appreciation” is an important piece in how an employee feels in the workplace. The managers interviewed seem to understand the value of their speech too, as in a myriad of results they expressed how important it is to provide this positive feedback to their employees. When answering the question, “When is it the right time to provide appreciative communication,” seven of 12 managers expressed that it was either always time or to keep it in the moment when something worth appreciating happens. These findings support the second hypothesis, “People in leadership roles increase the perceived happiness, or psychological well-being of their teams through communication.” In reporting high Likert scores, such as 4.74, the impact of communication is very apparent.

Utilizing Pearson’s Correlational Analysis, there was an interesting relationship based on how the employees responded according to their experience communicating with their manager in an appreciative manner and in receiving positive constructive feedback. The correlation between statement 1, “I am happy at work when my manager communicates with me in an appreciative manner,” and statement 9, “I feel motivated when I receive positive constructive feedback,” was 0.85. This high correlation suggests that the more appreciative a manager is through using positive language, the more the employee will feel motivated to complete their work. This result is also supported by what the managers noticed after providing appreciative communication to their employees. When the managers were asked what the behavioral impact of their words were, five of 12 expressed they noticed an increase in productivity, while four of the

remaining seven noted a general positive increase in the employee's behavior. These findings help support the idea that the happier the employee the more productive they are. Happiness relating to efficiency has important implications for management and strategies in the workplace and supports the idea that happier people are more productive (Zelenski, Murphy, & Jenkins, 2008).

Observing that happier employees are more productive, the responses to statement 10, "I feel motivated when I receive negative constructive feedback," scored collectively as a mean of 3.38. It is interesting to note that motivation can be pulled from employees through this style of feedback. However, the response to statement 9, "I feel motivated when I receive positive constructive feedback," scored 4.58. This may indicate employee preference for positive encouragement. Future research may look to empirically test this difference. There is data to merit negative constructive feedback, but the impact is not as impactful, nor as long lasting, as providing feedback that is more positive in nature.

An interesting result from the surveyed employees was their response to the final statement, "My manager plays a large role in my happiness at work." The mean result of 3.96 shows that a high value placed on what the manager can do, but may show a manager's communication was not the only variable of importance when it comes to an employee's psychological well-being at work. For the most part, the employees surveyed reported high positive affect at 3.8 with the negative affect only at 1.41. This showed the employees do have positive feelings related towards their managers when communication is positive. When comparing the final statement in the survey to the scores of the PANAS, it is easy to see that even these happy employees still generate a positive affect from other components related to their job or organization, such as being financially

rewarded for their work or finding personal satisfaction in the work they do. The positive correlation does help to support the third hypothesis and shows that a positive focus within communication and feedback contributes to a better employee experience. With this correlation, it helps support the idea that when leaders are able to communicate effectively, usually containing relational (affective) and task (content) components, their followers experience greater levels of satisfaction (Madlock, 2008). The relational and task components were brought up in each interview; each manager individually stated in various questions, that they tailor communication to the specific employee based on the relationship and knowledge level they have of the employee. Interestingly, the lowest scoring organization on the first statement received a 4.20. This organization saw the lowest average scores of the entire survey which supports the hypothesis of the value of a manager's communication in relation to their respective employee psychological well-being.

The primary conclusion of this study is that positive communication from managers to their employees could result in more than just productivity at work, it could fundamentally change their employees' lives. Being happy can provide an individual with material, social, psychological, and emotional resources to satisfy their primary and secondary needs (Rego, Souto, & Cunha, 2009). The amount of positive change relying on appreciative communication that a manager could be the source of could grow exponentially through their employees' connections, creating an incalculable positive ripple effect through their community.

## Recommendations

There are two recommendations based off the data for organizations numbered and listed below.

1. Communications training for managers. It is important for organizations to stress the importance of delivering communication training to their managers. It should be emphasized that the impact their words can have a powerful effect on their employees' well-being and productivity.
2. Creating a positive culture. Creating an emphasis around the importance of not simply changing the way a manager consciously communicates but creating a culture where a manager's intuitive reaction is to respond with compassion and appreciation to their employees. Seven of 12 managers interviewed expressed that they could learn how to improve their communication skills, specifically around giving feedback that is both encouraging and clear. If these organizations put more of an emphasis on managerial communications and in working to create organizational values or outcomes to support this, a more productive employee base could be the outcome.

## Limitations of Study

Key limitations of this study were that the surveys and interviews focused more on emotional and intangible outcomes, rather than a generation of data that directly correlated to a fiscal or a data driven productivity return. These outcomes made me assume what the actual impact an organization would see is, rather than providing data to create tangible action plans to generate a desired outcome. However, this research was

able to create a base of knowledge for further study and show an emphasis for creating a direction for more direct answers to these statements.

Another limitation of this study was that all the managerial interviews were based off of self-report. These limitations could have been consciously or unconsciously reported back incorrectly through exaggerated memories and experiences or generalizations. The surveys were also done cross-sectionally, specifically the previous two weeks, and do not show a wider time period to understand the full scope of the impact of their managers communication. These factors do influence the credibility of the research and a recommendation for further study would be to unearth more tangential data to support the self-reporting or time-based materials.

This study was also done on a smaller scale. In total, there were 12 managers interviewed and 92 employees surveyed. This smaller set of participants does not represent the entirety of leaders who can add more supporting or contrasting data to this research. Although there was a wide variety in industry between retail, sports medicine, and commercial real estate (to name a few) and a nice disparity of managerial levels, a larger population to draw from could create more generalizability of findings.

### **Suggestions for Further Study**

This study brought to light that managers use more than just verbal or written communication in order to show appreciation for their employees. Other methods used as examples from the managers interviewed were gifts, office snacks, meals out, and paid days off. For instance, one manager expressed that, “I know my team well, and they are motivated by food. So, to appreciate them I'll buy them food, or take them out to lunch.” These comments leave space for other methods of appreciation to be shared, and as a

further continuation of the work done here, measuring these extra components could provide useful data.

The suggestion for further study would be to conduct this study again and include more questions to generate a stronger data driven foundation. A potential would be to measure emotional effect of the employee before the appreciative communication was received and the emotional affect after. Productivity measures could be layered in as well to create more conclusions from the data being culled. A suggestion would be to generate more information from the employees' point of view in open ended questions to allow the employee to add context to their Likert scores.

A study with these added variables would be insightful and add data to help support conclusions about this data, and future data being captured. It could be an important follow up to an impactful study.

### **Final Thoughts**

The manager and employee reactions to this study showed a strong correlation between a manager's ability to communicate their appreciation to their employee and show the measured emotional affect. A relationship was found between an employee's psychological well-being and their managers appreciative communication. There was also evidence of an increase in productivity when an employee felt appreciated. Although a manager's communication is not the only unique variable in an employee's psychological well-being, it does play a large role in developing a happier employee.

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## **Appendix A: Survey Question Protocol – Employees/Managers**

Responses are obtained on a 5-point Likert-Type Scale where 1 = “not at all” and 5 = “most of the time”

1. I am happy at work when my manager communicates with me in an appreciative manner
2. I am productive when completing my tasks and my manager appreciates that work
3. My manager communicates with me often in an appreciative manner
4. My manager communicates in a way that creates a satisfying work environment
5. My manager treats me with compassion and respect
6. On days when my manager communicates in an appreciative way, I am more productive
7. The way my manager communicates plays a large role in my work experience
8. I receive feedback on my work that makes me feel motivated
9. I feel motivated when I receive positive constructive feedback
10. I feel motivated when I receive negative constructive feedback
11. My manager plays a large role in my happiness at work

## Appendix B: PANAS Survey

Indicate the extent you've felt the past two weeks after communicating with your manager.

	Very Slightly or Not at All (1)	A Little (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Constantly (5)
Interested					
Distressed					
Excited					
Upset					
Strong					
Guilty					
Scared					
Hostile					
Enthusiastic					
Proud					
Irritable					
Alert					
Ashamed					
Inspired					
Nervous					
Determined					
Attentive					
Jittery					
Active					
Afraid					

## Appendix C: Manager Interview Protocol

I am collecting data in order to provide a research based context for a thesis project I am completing as a part of obtaining a Master's of Science in Organization Development from Pepperdine University. The interview is confidential – this means that I won't use your name but I will use the information that you provide to inform my hypothesis. I will record your response to each question and read back to you what I have written, if requested. If I have misunderstood what you have said or inaccurately recorded your response, please let me know and we'll make corrections before moving on to the next question. Do you have any questions of me before we begin?

1. As a manager/boss/leader, how often do you communicate with members on your team?
2. How often do you communicate with your team in an appreciative manner?
3. I'd love for you to recall a recent time where you communicated with a member of your team in an appreciative way. Once you can think of an instance, let me know. Will you explain what happened in this scenario? After you communicated to them in this appreciative way, what was the impact you noticed the remainder of the day?
4. When do you feel the right time to provide appreciative communication to members on your team?
5. What is a strategy you take in the appreciative communication you have with your team?
6. When you speak with your team in an appreciative manner, what are they changes you notice in their demeanor and productivity?
7. Think of a time when you provided appreciative feedback to your team, or an individual on your team, what was the outcome you noticed in their behavior?
8. Think of a time when you provided negative feedback to your team, or an individual on your team, what was the outcome you noticed in their behavior?
9. Describe the communication skills you think a good manager needs.