Some Strategies for Well-being: Lessons from Making Slough Happy

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What is happiness?

• We know when we are happy

• There are physiological correlates

• Different aspects of happiness
  – Positive feelings in the present, satisfaction about the past, optimism about the future
  – Positive feelings + engagement + meaning

• Benefits of happiness
  – Better health, live longer, more creative
What makes us happy?

Generally **not**
- a lot of money
- choice

BUT rather
- Good relationships
- Meaningfulness
- Satisfying work
- Feeling secure
- Personal freedom
- Ability to satisfy evolutionary based needs (e.g. being in nature)
• Personality factors paramount
  – E.g. high self-esteem, extraversion, internal locus of control, resilience
  – so individual differences in set point for happiness

• Estimates of heritability (Lykken 1999)
  – 50% due to genetic influences.
  – Environment/situation = 10-15%

  – So leaves 30% to 40% which is up to you!
Factors inhibiting raising happiness levels above set point

**Adaptation**
- Get used to good things (e.g. lottery winners)
- And to bad (paraplegics)

**Social comparison**
  - Can lead to ‘*hedonic treadmill*’

**Some happiness strategies**
- Enjoy experiences you don’t easily adapt to
- Alternance
- Avoid social comparison
Psychology and Happiness

Overfocus on pathological but notable exceptions

- Humanistic psychology
- Evolutionary psychology
- Buddhist Psychology
- Neurolinguistic programming
- Cognitive psychology
  - E.g. Kahneman/ Seligman
- Also Skinner, Argyle, Balthes and Staudinger
Positive Psychology
(Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi)

Aims

• To understand and enhance subjective well-being scientifically.
• The scientific study of positive emotions, traits and institutions.

So

• Measures and studies positive emotions, life satisfaction, strengths, meaning and purpose etc
• Uses experiments to test hypotheses about strategies to enhance wellbeing
Limitations of Positive Psychology

• Ignores earlier contributions (e.g. humanistic psychology) because deemed ‘unscientific’.

• How far is it really science?
  – Hypotheses tested not generated by PP theory but taken from ‘common-sense’ experience
  – Culture bound?

BUT – has galvanized the field!
The Slough Project Workshops

All–day plenary sessions with ‘homework’ and small group work.

1. Creating a positive sense of self
   (using a trimodal approach - body, mind and reflexivity)

2. Relationships (e.g. intimacy, touch, connection in community)

3. Making work more enjoyable (e.g. finding meaning and purpose, using strengths, win/win, taking control)

4. Community and Society (e.g. volunteering, connection with others, reducing TV and choice)
Examples of MSH group activities

• Zen awareness
• Graveyard therapy
• Gratitude party
• Biodanza
• Encouraging touch and physical contact
• Savouring pleasure (spa)
• Finding flow in monotonous work (‘housework therapy’)
HAPPINESS TOOLS
Do these for 2 months and see the difference they make!

1. Get physical: take half an hour of exercise three times a week.
2. Count your blessings. At the end of each day, reflect on at least five things you are grateful for.
3. Talk time: have an hour-long - uninterrupted - conversation with your partner or closest friend each week.
4. Plant something: even if it’s a window box or pot. Keep it alive!
5. Cut your TV viewing by half.
6. Smile at and/or say hello to a stranger - at least once each day.
7. Phone a friend: make contact with at least one friend or relation you have not been in contact for a while and arrange to meet up.
8. Have a good laugh at least once a day.
9. Every day give yourself a treat. Take time to really enjoy this.
10. Daily kindness. Do an extra good turn for someone each day.
DID IT WORK?
Measures of happiness used

1. Life satisfaction (‘How satisfied are you with your life?’)
2. Degree of experienced happiness (Fordyce)
3. Domains of Happiness
4. Slough Questionnaire (positive mood, social relations, self-esteem)
5. Affectometer
6. Cartoon faces

(Also cortisol swabs for biodanza)
Domains of Happiness

4. How happy are you with each of the following areas of your life?

(Indicate by placing a tick in one of the boxes on a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 = not at all happy and 10 = completely happy)

Your work (or any unpaid work if not employed)
Your home
Your leisure
Your main relationship
Your family
Your community
Your local environment
Your diet
Your exercise level
Yourself generally
Slough Questionnaire

1. I can usually deal with the problems in my life
2. Nothing seems much fun these days
3. I feel valued by other people in my life
4. My life seems stuck in a rut
5. I’m unclear what I want from life
6. I often find myself doing things which fully absorb me
7. I can change things in my life for the better
8. Most of my daily activities seem trivial and unimportant
9 I feel in control of my life
10 I feel like a failure
11 I have all the energy I need
12 To me, the world seems a pretty bleak place
13 My life is full of interesting possibilities
14 Life seems rather empty
15 I feel close to people around me
16 I have difficulty in arranging my life in a way that is satisfying to me
17 My life feels good
18 There is not much to look forward to in my life
19 Things usually work out for me the way I want
20 I’m not doing what I’d like to be doing
21 I often get overwhelmed by problems
22 There is much beauty in the world around me
23 I like to get even when others have upset me
24 I have many things to be grateful for in my life
25  When it comes to it, most people cannot be trusted
26  Material possessions are important to me
27  Being in nature is important to me
28  I find it difficult to find much meaning in life
29  I like to take the easy way
30  I enjoy my social life
31  Being happy in myself is more important to me than what others think of me
32  I enjoy living in Slough
Affectometer

- Tense
- Confident
- Irritable
- Upset
- Enthusiastic
- Nervous
- Inspired
- Lonely
- Able to get down to things
- Relaxed
- Insignificant
Affectometer (cont)

• Happy
• Anxious
• Interested
• Depressed
• Tired
• Excited
• Withdrawn
• Joyful
• Overwhelmed
• Peaceful
RESULTS
Life Satisfaction

(How satisfied are you with your life?)

N=26

Testing 1 = 64

Testing 2 = 74

Testing 3 = 81

% change T1-T3 = +27%  (p = <.0005)

cf Switzerland = 83, Ireland 78, USA 77, China = 72, Turkey = 64, Hungary = 60, Romania = 58, Russia = 53.
Fordyce Happiness Measures

In general, how happy or unhappy do you usually feel?

N=26

Testing 1 = 66
Testing 2 = 76
Testing 3 = 79

% change T1-T3 = +19% (p = <.0005)
What percentage of the time have you felt happy?

T1 = 40%
T2 = 55%
T3 = 63%

% change T1 to T3 = +57% (p = <.0005)
Percentage of time felt unhappy

T1 = 21%
T2 = 13%
T3 = 10%

% change T1 - T3 = -47% (p = <.0005)
Percentage of time felt neutral

T1 = 39%
T2 = 32%
T3 = 27%

% change T1 - T3 = -31% ($p = .002$)
SLOUGH QUESTIONNAIRE

N = 31

Testing 1 = 62
Testing 2 = 73
Testing 3 = 79

% change T1-T3 = +27% (p = <.0005)
AFFECTOMETER

N = 21

Testing 1 = 52
Testing 2 = 65
Testing 3 = 72
Testing 4 = 76
Testing 5 = 78

% change T1-T5 = +43% (p = <.0005)
CHANGE IN OVERALL HAPPINESS SCORE

Testing 1  = 55
Testing 3  = 73

% change 1-3  = +33%
Some spinoffs

• Effect on viewers

• Use in work contexts

• Use in education – especially primary

• Net-mums project
Implications for ..... 

• **Social policy**
  – Focus on GNH not GDP
  – Design of educational curriculum
  – Ecopsychology (e.g. advertising controls)

• **Community development**
  – e.g. Action for Happiness/ Netmums
  – Role of Psychology and Philosophy in helping to shape the agenda
Personal relevance

Basic assumption – you can make the difference

Summary of Happiness Principles
• Take care of body – exercise and diet. Pleasure
• Actively develop relationships/ increase intimacy and caring for others
• Increase your skill in directing your thinking
• Practice ‘being present’ and fully aware of nature
• Find a sense of direction and meaning. Beyond self.
• Foster awareness and joy in being alive

Relevance of Buddhist goals and practice
• e.g. non-attachment, acceptance, mindfulness
• But need for balance with control and prospection