


YANNICK JACOB 
POSITIVE
PSYCHOLOGY
FOR COACHING

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY FOR COACHING

An introduction to theory and practice



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Why Positive Psychology?

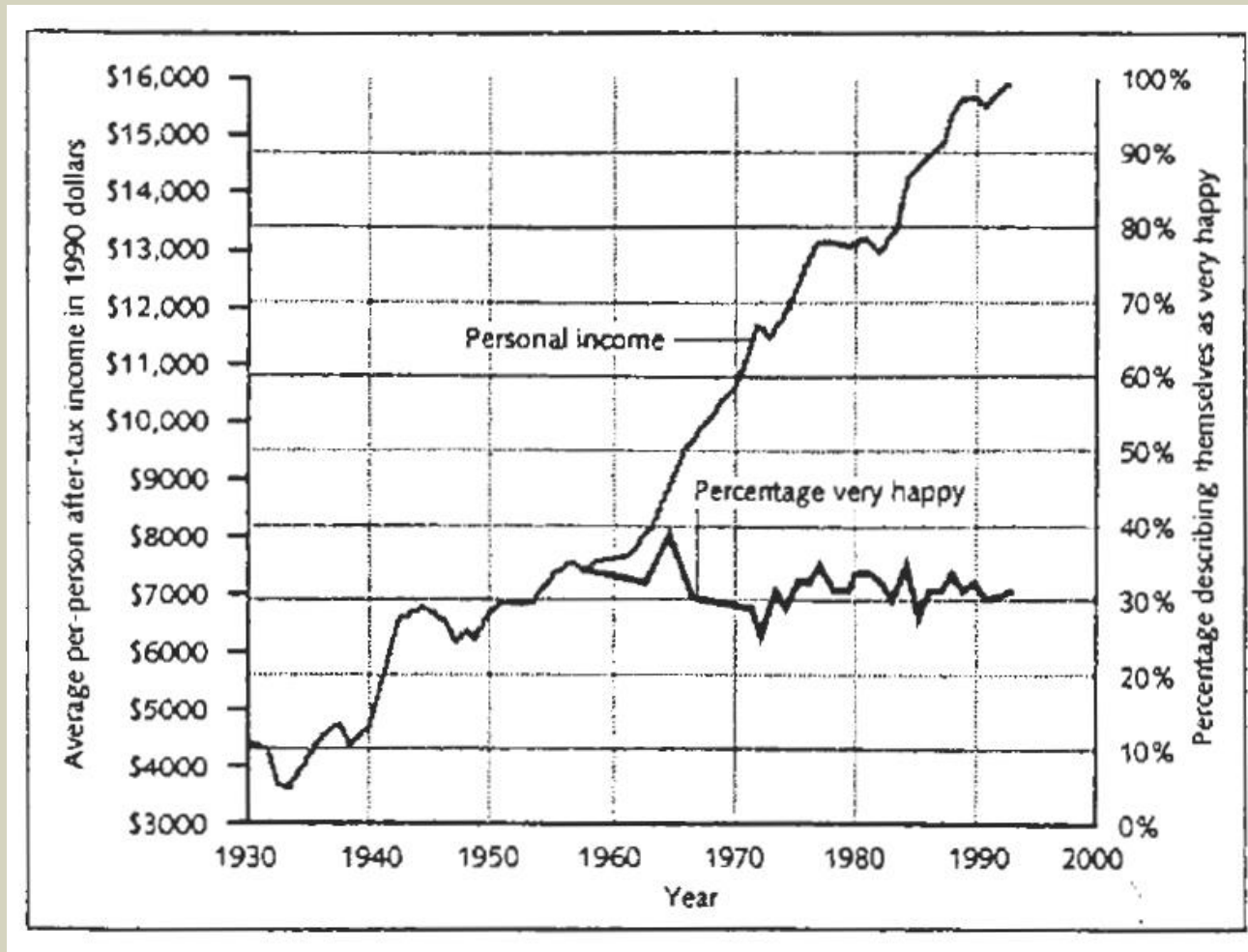
“The message of the Positive Psychology movement is to remind our field that it has been deformed. Psychology is not just the study of disease, weakness, and damage; it also is the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is wrong; it also is building what is right. Psychology is not just about illness or health; it is about work, education, insight, love, growth, and play. And in this quest for what is best, Positive Psychology does not rely on wishful thinking, self-deception or hand-waving; instead it tries to adapt what is best in the scientific method to the unique problems that human behaviour presents in all its complexity.” (Seligman, 2002b)



Why Positive Psychology?

- Gives us new perspectives on existing ideas
- Rebalances the deficit approach
- Adds scientific understanding to coaching processes (lots of coaching research comes from PP)
- Can add valuable tools, techniques & assessment
- Provides language and conceptualisations to explore many people's ultimate goal: happiness
- 'Happy people' are more productive, likeable, active, healthy, friendly, helpful, resilient and creative (Lyubomirsky, King et al, 2005) and experience more meaning (King et al, 2006).
- Research evidence in favour of applying strengths, gratitude, optimism, forgiveness, kindness, humor to practice (see Biswas-Diener, 2010, p.32)
- Two camps: Create knowledge – Apply knowledge

Money



Diener, 2002, p. 140

Money

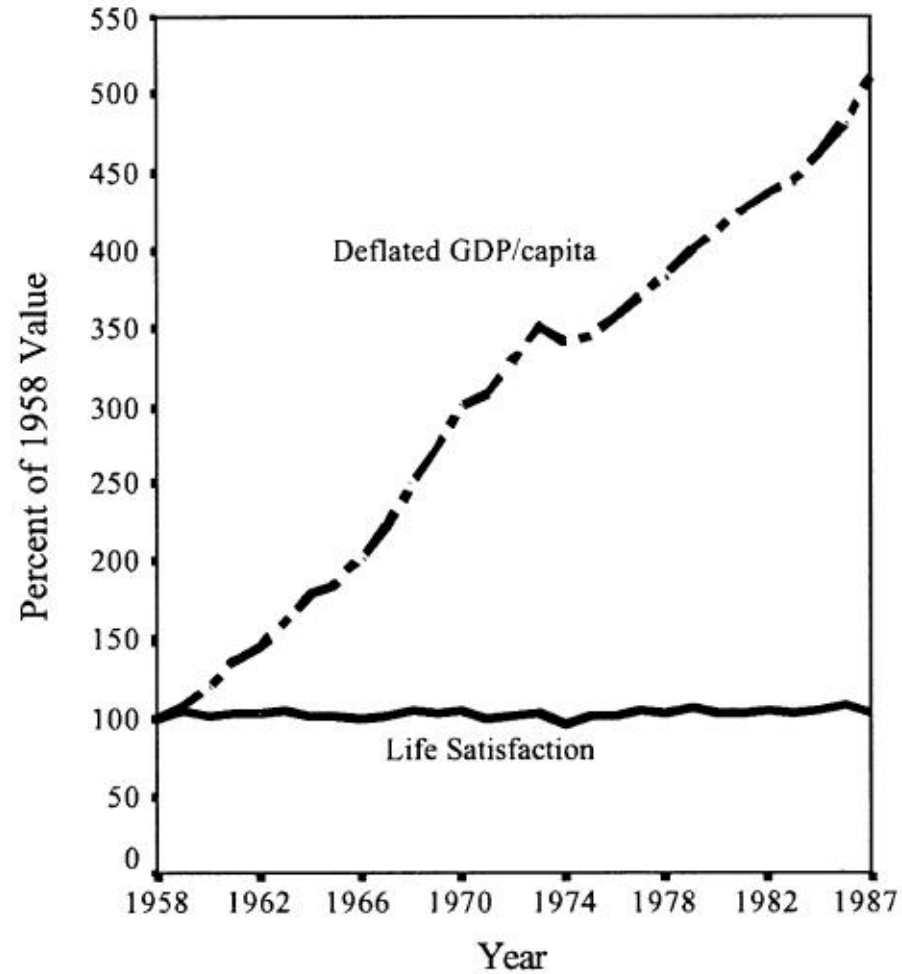


Figure 2. Economic growth and SWB in Japan.

What is Positive Psychology?



- Science
- New perspectives on existing ideas
- What's right with people (e.g. positive emotions)
- People at their best (e.g. strengths)
- Conceptualisations of wellbeing and happiness
- Resilience
- Interventions (Research → 'Real World' Application)
- Not sufficient on its own (ideally part of mainstream psychology)
- The rapid growth and popularity of PP suggests that it resonates well with people.



Positive Psychology - Definitions

- “Positive psychology is the scientific study of optimal human functioning [that] aims to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive”. (Seligman, 1999)
- “Positive Psychology aims to understand, test, discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive”. (Sheldon et al, 2000)
- “Positive Psychology is the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions.” (Gable & Haidt, 2005)
- “Scientific study of virtue, meaning, resilience and wellbeing, as well as evidence based applications to improve the life of individual’s and society in the totality of life.” (Wong, 2011).
- “Applied Positive Psychology is the application of positive psychology research to the facilitation of optimal functioning”. (Linley & Joseph, 2004)



Subject areas

- Strengths
- Positive emotions
- Well-being & happiness
- Assessment & psychometrics
- Mindsets
- Self-regulation
- Engagement & motivation
- Evidence-based interventions
- Also: Creativity, wisdom, aging, self-esteem, characteristics of positive groups and organisations, hope & optimism, positive relationships, positive leadership, post-traumatic growth, etc.

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Why Positive Psychology in Coaching?

Groups: Interventions, Resilience programs, Positive Psychology in education

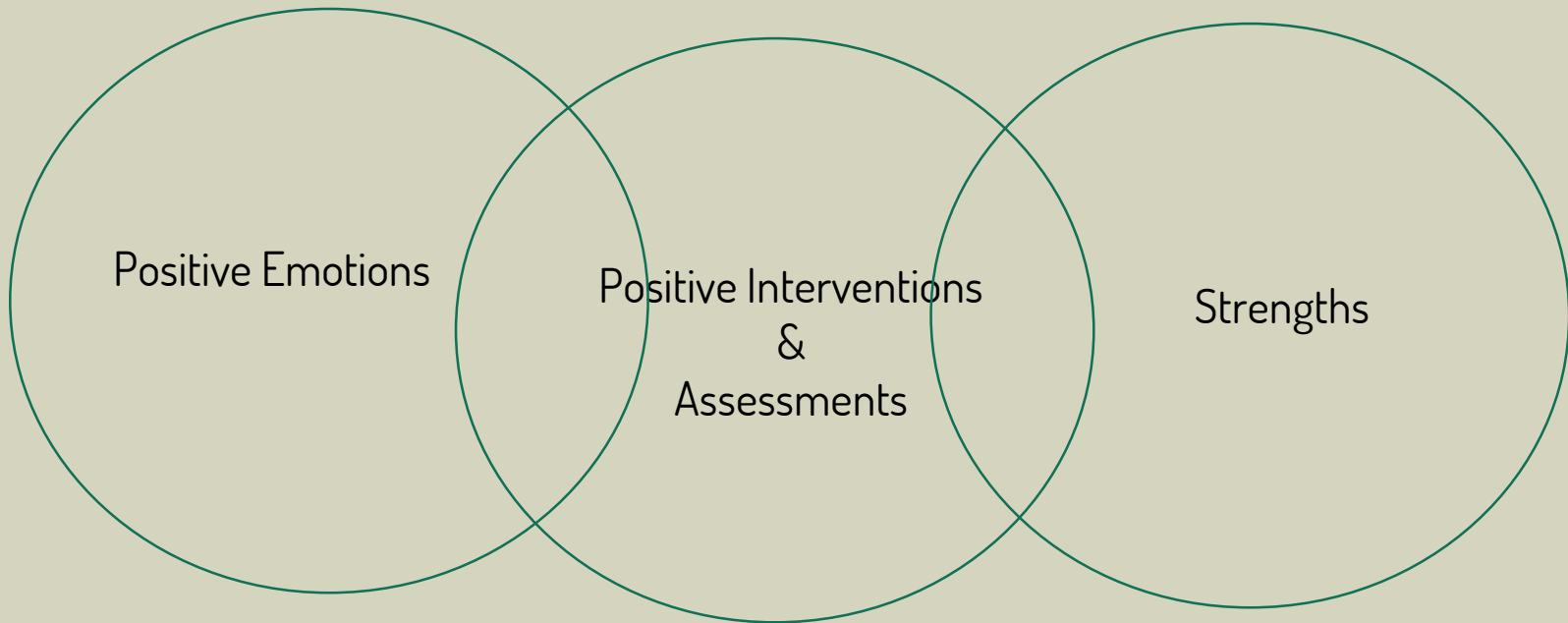
Individuals: **“Coaching is the natural choice for being the applied arm of Positive Psychology”** (Biswas Diener, 2010, p.5)

- “In spirit, [...] **coaching and positive psychology are natural partners**. The goal of coaching has always been to maximise the potential of the client by building his or her strengths and skills. (Kauffman & Scoular, 2004)
- “As a science, positive psychology is well poised to inform the coaching profession and help elevate the standards and tools of practice. [...] **Mutual aim to help individuals and groups to perform better and live more satisfied lives”** (Biswas-Diener, 2010, p. 5)
- **“Need for closer collaboration and integration between the two** professions. [...] Just as positive psychology is now striving to **reclaim the study of people in their completeness**, so too, we believe, is coaching psychology” (Linley & Harrington, 2007)
- **“Coaching is the natural ally of positive psychology”** (Boniwell, 2006, p.99 citing Kaufmann & Scoular, 2004)



Positive Psychology Coaching

Simply put:



Positive Psychology Coaching

(Biswas-Diener, 2010)



- Working with strengths, assessment and harnessing positivity
- 5 Tenets of PPC:
 - Humans have an **innate drive** to grow, change and overcome.
 - Focusing on **strengths** is as powerful, or more powerful, than focusing on weaknesses to achieve success.
 - **Positivity** – whether in the form of emotion or hope – is a powerful resource for facilitating change and achieving success.
 - Attention must be paid to both **positive and negative aspects** of life in order to address the complete client.
 - **Scientifically derived** knowledge and assessment give us unique ways of understanding clients and coaching.

Positive Psychology Coaching Toolkit

(www.positivepsychologyprogram.com)



- CLIENT INFO & CONTACT DETAILS
- SESSION 1 – VALUES AND GOALSETTING
- SESSION 2 – STRENGTHS
- SESSION 3 – BEHAVIORAL CHANGE
- SESSION 4 – OBSTACLES AND COPING
- SESSION 5 – POSITIVE EMOTIONS
- SESSION 6 – EVALUATION AND THE FUTURE

Using PPIs in Coaching

(Passmore & Oades, 2014)



- Series of articles about using Active Constructive Responding, Gratitude and Random Acts of Kindness in the coaching room

We would suggest that coaching psychology is in fact applied positive psychology theory. In short, coaching psychology is where the rubber of positive psychology theory, hits the road of organisational and health practice. Positive psychology theories have been translated by coaching psychologists into practical techniques that can be used in organisations.



Benefits of Coaching (in a PP context)

- Possibility and choice **(Autonomy)**
- The relationship as single most helping factor **(Relatedness)**
- Experiential learning in the coaching room **(Personal Growth)**
- Outside perspective (towards Self-acceptance)
- Identifying and utilizing strengths **(Competence)**
- Experiencing flow during coaching sessions (Learning to increase **Engagement**).
- Creating/finding meaning and purpose **(Meaning)**
- Nurturing resilience **(Resilience)**
- Building communication skills (competence, relatedness)
- Emotional intelligence (competence)
- Interventions/tool box (competence)



PP & CP – A perfect match

A Perfect Match

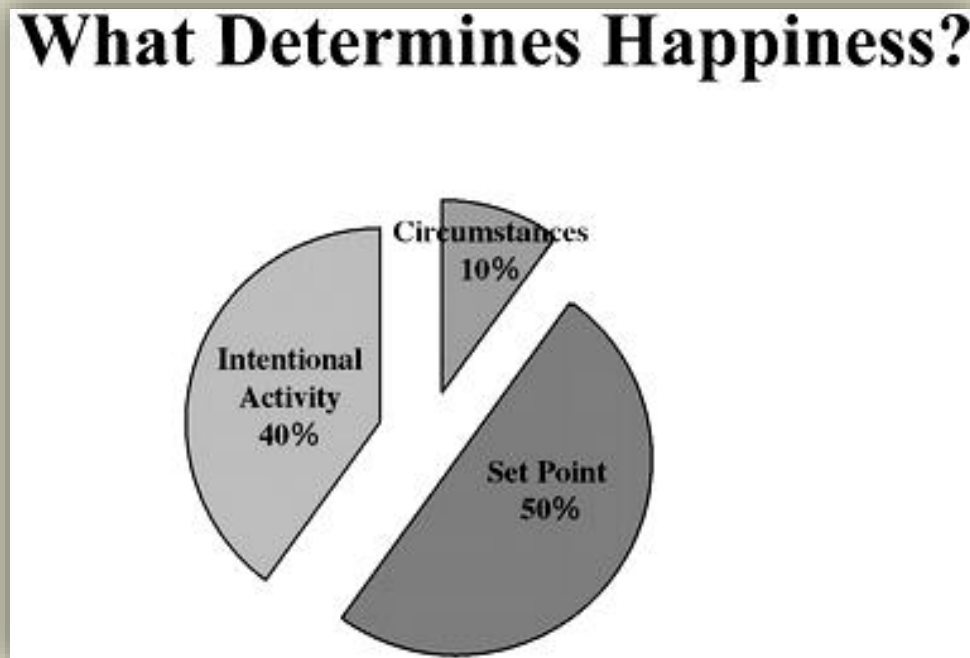
Suggestions for fostering a blending of coaching and positive psychology:

- 1** Open dialogue between coaches and positive psychologists so that the former can keep current with new directions in positive psychological science. This may mean subscribing to positive psychology journals, joining positive psychology list serves or attending positive psychology conferences.
- 2** Create direct relationships between these two groups so that coaches can provide opportunities for new positive psychology research and psychologists, in turn, can help create new coaching ready interventions. This might best be accomplished by a special group, think tank or list serve designed to create individual cross-disciplinary relationships.
- 3** Coaches should be pro-active in creating professional standards for new niche practices such as “happiness coaching” and similar life coaching techniques grounded in positive psychology research.



What we can and what we can't change

Evidence suggests that 40% of our happiness level depends on the activities we undertake



Source: Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schkade (2005).

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Conceptualisations of Happiness

(Understanding the ultimate goal)

- PANAS, SWL, SWB, SDT, PERMA, PWB
- No consensus on definitions of wellbeing (Snyder & Lopez, 2007)
- Short-term vs. Long-term
- Happiness Formula?
$$\text{SWB} = \text{Satisfaction with Life} + \text{PA} - \text{NA}$$
- Happiness Ratios?



Conceptualisations of Happiness

PANAS – Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scale

SWL – Satisfaction with life (subjective, 1-5 questions)

SWB – SWB = Satisfaction with Life + PA – NA

SDT – Autonomy, Relatedness, Competency

PERMA – Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships,
Meaning, Achievement

PWB – Autonomy, Relatedness, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Meaning,
Self-Acceptance

Perspectives on well-being



2 main aspects: Feeling good
Hedonism

Flourishing
Eudaimonia)



Pleasure,
happiness,
contentment,
homeostasis

Self-actualisation, living in
accord with one's own values,
personal development,
transcendence, long term
goals



Positive Emotions

- Broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001)
- Positive emotions
 - Make us feel good – counteract negative emotions
 - Broaden momentary thought action repertoires
 - Build enduring personal resources (resilience)
 - Transform people and produce upward spiral

(see also Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009)

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Strengths

- Talent + Knowledge + Skills = a Strength
- Identify – Utilize – Develop – Use in new ways
- Supplementary to managing weaknesses
- VIA
(Peterson & Seligman, 2002, www.authentichappiness.com)
- Strengthfinder
(Gallup; Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; www.strengthstest.com)
- Realise 2
(CAPP – Centre for Applied Positive Psychology)

Values in Action (VIA)

Seligman & Peterson – free test at www.authenticapiness.com



Strengths of Wisdom and Knowledge:

Creativity – Curiosity – Open-mindedness – Love of Learning – Perspective (Wisdom)

Strengths of Courage:

Bravery – Persistence – Integrity – Vitality/Zest

Strengths of Humanity:

Love – Kindness – Social Intelligence

Strengths of Justice:

Citizenship – Fairness – Leadership

Strengths of Temperance:

Forgiveness – Humility and modesty – Prudence – Self-regulation

Strengths of Transcendence:

Appreciation of beauty and excellence – Gratitude – Hope – Humour – Spirituality



Clifton Strengthsfinder (Gallup)

Detailed explanation: http://www.strengthstest.com/theme_summary.php/

Free test with book: Now Discover your Strengths

Executing Themes

Achiever, Arranger, Belief, Consistency, Deliberative, Discipline, Focus, Responsibility, Restorative

Influencing Themes

Activator, Command, Communication, Competition, Maximizer, Self-Assurance, Significance, Woo

Relationship Building Themes

Adaptability, Developer, Connectedness, Empathy, Harmony, Includer, Individualization, Positivity, Relator

Strategic Thinking Themes

Analytical, Context, Futuristic, Ideation, Input, Intellection, Learner, Strategic



Strengths Interview

- What do you like most about yourself?
- What do you enjoy doing most?
- Tell me about a time when you were at your best?
- What is your most significant achievement?
- What makes you feel you are being who you really are?
- What are you most looking forward to in the future?
- How can your strengths help you in the future?

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Optimism – Explanatory style



- ‘Explanatory style’ is the scientific theory that events and situations can be explained in optimistic and pessimistic ways. It is more than a belief that things will go right or wrong. It is the thought process that goes on when we make sense of good or bad events. Something that happened in the past influences the way we think about this present event. So, when something bad happens (such as failing a math exam)...
- ...the pessimist will explain it in a way that is
 - stable (lasting: I always fail maths exams, it’ll never change)
 - internal (It’s me! I’m just so bad at maths, I don’t get it)
 - global (universal: I’m a failure. I can’t pass any exams)
- ...the optimist will explain it in a way that is
 - unstable (It was a one-off, next time I’ll probably do better)
 - external (It wasn’t my fault)
 - specific (Maths is a problem, but most other subjects are ok)
- Optimistic explanatory style predicts sales success. When the salespersons scoring in the top 10% in an optimism questionnaire were compared to those scoring in the bottom 10%, it transpired that the former sold 88% more insurance (Seligman & Schulman, 1986).

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Mindfulness for Clients

- Improved Concentration and Attention
- Improved Memory and Intelligence
- Improved sleep
- Increased meaning, SWB, flow
- Decreased anxiety & stress



Mindfulness for Coaches

- Non-judgmental / being aware of assumptions
- Congruence / authentic awareness
- Empathy / connection in the here-and-now
- Creativity / expanded awareness of options
- Mindfulness as “clearing your throat”



Mindfulness for coaches

- Coaches train to be good at noticing things
 - Open to distractions
- Distractions of home, work, other clients etc
- Voluntary vs. involuntary attention

Mindfulness helps the coach to be more present and aware of distractions, assumptions, emotions etc

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Mindsets

- “The view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life” (Dweck, 2006, p. 6)
- How you perceive basic abilities and qualities e.g. Intelligence, parenting, business, relationships, musicality, creativity...
- Activity:
Think of something in your past that you think measured you. A test score? A dishonest or callous action? Being fired, being rejected? Focus on that thing. Feel all the emotions that go with it. Now put it into a growth mindset perspective. Look honestly at your role in it but understand that it doesn't define your intelligence or personality. Instead ask: What did I or can I learn from that experience? How can I use it for a basis for growth? (Dweck, 2006, p.53)



Types of mindsets

- **Fixed**

- › Qualities are carved in stone
- › Performance goals (validation, achievement)
- › Proving (both success and failure can cause anxiety)
- › View situations as threats
- › Helpless response
- › Effort = enemy
- › Incorrect strategies
- › Disengage

- **Growth**

- › We can cultivate our qualities
- › Learning goals (mastery, development)
- › Improving
- › View situations as challenges
- › Mastery response
- › Effort = success
- › Listen to new learning information
- › Think outside the box
- › Persevere

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Resilience

- The ability to bounce back from adversity
- Most importantly a skill; not a trait
- All emotions are important
- It's about recognizing them and training your brain to handle them efficiently

*Sources: Seligman, (1990); Reivich
& Shatté (2002)*



Post-traumatic Growth

Dimensions/Subscales (Tedeschi & Calhoun 1995, 1996)

1. relating to others
2. new possibilities
3. personal strength
4. spiritual change
5. appreciation of life



Resilience Skills

- Will enhance your ability to think flexibly and accurately:
 - Learning Your ABCs
 - Avoiding Thinking Traps
 - Detecting Icebergs
 - Challenging Beliefs
 - Calming & Focusing
 - Putting It Into Perspective
 - Real-time Resilience

Circle of Influence



- **Thinking** (dealing with unhelpful thoughts)
- **Emotions** (dealing with unhelpful emotions)
- **Action** (problem solving and solution focused action)



(see "CBC skills and techniques resource for techniques")

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Experience of flow

- “My mind isn’t wandering. I am totally involved in what I am doing and I am not thinking of anything else. My body feels good... the world seems to be cut off from me... I am less aware of myself and my problems”.
- “My concentration is like breathing... I never think of it.. I am quite oblivious to my surroundings after I really get doing in this activity. I think that the phone could ring, and the doorbell could ring or the house burn down or something like that. When I start, I really do shut out the world. Once I stop I can let it back again”.
- “I am so involved in what I am doing... I don’t see myself as separate from what I am doing”.



Dimensions of flow

1. Complete concentration
2. Actions and awareness are merged.
3. Losing awareness of oneself or self-consciousness
4. Sense of control
5. Transformation of time
6. Intrinsically rewarding
7. Clear goals
8. Immediate feedback
9. Balance between challenges and skills



Dimensions of flow

- Complete concentration on what one is doing at the present moment, with no room in one's mind for any other information.
- Actions and awareness are merged. A guitar player merges with the instrument and becomes the music that he plays. The activity becomes almost automatic, and the involvement seems almost effortless (though far from being so in reality).
- Losing awareness of oneself or self-consciousness is also a common experience, but interestingly, after each flow experience the sense of self is strengthened, a person becomes more than he or she was before.



Dimensions of flow cont.

- Sense of control over what one is doing, with no worries about failure.
- Transformation of time. Usually, time passes much faster than expected. However, the reverse can also be true.
- Activities are intrinsically rewarding. This means they have an end in themselves (you do something because you want to), with any other end goal often being just an excuse.



Conditions of the flow experience

- There are clear goals every step of the way
- There is immediate feedback on the progress. For example, in a competition you know exactly how well you are doing, i.e. whether you are winning or losing.
- There is a balance between challenges and skills

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Positive Psychology Interventions

GARFIELD By Jim Davis





Positive Psychology Interventions

- There are no shortcuts to eudaimonia. However, we can affect emotional states, health and wellbeing through interventions
- Interventions include practicing gratitude and positive thinking, improving social connections, managing stress, hardship and trauma, living in the present, committing to goals, maintaining physical health and spirituality
- Sustainable change requires positive emotions, optimal timing and variety, social support, motivation and commitment, creating habits (Lyubomirsky, 2007)



Positive Psychology Interventions

- Expressing gratitude
- Three good things
- Identifying top strengths
- Using strengths in a new way
- Ideal self
- Random acts of kindness
- Positive reminiscence
- Writing interventions
- Exercise
- Active-constructive responding

Client-intervention fit: One does not fit all (Lyubomirsky)

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Positive Psychology Assessment

- Wellbeing scales
 - Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al, 1985)
 - Positive Affect (PANAS; Watson & Tellegen, 1985)
 - Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999)
 - Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2001)
 - Psychological Wellbeing (PWB; Ryff & Keyes, 1995)
 - Flourishing (PERMA; Seligman, 2011)
- Strengths
 - VIA
 - Gallup Strengthsfinder
 - Realise 2



A Selection of Psychometrics

(Lopez & Snyder, 2003)

- A quick overview on some of what's available:
 - Cognitive: Self-efficacy, confidence, problem-solving appraisal, locus of control, optimism, creativity, wisdom, courage
 - Emotional: Positive emotions, emotional intelligence, self-esteem, self-respect, love
 - Interpersonal: Empathy, attachment security, forgiveness, humor, gratitude
 - Other: Meaning, post-traumatic growth, perception of aging, moral judgement maturity, characteristics leading to positive work outcomes, work satisfaction



Critiques

- Nothing new
- Overly focused on the individual
- Lacking scientific rigour
- Few scientists – Many activists
- Misconceptions & the media
- Advertising shortcuts to happiness
- Lacking philosophical foundation – Simplistic approach to human existence
- Trying to come across as unique and separate from e.g. humanistic psychology

Further Reading & Resources



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- Assessment & Questionnaires:
- YouTube Video Collection on Positive Psychology Coaching:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLNDYe2QN5UgiVo74QILVH8tKVCpYA8JQH>
- Keeping up with latest research (without reading lots of papers): <http://thefLOURISHINGcenter.com/cepp/>



Further Reading & Resources

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