

REINVENTING the quality of life on Earth

As we face a world-changing decade, we pause to ask: *What makes a life worth living—and how many of us get to live that way?*

This question is not just a philosophical meditation. As populations increase and resources dwindle, we may find that we need to radically redefine happiness, especially if we have any hope of achieving it at a planetary scale.

EXTRINSIC VS. INTRINSIC HAPPINESS

In one key study, a group of researchers at the University of Rochester followed 150 recent college graduates for two years, monitoring their goals and reported happiness levels. They compared the rates at which the graduates achieved both extrinsic (or material) rewards and intrinsic rewards (such as time spent with friends and family, learning a new skill, or helping others). Each graduate was asked to self-report his or her levels of well-being and life satisfaction.

The researchers' unequivocal conclusion: "The attainment of extrinsic, or 'American Dream,' goals—money, fame, and luxury goods—does not contribute to happiness at all." In fact, they reported that far from creating well-being, achieving material rewards "actually does contribute to some ill-being." If we let our desire for more and more money and goods monopolize our time and attention, it prevents us from engaging in activities that could actually increase our happiness.

EMERGING UNHAPPINESS

Yet in emerging economies like China, India, and Brazil, more and more people are being ushered onto the global treadmill of striving for more. They are encouraged to pursue extrinsic satisfactions and to compete for limited natural resources as a way to increase their quality of life. They are following the path of the "American Dream" despite increasing scientific evidence that, above the poverty line, more money or goods makes virtually no additional contribution to our happiness.

As one positive psychologist put it, "we are devouring the world" by trying unsuccessfully to consume our way to happiness. And without intervention, the most unsustainable and least effective happiness strategies will become central ways of life for upwards of two billion more people in the Global South over the next decade.

The trend toward unsustainable happiness is so pronounced that the New Economics Foundation, which tracks how efficiently countries are able to improve real quality of life in terms of their environmental impact, renamed their first major report, changing the title from "The Happy Planet Index" to "The Unhappy Planet Index."

Quality of life globally has long been measured in terms of economic activity—namely, material production and consumption of finite resources. Meanwhile, the "American dream" of a high-consumption lifestyle has been adopted as a global model for happiness. But as we face a future of scarcer resources, we may find that this way of thinking no longer works.

A CORE DILEMMA

So what kind of happiness is realistically possible for the projected population of nearly eight billion people in 2020? That's the core dilemma for happiness scientists, economists, and policy makers today. Their challenge: to seek out innovations that will make it possible for more people to experience greater well-being, at lower environmental cost.

How we define happiness influences how we measure happiness—which, in turn, influences the policies and habits we adopt to pursue happiness. So what big new ideas should we embrace to guide our future happiness work? What are the best social, civic, commercial and organizational solutions to improving global quality of life? And which metrics will we use to help us adopt new happiness habits, develop new happiness products, and design new happiness policies?

If we want as many people as possible to lead happier, healthier lives, we have to reinvent the quality of life on Earth. The way we do that may well depend on what kind of future we have. Of course, it may also determine the kind of future we have.

HOW TO USE THIS HAPPINESS KIT

This kit contains four happiness cards: one for each of the four alternative scenarios in the 2010 Ten-Year Forecast. In each of these scenarios, happiness means something different, and the way we go about achieving it is also different.

The purpose of this kit is to try out different happiness scenarios. The goal is to explore what it takes to be happy and how you—and the organizations you work with—can do what it takes.



FIRST, CHOOSE A CARD

Spend a little time with the description on the front side of the card. Discover what happiness means in the scenario you've chosen. Take a peek at the research behind it. Consider the various ways this kind of happiness can be measured. Think about who's happy in this scenario, who's not, and how more people could be happy.



NEXT, LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES

Each definition of happiness poses its own challenges and opportunities for innovations. Reflect on the ways you might increase your own happiness in this world. Then think about ways you—or those you work with—could amplify happiness worldwide. Write down possible happiness inventions, new services, new ways of working and communicating and transacting business that your community, your organization, your agency could innovate. Put a star next to those that seem most exciting to you.



THEN, TALK TO YOUR FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES

You don't have to resolve the dilemma of happiness on your own. Take the card with your notes and show it to friends or colleagues. Ask them what they think of your ideas. Ask them what you might do together. Write down your ideas together. Do it like a game where each person adds another sentence to a story. See what bigger opportunity emerges when you've talked to two, three, or ten people.



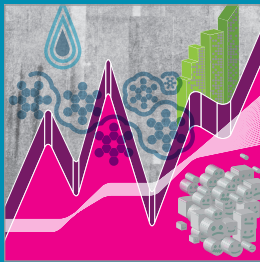
TURN IT INTO ACTION

Everyone has their own way to go from idea to action. Maybe it's a to-do list. Maybe it's one resolution you undertake. Maybe it's a meditation. Whatever your style is, use the card and your notes to turn your insights into action. Create a happier future.

THE COMING DECADE IN BRIEF:

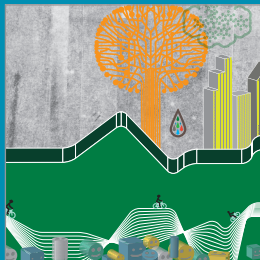
FOUR SCENARIOS

The 2010 Ten-Year Forecast posits four possible paths through the next decade—four alternative scenarios that each confront the dilemmas of carbon, water, power, cities, and identity in different ways. Here's a quick summary of each scenario:



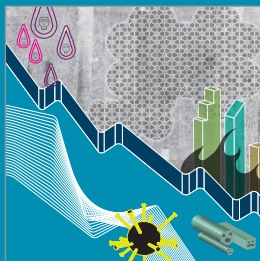
GROWTH: ONE STEP AHEAD OF DISASTER

Growth paradigms continue in this world, with modest, erratic economic growth over the decade. But this growth is driven primarily by heavy investment to avert looming disasters. Massive funding by technological innovation to meet climate, food, and other environmental crises is the order of the day.



CONSTRAINT: SUSTAINABLE PATHS IN A LOW-CAPITAL WORLD

A sustainability paradigm sets the norms for consumption. It shifts both local and global priorities away from productivity and wealth generation toward creative participation and well-being. Strong policy, quotas, and game-like missions drive social cohesiveness.



COLLAPSE: LOCAL DISASTERS, REGIONAL CONFLICTS

Multiple serial or cascading local and regional collapses continually threaten the stability of the world, depleting resources for meaningful innovation, personal and ecological health, and social remediation. Migration is a flashpoint for local and regional conflict.



TRANSFORMATION: SUPERSTRUCTURED SYSTEMS

A fundamental change in the costs of coordination across a variety of human activities begins to create organizational innovations that significantly disrupt traditional institutions and processes, with a focus on rapid adaptation to extreme environments. Rapid innovation in parallel institutions goes hand-in-hand with technological innovation.

AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE:

Embracing the next great depression

Is global happiness a distraction from our most urgent challenges? Should we embrace a period of global depression instead?

Happiness is one of our most universal goals. But during challenging times, being happy may not always be an advantage. In fact, according to recent psychology research, mild or moderate depression may actually confer significantly more benefits than happiness—particularly when we find ourselves tackling extraordinary challenges.

Why does depression exist at all? Randolph Nesse, a professor of evolutionary medicine at the University of Michigan, researches the origins of depression. If it has remained in our gene pool for so long, he argues, there must be some evolutionary benefit. Nesse believes that depression may be an adaptive mechanism meant to prevent us from falling victim to blind optimism and squandering resources on the wrong goals. It's to our evolutionary advantage not to waste time and energy on goals we can't realistically achieve, he argues. So when we intuitively sense that we have no clear way to make productive progress, our neurological systems default to a state of low energy and motivation. During this period of mild depression, Nesse theorizes, we can conserve our resources and search for new, more realistic goals or more effective strategies.

If Nesse's theory is right, mild depression can actually serve as a helpful wake-up call. It is a signal to reassess our goals and to seek out more realistic avenues for success. Instead of seeing depression as something to avoid, he proposes that we can learn to value its role in helping us identify a better way to expend our best efforts.

Andy Thomson, a psychiatrist at the University of Virginia, and Paul Andrews, an evolutionary psychologist at Virginia Commonwealth University, have teamed up to explore another potential benefit of a signature feature of depression: rumination, or deep and fixated thought about a problem. When we ruminate on a problem, we are unable to attend to anything else. According to research by Thomson and Andrews, rumination during depression serves two important purposes. First, rumination helps us learn more effectively from our mistakes. Instead of moving on quickly from our failures, we force ourselves to grapple with what happened and look for insight. While unpleasant, a rumination period of days or even weeks makes us more likely to make better decisions in the future.

Scientific evidence also suggests that rumination enables us to stay focused, longer, on solving complex problems. During depression, several studies show, there is an increase in brain activity in an area called the left ventrolateral prefrontal cortex (VLPFC). This area of the brain seems to be especially important for maintaining attention and cognitive focus. The more blood flow to the VLPFC, the better able we are to concentrate on difficult work. Indeed, multiple experiments have found that mildly or moderately depressed participants solved complex puzzles better than happy patients, most likely because of the hyperactivity in their VLPFC. Thomson and Andrews summarize these findings as follows: "Human attention is a scarce resource—the neural effects of depression make sure the resource is efficiently allocated."

As we face the challenges of the next decade, we may find that depression serves as a particularly useful emotion, signaling when our efforts are being squandered on unproductive goals and helping us hunker down and focus on our most urgent problem-solving efforts. It's unlikely that anyone will aspire to remain in a state of depression for long, of course. But we may find ourselves naturally living out, on the whole, a depressed decade. And if we are mindful of the value of mild depression, it may, in fact, prove crucial to our ability to re-invent quality of life on the planet. To be happier as a planet, we may need to embrace a great depression first.

—Jane McGonigal

FURTHER READING ON THE VALUE OF DEPRESSION

"The evolutionary origin of depression." *The Economist*. June 25, 2009. http://www.economist.com/sciencetechnology/displaystory.cfm?story_id=13899022

Jonah Lehrer. "Depression's Upside." *New York Times Magazine*. February 25, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/28/magazine/28depression-t.html>

Daniel Nettle. "Evolutionary origins of depression: a review and reformulation." *Journal of Affective Disorders*. 81 (2004) 91–102 http://www.staff.ncl.ac.uk/daniel.nettle/journal_of_affective_disorders.pdf



IN A WORLD OF GROWTH:

Happiness is a measure of individual life satisfaction—
and we can always be happier

In *Happier*, Harvard psychology professor Tal Ben-Shahar recommends a simple meditation as the most effective way to measure and evaluate your own happiness: Imagine yourself at the age of 110. How positively satisfied do you feel about the life you have lived? Ben-Shahar argues that we are best able to recognize what makes us happy, not in the moment, but rather by reflecting on it afterwards. This sense

of historical life satisfaction is often referred to as “at the end of the day” happiness or “on my deathbed” happiness. It represents how happy we are with the overall narrative of our lives: How many goals did we achieve? How much success did we create? What obstacles did we overcome? What did we really accomplish with our lives?

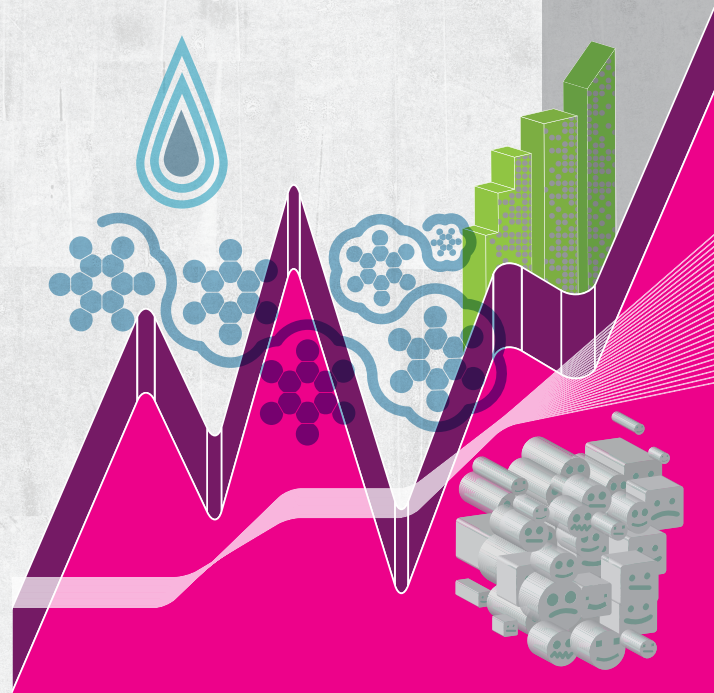
According to psychologist and Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman, this kind of goal-oriented happiness is the standard model of happiness in America—and it comes at a high cost. When we work toward end-of-day happiness, we tend to spend more time working to earn status and make money, and less time doing things that tend to increase daily quality of life: spending time with friends and family, savoring things we enjoy, or simply slowing down the pace of our lives. In short: We are willing to give up happiness in the moment in order to have a better happiness narrative at the end of the day (or the end of our lives).

Kahneman argues that this “experience versus memory paradox” is precisely why Americans tend to rate very highly on happiness surveys that measure overall life satisfaction, but equally high on surveys of anxiety, stress, depression, and social isolation. We are making ourselves happier and happier at the end of the day, he says, but at the cost of being more and more unhappy in the moment.

In a recent public talk, Kahneman urged policy-makers and economists to start a national conversation about which kind of happiness we want to increase in the United States. “We have to make a choice. These kinds of happiness are almost always inversely related, and opting to increase one kind of happiness will come at the expense of the other.” He predicted that without significant course correction, we will continue to work toward increasing life satisfaction, and as a result, actually wind up decreasing overall quality of life. “We will be more satisfied with our lives—at the cost of enjoying them less.”

There is another potential cost to continued growth of the classic American model of happiness: increased inequality of happiness. Life satisfaction is for the most part, a competitive kind of happiness: our sense of success and accomplishment is relative, based on social comparisons with friends, family members, colleagues, and neighbors.

If we define and measure happiness as life satisfaction, we are likely to focus more and more on pleasing what positive psychologist Martin Seligman calls “the maximal self,” or the high-achieving and self-interested individual. We will increasingly define happiness as a truly individual pursuit and fail to recognize the potential advantages of pursuing it collectively.





IN A WORLD OF GROWTH:

In a world where happiness is a measure of life satisfaction, how can you help people achieve their life goals?

Life satisfaction is a view of happiness from the end of the day, the end of the year, or the end of a life. We are best able to recognize what makes us happy, not in the moment, but by reflecting on it afterwards.

MEASURES OF HAPPINESS: How many goals did we achieve? How much success did we create? What obstacles did we overcome? What did we really accomplish with our lives?

THE CHALLENGE: The “experience vs. memory paradox” leads people to rate themselves as happy, even when their moment-to-moment experiences are less than happy.

HAPPINESS CENSUS

Who's happy?

Who's not?

How can more people be happy?



HAPPINESS INNOVATIONS

What would make the world a happier place by 2020?

New inventions:

New services:

New communities:

New ways of working & playing:

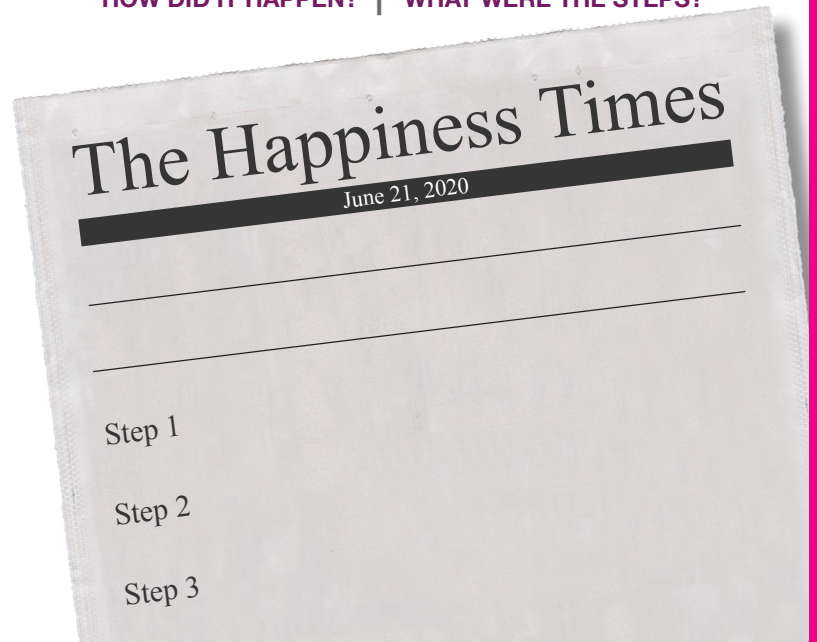


2020: THE HAPPINESS HEADLINE

What's the big news about happiness in 2020?

WRITE A HEADLINE:

HOW DID IT HAPPEN? | WHAT WERE THE STEPS?



IN A WORLD OF CONSTRAINT:

**Happiness is a measure of moment-by-moment well-being—
and we can develop it as a renewable resource**

Imagine a world in which conspicuous consumption is replaced by conspicuous wellness. Quality of life is defined, not as a measure of productivity, but rather as a measure of the moment-by-moment joy in our daily lives. And time affluence, or time to spend on the activities we enjoy most and with the people we care about most, supercedes material affluence as a measure of wealth.

GNH is based on the idea that it makes more sense to build up national capacity for well-being than to build up economic capacity tied to the production and consumption of scarce material resources. As Bhutan Prime Minister Jigme Thinley explains, “The dogma of limitless productivity and growth in a finite world is unsustainable and unfair for future generations,” Thinley says. “The conditions for people to achieve happiness must not depend on scarce resources.” GNH focuses on an idea of sustainable happiness, or well-being generated by our daily actions and mindset, rather than through production and consumption.

To encourage global adoption of the GNH model, the Center for Bhutan Studies has created a 72-measure index to track and nurture happiness, divided into nine categories of well-being. The three most heavily weighted categories used to measure GNH focus on “time use,” “community vitality” and “emotional well-being.”

The time-use measures seek to encourage a happy work-life balance and to drive daily participation in happiness-generating activities. The indices recommend, for example, seven hours of work daily, eight hours of sleep, and the remainder allocated to activities scientifically proven to increase well-being, like, “community participation,” “spiritual activities,” “education and learning.”

It’s already happening in the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan. There, economic policy for the past 28 years has focused on Gross National Happiness (GNH) instead of the more traditional Gross National Productivity (GNP) or Gross Domestic Productivity (GDP).

Community vitality measures the strength of local relationships, with indices based on questions like “How much do you trust your neighbors?” and “How often do you voluntarily help others in your neighborhood?” They also include kinship measures, such as “How many members of your family do you see daily?” and “How many relatives live within daily visiting distance?”

Meanwhile, the emotional well-being measures seek to increase positive emotions like friendship, calmness, and optimism and to decrease negative emotions like frustration, loneliness, and hopelessness.

Crucially, none of these measures of happiness requires increased production or consumption of material goods. Instead, they focus on increasing what science writer and happiness researcher Stefan Klein calls “The Magic Triangle of Well-being”: civic sense and community, social equality, and control over our own lives.

The idea of a Gross National Happiness (GNH) index is gaining acceptance: similar guidelines have been adopted as part of national policy recommendations in Brazil, India, and Haiti. The biggest effort so far to implement GNH outside of Bhutan is in France, where The Quality of Life Commission initiated by President Nicolas Sarkozy is driving significant GNH reform at the national level. As the commission reports: “We are now living one of the worst financial, economic, and social crises in post-war history. One of the reasons why the crisis took many by surprise is that our measurement system failed us.”





IN A WORLD OF CONSTRAINT:

In a world where happiness is a moment of well-being, how can we develop it as a renewable resource?

Sustainable happiness becomes the goal in a world where conspicuous well-being supplants conspicuous consumption. Policy focuses on changing what we measure to change how we behave.

THE CHALLENGE: Sustaining time affluence, community vitality, and emotional well-being may depend on how well we secure our natural and social capital for future generations.

MEASURES OF HAPPINESS: How much time do we have for the activities we enjoy most? How much do we engage with our friends, family, and neighbors and how much do we trust them? What are emotions that dominate my daily life?

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New inventions:

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The Happiness Times
June 21, 2020

Step 1

Step 2

Step 3

IN A WORLD OF COLLAPSE:

Happiness is a biochemical state—and we can cultivate it by using both pharmaceutical and digital interventions

In the *How of Happiness*, research psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky writes: “An avalanche of studies has shown that happy moods, no matter what the source, lead people to be more productive, more likable, more active, more healthy, more friendly, more helpful, more resilient, and more creative.” In a world of collapse, we may find ourselves increasingly taking this idea seriously. Faced with increased

scarcity and threat, we may abandon traditional notions of “authentic happiness”—the positive emotions that arise naturally from our real life successes and relationships. Instead, we may find ourselves seeking happy moods any way we can get them, in order to ensure our productivity, our likeability, and our good health. We will seek to invent new ways to make ourselves happy, by any means necessary.

Two key adaptive strategies are likely to emerge as the most effective means of achieving happiness in a collapse scenario: happiness supplements and happiness escapes.

Happiness supplements will most likely come in the form of science-backed pharmaceuticals and neuro-stimulation medical devices designed to biochemically augment our emotional well-being. Oxytocin nasal sprays, for example, will increase our positive feelings about other people, by delivering a powerful hit of the so-called “love hormone.” Scientists have already demonstrated that such a spray provokes powerful feelings of trust, affection, and social bonding—even among strangers. In the future, proponents of a commercially available oxytocin spray may argue that although these feelings are artificially induced, they nevertheless have lasting, positive results, speeding the formation of friendships and strengthening our social support networks.

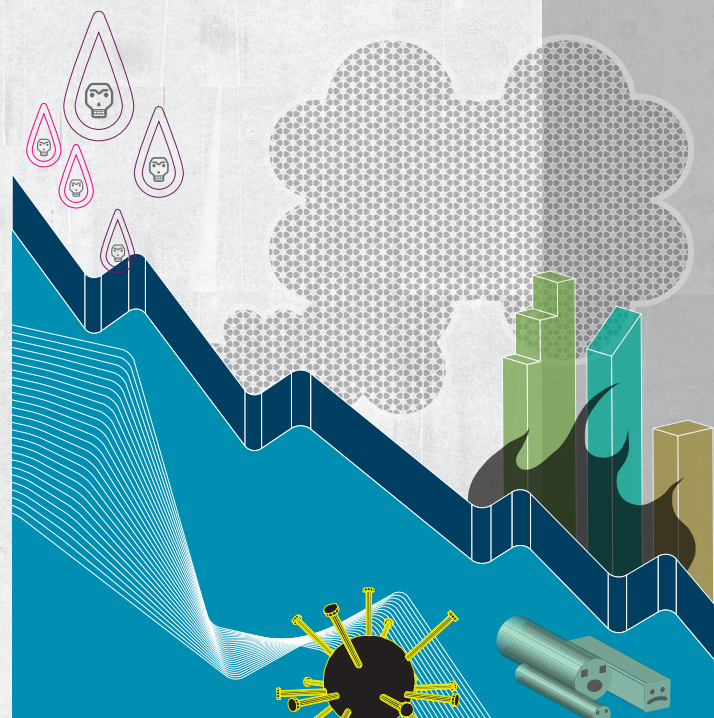
Meanwhile, “non-invasive” (that is, non-surgical) brain stimulators have already been approved by the FDA for treating anxiety and depression. Transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) therapy works by inducing a flow of electric current in the frontal areas of the brain associated with mood. Considered painless,

relatively inexpensive, and free of side effects, the thirty-minute TMS therapy sessions may become as popular as spa treatments in the future—not to treat mental illness, but simply to change how we feel.

Happiness escapes, meanwhile, will flourish in virtual environments. Online games and 3D environments provide virtual triggers for natural biochemical reactions—in particular, a potent cocktail of norepinephrine, epinephrine, and dopamine. These three neurochemicals in combination make us feel satisfied, proud, and highly aroused. And scientists have repeatedly documented that this particular biochemical cocktail is unleashed whenever we solve game puzzles, or acquire more virtual goods by completing a challenge, or when we “level up” in a virtual world.

Games are now being engineered to produce biochemical results. Game design and research labs include sophisticated neurological and physiological measuring devices to help developers fine-tune a game’s ability to produce these happiness reactions. As one journalist put it, “The Microsoft game testing lab looks more like a psychological research institute than a game studio.”

Both these strategies represent a kind of “synthetic” happiness. They both successfully produce a biochemical experience of happiness. But the state is not induced by the experiences our biological bodies evolved to manage. Our feelings of happiness are not prompted by the “real” and “natural” conditions of our everyday lives. As a result, there is much debate and disagreement over the validity of these adaptive strategies. If we feel happy, are we really happy, regardless of the source of the biochemical reactions? Do happiness supplements and escapes represent an unhealthy exodus from our natural lives? Or are they reasonable, and even intelligent, adaptations for extraordinarily difficult times?





IN A WORLD OF COLLAPSE:

In a world where happiness is a biochemical state, how can people better manage their personal biochemistry?

Facing increased scarcity and instability, we gravitate toward happiness supplements and happiness escapes. The mood of happiness is more important than the source as we seek to be more productive, more likeable, and more resilient.

THE CHALLENGE: The quest for so-called synthetic happiness may distract us from solving fundamental problems in our lives and our world.

MEASURES OF HAPPINESS: How does the brain look when we're happy? How can we stimulate those brain centers that signal happiness? What are the optimum levels of oxytocin, norepinephrine, epinephrine, and dopamine?

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IN A WORLD OF TRANSFORMATION:

**Happiness is a collective activity—
and we can engineer it at extreme scales**

“Happiness is catching.” That’s the breakthrough idea that may one day transform our approach to happiness from an individual pursuit to a collective effort.

Nicholas Christakis, a medical sociologist and doctor at Harvard, and James Fowler, a political scientist at University of California, San Diego, developed the “social contagion theory” of happiness by mapping twenty-years worth of

happiness data from 4739 individuals into social network graphs. They studied how fluctuations in one person’s happiness rippled through the social network. They discovered, for example, that a friend who lives within a mile and who becomes happy increases the probability that you are happy by 25%. A next-door neighbor who becomes happy increases the probability you are happy by 34%.

The main conclusion of their research: “People’s happiness depends on the happiness of others with whom they are connected. This provides further justification for seeing happiness, like health, as a collective phenomenon.” Indeed, in a transformation scenario, happiness is likely to be viewed, increasingly, as a public health issue.

So how will we help happiness spread? Local happiness pilot programs will be a key tool in this process of engineering national, or even global, happiness. These programs seek to improve quality of life within a specific geographic area, with the goal of scaling and spreading successful strategies to other areas. The programs often tie happiness explicitly to good health and longer lives.

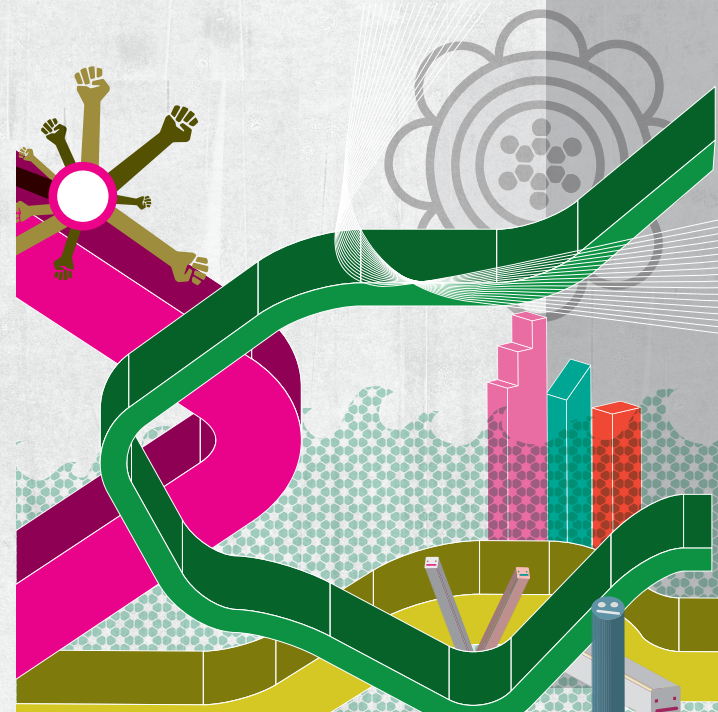
Consider the project to turn the Minnesota town of Albert Lea into a test bed for contagious happiness strategies. More than twenty percent of the town’s 18,000 residents signed up to participate in the “Vitality Project,” designed to increase the collective well-being of the entire town. Participants took part in regularly scheduled happiness activities such as walking *moais* (walking groups of six to eight neighbors); planting food in community gardens; and social workshops designed to “discover your purpose.” The goal: to link contagious happiness with collective health. According to Leslie Lytle, a doctor from the University of Minnesota and co-director of the

pilot study, “We expect to add 10,000 years of projected life expectancy to the community, which equals out to at least two years of projected life expectancy for each participant.”

These pilot experiments are part of the larger trend toward “social innovation”—a process aimed at discovering world-changing solutions to social problems by prototyping and testing new and creative ideas at local levels. By diffusing the initial risk across many different pilot programs and by lowering the costs of trying out a new idea, social innovation makes it possible to test more unusual ideas and to learn faster, ultimately speeding up the process of making extreme-scale change. According to recent research on the role of pilot experiments, good ideas are also contagious. Like happiness, social solutions spread like a virus, eventually leading to change at national and global scales.

Governments and community organizations alike will invent and locally test new social models specifically designed to improve our collective well-being. Social contagion research may also lead to a new field of “happiness engineering,” with products and policies designed to engineer the spread of positive emotion. Corporations, non-profit organizations, and governments may all find themselves playing a role in launching viral happiness campaigns.

In *The Geography of Bliss*, foreign correspondent Eric Weiner writes: “Our happiness is completely and utterly intertwined with other people: family and friends and neighbors. Happiness is not a noun or verb. It’s a conjunction. Connective tissue.” Over the next decade, the biggest breakthroughs in quality of life are likely to grow out of precisely this understanding—that we are best able to pursue happiness, not as individuals, but rather as part of a social network.





IN A WORLD OF TRANSFORMATION:

In a world where happiness is a collective activity, how can we engineer it at extreme scales?

According to the theory of social contagion, our happiness depends on the happiness of those we're connected to. In a world of hyper-connection, happiness becomes a public health issue, and we focus on building happy networks.

THE CHALLENGE: The realization that we're responsible for one another's happiness may pressure—and even ostracize—those with legitimate reasons for unhappiness.

MEASURES OF HAPPINESS: How happy are our friends and family? Which geographical areas are happiest? Which network clusters are happiest? How far does my happiness extend? What is my happiness footprint?

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