

Nic+Marks



The Happiness Manifesto

How nations and people
can nurture well-being

Table of contents



NOTE



THANKS



THE HAPPINESS MANIFESTO

- ✓ | Measurement Matters
- ✓ | In the beginning there was ... a warning sign
- ✓ | Imagine how different the world could have been
- ✓ | The false logic is uncovered
- ✓ | Walking his TED talk
- ✓ | In need of serious revisions
- ✓ | National accounts of well-being
- ✓ | Gathering momentum
- ✓ | Sustainable well-being
- ✓ | The power of a single indicator



REDEFINING PROGRESS...

- ✓ | The well-being of nations
- ✓ | The sustainability of nations
- ✓ | Unsustainable nations
- ✓ | Unhappy nations
- ✓ | Figure 1: Happy Planet Index
- ✓ | Happy, sustainable nations
- ✓ | Learning from Costa Rica
- ✓ | Creating a single ranking of nations
- ✓ | Table 1: HPI results table for a selection of countries
- ✓ | Progress or regress?
- ✓ | Figure 2: Happy Live Years
- ✓ | Change of direction



HAPPINESS IS IN OUR NATURE...

- ✓ | Table 2: The four main negative emotions
- ✓ | How happiness builds a virtuous cycle
- ✓ | Taking stock



A HAPPINESS MANIFESTO...

- ✓ | Five ways to personal well-being
- ✓ | An invitation and a possibility space
- ✓ | The role of government
- ✓ | Seven strategies for national well-being
- ✓ | We are all in this together



REFERENCES



2021 *foreword*

This book was written in late 2010 just after my TED talk had been released. I was asked by TED to be one of the first three authors of their new

TED book range. After launch for a few days the book was the best selling short-form book selling on Amazon. After 10 years TED decided to release the copyright back to myself. To mark the release of the 2021 edition of the Happy Planet Index we thought it was a good idea to make it available as a free download.

I personally have not been working in the policy field for the last 10 years. Post TED I felt like a new challenge, and I decided to work on work. My logic was that as people spent so much of their working hours at work it was a good opportunity. I was also just as critical of how business measured employee experience as I was of governments and how they measured population experience. With my business, Friday Pulse, I have created a new people metric for businesses - a Happiness KPI™ - to track and improve happiness at work.

When I first created the Happy Planet Index (HPI) in 2006, it was designed to bring a fresh more positive perspective to sustainability and climate change. Now 15 years, and a global pandemic, later it feels even more relevant and timely. We urgently need to tackle climate change, however as it is such a large global issue it can leave us personally feeling a bit powerless and depressed.

However I remain optimist and believe we can find a pathway to a world we all want, where good lives don't cost the earth. I am not an expert in climate change but I do know that all the evidence from psychology is that our happiness is much more driven by our relationships than our material goods. The possibility space that I articulate in this short book is still there. We can be sustainably happy it is just going to require a combination of system and personal change to get there.

I hope you enjoy this book and if you want to find out more about my current work please visit [my website](https://nicmarks.org).

NIC MARKS

Creator of the Happy Planet Index

<https://nicmarks.org>



Note about happiness:

Throughout this book I use the word "happiness." Some people do not like this word, especially when considering something as serious as the progress of nations. The research centre that I founded at the UK think tank **nef** (the new economics foundation) is called the centre for well-being. We use the word "well-being" when we have a policy focus. We see well-being as being broader than happiness, encompassing people's resilience, their vitality and their sense of purpose, as well as relationships with other people.

However, "well-being" is a slightly dry word. "Happiness," with its emotional undertone, more directly expresses a life goal most people can agree on. It is precisely people's emotional experience of life that I think governments, institutions, organizations and, indeed, other people need to respect. So "happiness" it is, but please be aware that I often use the words "happiness" and "well-being" interchangeably.

Thanks

First, I would to thank all the great people I have worked with at **nef** and the centre for well-being without whom these ideas would not be nearly as strong: Saamah Abdallah, Jody Aked,, Sanjiv Lingayah, Nat McBride, Juliet Michaelson, Charles Seaford, Hetan Shah, Nicola Steuer, Laura Stoll, Sam Thompson and James Whiting. There are very many happiness and well-being researchers who have been very supportive (sometimes in a challenging way) to me over the years. They include Robert Biswas-Diener, Ed Diener, Barbara Fredrickson, Felicia Huppert, Richard Layard, Alex Linley, Sonja Lyubomirsky, Mariano Rojas and Joar Vittersø. Special thanks to Manfred Max Neef, the Chilean ecological economist who started me out on this path, and to Tim Jackson, whom I have walked it with for many years.

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My family have been supportive and tolerant, especially during an exceptionally intense period of writing, so thanks to my parents Ian & Angela and my three children, Bertie, Marti and Rawdie.



The Happiness Manifesto

How nations and people can nurture well-being



In August 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., and said these words:



“Even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘... that all men are created equal.’

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Social Activist and Baptist Minister who played a key role in the American civil rights movement in the mid-1950s

Nearly 50 years later, we face different difficulties of both today and tomorrow. Today our world financial system is in tatters and, despite decades of attention, global poverty and inequalities stubbornly persist. The threat of climate change looms over our tomorrows. With these serious difficulties it is perhaps not surprising that we seem to be in a state of despair about the future; it is as if we have lost our capacity to dream. But it is precisely now that we need inspiration most.

Like King, we can return to one of the truly inspiring documents of human history: the US Declaration of Independence. There, in the second sentence, is perhaps the most famous statement on human rights ever made:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.



King drew attention to the words “all men are created equal”; I want to draw attention to the very last word, Happiness.

I want to draw attention to this word because I believe we have lost sight of the nobility of its aspiration: to unite the purpose of nations with the hopes of people. I believe that this unity of purpose is breaking down. Much of modern life is based upon a false logic, a logic that assumes that happiness and well-being come from financial prosperity. Thus most politicians – and most of our mainstream media – appear to assume that the main goal of government is to ensure the economy is forever moving forward. It is almost as if the American founding fathers had declared that our inalienable rights were Life, Liberty and the pursuit of **Economic Growth**.

There are two main reasons why this assumption is wrong.

First, once basic material needs have been met, there is very little evidence that pursuing financial prosperity generates much extra happiness for individuals or for nations.

Second, by blindly pursuing economic growth, we are creating a whole set of social and environmental issues that will undermine the potential happiness and well-being of future generations.

It is time to wake up and imagine a different future. A future where nations and people can again share a common purpose: nurturing well-being. This Happiness Manifesto is a plea for nations and people to work together to create happier, more sustainable lives. It is not a traditional political manifesto, though it does suggest a radical new approach to policy making. It is also not a traditional happiness self-help book, though it does contain some ideas that you might find helpful for your happiness. Instead it is a manifesto for a better future where happiness does not cost the earth.

Before I share the vision of this Happiness Manifesto, I need to explain how I plan to ensure that it, too, is not based on a false logic. First, I will unpick some of the reasons why we have gotten to where we are. This is a story about the power of measurement. How what we measure matters and how, by measuring the wrong things, we have headed in the wrong direction. Secondly I will illustrate that it is only by using different measures, and redefining progress in terms of sustainable happiness, that we will find a new sense of direction. Finally I will turn from numbers to an exploration of human nature. Drawing on insights from psychological research, I will suggest that human happiness is not only desirable but also an essential part of how we will develop creative solutions to the challenges we face.

It is only when I have laid these foundations that I will propose the Happiness Manifesto, a set of positive actions that will nurture our personal and national well-being: five ways to personal well-being and seven strategies for national well-being.

So first to the power of measurement, as it is here that the roots of the false logic we are trapped in can be found.



Measurement matters

In the beginning there was... a warning sign

The extraordinary thing about how we have come to value economic growth as our key indicator of national success is that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was neither developed for, nor envisioned to be used as, a measure of human welfare.

Economist Simon Kuznets was one of the architects of the US national accounting system. In 1934, in the throes of the Great Depression, he presented a report to the Senate Finance Committee on the estimates of national income from 1929 to 1932. In it, he describes how the national accounting system could reveal new kinds of economic information such as: accurate estimates of income distribution, the identification of the sources of economic growth plus the potential to create economic stability by better understanding the fluctuations in the business cycle. . He particularly suggested that a key value of national accounts could be as a means of ensuring that the “consumption needs of different sectors of the population were being met”. He also understood that purely income-based indicators didn't tell the full story of a nation's welfare, and he recognized the value of other activities, such as unpaid work in the home, that were essential to people's lives but were not part of the economy. For these reasons, in his report to the Senate, he categorically stated: “the welfare of a nation can scarcely be inferred from a measurement of national income.”

Despite Kuznets's warning, though, national income and its formal indicator GDP have indeed come to be the dominant measures of human welfare. How did this come about? As is often the case, war changed everything. In the UK, probably the most famous economist of his generation, John Maynard Keynes, worked on producing a reliable and practical national accounting system. It was inevitably focused on production, as there was a need to produce a lot of things very quickly and very efficiently – for example, the UK manufactured nearly half a million trucks during the war and more than 100,000 aircraft. After the war there was a renewed focus on production, as most of Europe needed rebuilding. So it was almost by accident, because of the outbreak of war, that production-based national accounts became the exclusive focus of policymaking.


In 1947, the United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA) was created, and the attention on GDP as a headline indicator of progress began. Kuznets regarded the system as a great disappointment. His original purpose, of working to alleviate inequalities and poverty, was not adequately addressed by this new formal system.

Imagine how different the world could have been

Imagine what the world would be like if Kuznets' original intentions had been adhered to. Would governments today see their core purpose as minimizing inequalities in income distribution instead of maximizing economic production? Would such sensitivity to the welfare of the poorest have changed the whole pattern of globalization? The path of history has turned on smaller things.

Two decades later, one politician started to question where this path of forever focusing on economic growth was leading us. In probably the most eloquent deconstruction of our measurement system ever, Robert Kennedy gave an impassioned speech at Kansas University in March 1968 at the beginning of his presidential campaign. He talked about the restlessness of the national soul of America, the growing division between Americans, and the persistent unacceptable levels of poverty and deprivation. But then his speech took a remarkable turn as he explicitly confronted the national accounting framework and criticized the rising materialism in the country:

Even if we act to erase material poverty, there is another greater task; it is to confront the poverty of satisfaction – purpose and dignity – that afflicts us all. Too much and for too long, we seemed to have surrendered personal excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things. Our Gross National Product, now, is over \$800 billion a year, but that Gross National Product ... counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for the people who break them. It counts the destruction of the redwood and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. It counts napalm and counts nuclear warheads and armored cars for the police to fight the riots in our cities. It counts Whitman's rifle and Speck's knife, and the television programs which glorify violence in order to sell toys to our children. Yet the Gross National Product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country. It measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.



Kennedy's words still ring true; GDP (or GNP as it was usually referred to in his day) simply does not measure what matters ... to us.

GDP has continued to be criticized since Kennedy's speech. There is now a long list of its shortcomings. GDP not only includes things which are "bads" such as the costs of health problems, accidents, family breakdown, crime and pollution, it also excludes things which are "goods" such as unpaid activities like child-rearing, running a household, helping friends and neighbors, volunteering and local political participation. All of these activities are outside the market, yet they are at the very core of our economies. As well as not valuing what matters most, GDP doesn't account for the social and environmental costs of economic development, with perhaps the most pressing example being the long-term costs of climate change, which economist Nicholas Stern has called "the greatest and widest-ranging market failure ever." All in all, GDP cannot be considered a reliable or desirable measure of progress.

Again we are left imagining what could have been. If Kennedy hadn't been assassinated and had gone on to become president, what would he have asked the various US statistics agencies to measure? Would he have created different policies based on those measures?

He would no doubt have faced stern opposition from classical economists. They would argue that even if GDP is not a good measure of progress, this does not matter if increasing it automatically leads to increases in well-being anyway. Neatly, the assumptions they make have allowed them to argue precisely this. Classical economists assume that people have rational and stable preferences and that their well-being is greatest when they have the maximum opportunities to satisfy them. So more choice is always better, and more income increases choices, so the way to make life better is to increase people's incomes. This theory is all well and good, but is it in fact true?

The false logic is uncovered

Back in the early 1970s, Richard Easterlin, an economist from California, started to explore the relationship between GDP growth and happiness using a new type of subjective well-being measures. These subjective measures used the data from large-scale surveys where respondents have been asked to rate their own happiness or satisfaction with life. While simple, these measures have been shown to be reliable, and in experiments people who score highly on them have been observed to smile more and are rated as happy by people who know them well.

So what did Easterlin find? A paradox no less! He found that if he looked within a given country, at a given time, then people with the highest incomes did indeed report the greatest happiness. He did not find any evidence, however, that rising per-capita GDP caused average national happiness to also rise. Instead he found that happiness levels stayed the same. So while richer people are happier at any point in time, we do not all get happier as we all get richer. This perplexing finding has become known as the “Easterlin paradox.” Easterlin himself explained the paradox by suggesting that it was relative income that mattered for happiness, rather than absolute. In other words, he suggested that we compare our current income to other people’s income now, rather than to our past earnings.

While recently the paradox has been challenged using new international data collected during the intervening years, it is absolutely clear that the magnitude of any increases in happiness is very small. Many countries, such as the US or the UK, which have had substantial economic growth over the last few decades have not had any discernable increases in national happiness over the same period.

It is worth pausing for a second and reflecting on why these findings are so startling. They are the very uncovering of the false logic at the heart of our economic system. We have organized our modern societies around a particular model of how to pursue happiness. We have assumed that increasing economic output would lead straightforwardly to increases in the standard of living and thereby human happiness. Our economies are organized around increasing GDP with little regard for the negative impacts on the environment or even how income is distributed within our nations. Our business models are focused almost exclusively on maximizing profits for shareholders, often ignoring the needs of their broader stakeholder groups, such as local communities, employees and suppliers. Meanwhile people are led to believe that the more disposable income they have, the more they will be able to consume, and that this is the route to happiness. In fact, in recent decades, people seem to have become exclusively focused on consuming and in the process have gotten themselves heavily indebted. Tim Jackson, in his TEDTalk on an “economic reality check,” put it brilliantly when he said: “It is a story about people, us, being persuaded to spend money we don’t have, on things we don’t need, to impress people we don’t care about.”

If we are going to become happier and more sustainable, then the false logic of this story needs to be exposed and laid bare.

Walking his TEDTalk

There are signs that things are starting to change. At the TED conference in February 2010, David Cameron, the British politician who has since become prime minister, quoted Robert Kennedy extensively and shared his vision of how Britain should start to measure GWB – General Well-Being. It turns out that this was not just TED-talk -- and since his election he has started to walk his talk. In November 2010, Britain woke up to a very welcome front-page headline:

UK happiness index to gauge national mood: despite the cuts gloom Cameron wants wellbeing measure to steer policy.




Cameron has announced plans that he is going to invest £2 million in creating the first national well-being indicators. He has given the UK National Statistician, Jil Matheson, the task of exploring how a new set of well-being indicators can best be created. We at nef (the new economics foundation), anticipate that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) will consult with experts about the questions to be used, and then they will be asked systematically in one of the existing, large household surveys. This is crucial as it is only by the regular collection of high-quality data that policymakers will start to gain confidence in this new type of well-being analysis. Cameron is to be applauded, not only for his ambition, but also for his actions so far. The well-being indicators should help shift the policy debate away from an exclusive focus on economic performance. Some may argue his goal is simply political – to create an alternative success narrative in the event his economic efforts fail. But both cynics and supporters can agree that the measurement of well-being will only really start to matter if it does actually steer policy.

A call for new ways to measure progress

The UK interest in well-being indicators is not in isolation and builds on a lot of recent activity by governments and international agencies. In fact, one of the ONS's explicit briefs from Cameron is to review work that has been carried out by the French government. This work started in January 2008, when French president Nicolas Sarkozy recruited Nobel Prize-winning economists Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen together with French economist Jean-Paul Fitoussi to form a special commission on the measurement of economic performance and social progress. As they outlined the scope of their work, all three economists were well aware of the challenges they faced:

There is a huge distance between standard measures of important socioeconomic variables like growth, inflation, inequalities etc. ... and widespread perceptions. ... Our statistical apparatus, which may have served us well in a not too distant past, is in need of serious revisions.



The commissioners were right to note that people's "widespread perceptions" were very different from the official GDP story. In 2006, which we would perhaps now regard as the peak of the economic boom years of the decade, a question in the European Social Survey asked people whether they felt life was getting worse in their country. Startlingly, 61% of Europeans felt it was, and the French were even more pessimistic, with 84% feeling that life was getting worse for their fellow citizens.

Walking his TEDTalk

Their call for serious revisions to the statistical apparatus was like music to our ears at nef (the new economics foundation), the London-based policy think tank that I work at. In fact, we had some suggestions to make ourselves about how to include well-being within the national accounting framework. To this end, in early 2009, we launched our own report called National Accounts of Well-being (www.nationalaccountsofwellbeing.org). The report is based on data from the European Social Survey (ESS), which covers 22 countries across Europe. In each country a representative sample was asked over 50 questions about their personal and social well-being.

Recently the ESS confirmed that the set of well-being questions will be repeated in the 2012 survey. For us this is very significant, as it will enable us to make comparisons across time as well as between nations. As much as anything, we are interested in starting a debate about how well-being should be measured to make it most useful in guiding policy. Should the measurement focus on how happy people are now, or their resilience and potential to respond to future challenges? Should policy be more interested in people's personal well-being or their thoughts and feelings about their relationships and local communities? These are important questions that can be answered only by researchers and policymakers working together to develop robust, reliable and relevant indicators.

More new measurements of happiness

We are not the only ones calling for these types of revisions, and there seems to be a genuine gathering of momentum. It is probably not a coincidence that the UK is one of the first to start to act on all these ideas, as there has been a concerted effort, not only by us, to re-focus policy on happiness and well-being for some time now. In fact, the first to make these calls was the prominent UK economist Richard Layard, who in 2004 published a highly influential book simply titled *Happiness*. Recently Layard has launched “Action for **Happiness**” – a movement for positive social change that seeks to bring people together from all walks of life to create a happier society for everyone (<http://www.actionforhappiness.org/>). It is also clear that the British public seems to support the main thrust of Layard’s campaign as a recent poll suggested that 81% of people supported the idea that government’s prime objective should be the “greatest happiness” rather than the “greatest wealth.”

In the US, there has been a long tradition of social indicators work that aims to supplement economic accounts. In late 2010, the Rockefeller Foundation launched a new website called **The State of the USA** (<http://www.stateoftheusa.org/>); its aim is to create a national dataset of key social, environmental and economic data. Recently there have also been calls to create national well-being indicators that go beyond GDP, particularly led by three leading psychologists, Ed Diener, Daniel Kahneman and Martin Seligman. Diener and Seligman wrote a very influential paper – ***Beyond Money: Toward an Economy of Well-Being*** – in which they identified the potential for well-being indicators to supplement economic ones. Kahneman, who although a psychologist, is a Nobel Prize winner in economics, has done considerable work on evaluating the usefulness of different types of well-being indicators. Some of Kahneman and Diener’s work has been with Gallup, which has invested heavily in its US daily polls and a world poll, both of which include several well-being questions.

The European Commission has held a series of conferences on ***Beyond GDP***, and its statistics agency Eurostat has started to work on developing well-being indicators for the European Union. In addition, the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – effectively a group of the wealthiest nations) has had a whole stream of high-level engagement work and conferences on ***Measuring the Progress of Societies***.

These are all important developments, and they highlight the need for international cooperation and systematic investment. Our current economic accounts were not created overnight, and their annual construction is not a trivial matter either -- the UK agency ONS spent £238 million in 2009/2010 collecting and analyzing social and economic data. If well-being indicators are going to become more central to how we organize government, then other governments should follow the UK’s recent lead and invest in them.

Measuring sustainable well-being

The Stiglitz Commission, as the French presidential commission became known, published its very comprehensive report in the second half of 2009. The first section of the report deals directly with several of the internal inconsistencies of GDP, such as how to value public services – is it how much we spend on them or what their outputs are worth to us? These are important questions and worthy of attention.

However our attention, at nef, was drawn to their thinking about well-being and sustainability. Interestingly, the Commission distinguished between current well-being and sustainability, which it defined as whether well-being can last over time:

The time is ripe for our measurement system to shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's well-being. And measures of well-being should be put in a context of sustainability.

This is absolutely our opinion, too. It makes no sense if a nation's current well-being comes at the expense of its future well-being, something we have not heard the UK government pick up on yet. The Stiglitz Report received a warm welcome in almost all circles and its publication will certainly become one of the definitive markers along this long road to challenging the dominance of GDP.

The power of a single indicator

I disagree, however, with one of the Commission's conclusions. While it states that **"...well-being needs to be put in the context of sustainability,"** it shied away from the need for a single headline indicator to capture their relationship because of technical concerns. It is true, of course, that the measurement of happiness and well-being is complex and to place them in the context of sustainability even more so. But for me, the danger is that if there is no headline indicator to challenge GDP, then nothing very much will change.

I have put it to Professor Stiglitz that he is technically correct but strategically wrong. Most people are not economists or statisticians; they simply want to get on with making decisions that improve their lives and the lives of other people. This is why the simplicity of GDP is so appealing, the assumption being that if it goes up, things are going well. Politicians look for those GDP figures so that they can point to their "success." Policy makers do not want to have to look at 10, or even 50, different indicators and make a judgement about what they all mean. What happens if five indicators are going up and five are going down? Is that a good or a bad thing overall? In my opinion, it is vital to consider such trade-offs and the tensions between different goals of society, but if we have no way of jointly assessing their implications, they tend to be ignored. We need a new single indicator as powerful as the GDP that allows us to compare nations and track our own progress.



Redefining progress



When the Stiglitz Report highlighted that current well-being needs to be placed in the context of sustainability, it was really drawing attention to the fact that there is an inherent tension between them. In fact, it is this tension that first inspired me to start to think about sustainability, and progress towards sustainability, from a happiness perspective. Thinking about happiness freed me up to stop focusing on sustainable consumption or production and to instead simply think about happy, sustainable lives.

It suddenly became clear that it is no good having people living happily now, if this present happiness is created in such a way as to undermine the ability of future generations to live happily. That is not progress. Progress is about aligning these two goals: happiness now and happiness in the future.

Perhaps, as I am a statistician, it is not surprising that somewhere along the way I started to think about how we could capture this tension between present levels of happiness and sustainability in an index. This train of thought eventually came to fruition when we, at nef, published the **Happy Planet Index** (HPI) in 2006.

The name itself makes clear that we are not only talking about happy lives but also about the planet. The first HPI was launched in July 2006, and it attracted a lot of interest – more than we could ever have imagined. Newspaper articles were written across the globe, and within two days of its launch, the report had been downloaded and read in 185 countries worldwide. In fact, **nef**'s website crashed for four days running as we simply couldn't deal with the volume. Three years on, HPI 2.0 was calculated with new improved data sets for 143 countries, covering 99% of the world's population.

The HPI measures two things: the well-being of nations and the sustainability of nations.

The well-being of nations

To measure well-being, we expanded the concept to include peoples' health as well their happiness. The indicator we use for health is "life expectancy at birth," as used in the UN's **Human Development Index**. The use of this reliable and well-known objective indicator helps to anchor the less well-known subjective data about human happiness. For happiness, the only global data available is on life satisfaction. We were generously granted access to the **Gallup World Poll**, the largest cross-national survey that has ever been carried out on well-being, which we supplemented with data from the **World Value Survey** for some extra countries.

We combined the subjective life satisfaction data with the objective life expectancy data to create a measure known as "happy life years," which was first developed by the Dutch sociologist Ruut Veenhoven. Happy life years can be seen as happiness-adjusted life expectancy. The measurement has a powerful logic to it. It recognizes that a satisfying life is not ideal if it is short; and that a long life is not ideal if it is miserable.

The sustainability of nations

The second element of the HPI is measuring our impact on the planet. In our opinion, the current best available approach is the ecological footprint, developed by ecologists Mathis Wackernagel and William Rees. Our ecological footprint is a measure of the amount of land required to provide for all of our resource requirements, including the amount of vegetated land required to absorb our CO₂ emissions. This figure is expressed in units of “global hectares” (gHa). The advantage of this approach is that it is also possible to estimate the total amount of productive hectares available on the whole planet. Dividing this by the world’s total population, everyone’s global fair share of ecological resource use can be estimated. Using the latest footprint methodology – and it should be noted that this is a developing methodology – this estimate is 2.1 gHa per person.

In 2005, the average footprint for the UK was 5.3 gHa; the US’s was even higher at 9.4 gHa. These figures are sometimes reported in terms of the number of planets that would be required to support lifestyles like these. If the entire planet was made up of UK citizens, we’d require two and a half planets to sustain us. For the US, four and a half planets. Clearly these figures represent significant unsustainability, and they give us some idea of the magnitude of the challenge we are facing.

The easiest way to illustrate how the HPI holds the tension between a nation’s well-being and its sustainability is by looking at Figure 1. On the horizontal axis sits the ecological footprint of nations, our measure of their sustainability; once a nation is beyond its equitable fair share of 2.1gHa, then more is bad as it then represents too much pressure on the planet’s ecosystems. On the vertical axis sits happy life years, our measure of the well-being of nations, where more is good as it represents happier, healthier lives.

The global average is shown by the largest circle at 2.3gHa and just over 40 happy life years. All the individual nations of the world are spread out across the graph.

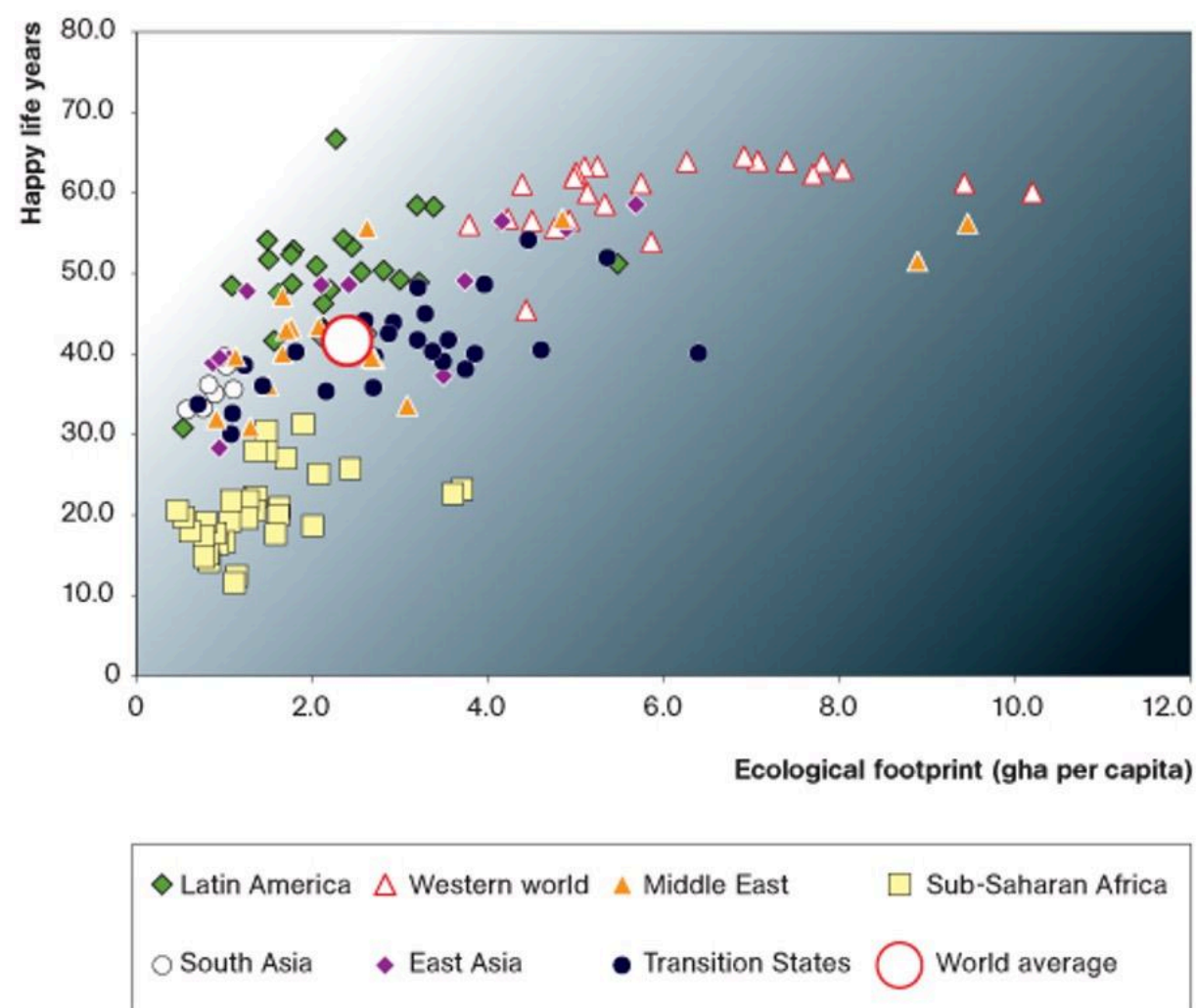
Unsustainable **nations**

To the top right lies a series of countries represented by triangles – from right to left: Luxembourg, the US, then two Gulf States, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait – with other western nations across the top. This group of nations is broadly doing okay in terms of producing well-being, but using too many of the planet’s resources to get there. Their challenge is to reduce their environmental impact while maintaining levels of well-being.

Unhappy **nations**

To the bottom left is a group of nations who simply are not producing much well-being for their citizens. They are predominantly sub-Saharan African nations, where life is short and unhappy. Average life expectancy in Zambia and Zimbabwe is below 41 years, for example; malaria and HIV/AIDS are killing a lot of people too young. People also score very low on life satisfaction measures, the lowest being just 2.4 for Tanzania, with even South Africa only scoring an average of 5.0 out of 10.0. This group of nations’ challenge is to improve their population’s well-being. Many of them have ecological footprints well below one-planet living, so they have some “space” to use more resources to achieve these gains.

Figure 1: Happy Planet Index: Happy life years and ecological footprint for 143 countries, and world average



Happy, sustainable **nations**

But then we can look top left and start to identify some countries that are doing quite well in Happy Planet terms – creating good, sustainable lives that don’t undermine the future. It is in this corner that we ultimately want all nations of the world to be. Those in this space now include some Asian countries, but doing especially well are Latin American ones. Eight of the top ten ranking countries in the HPI are from Latin America, including the nation all out on its own at the top left, Costa Rica. The challenge for these nations is to resist the lure of unsustainable “western” lifestyles. In fact the group of (mainly western) unsustainable nations should be aspiring to be more like these nations rather than vice versa.

Learning from Costa Rica

The fact that Costa Rica comes top of the HPI is both surprising and interesting.

The data tells us just how well they are doing. Average life expectancy is 78.5 years; this is higher than the US, where it is only 77.9 years. Its ecological footprint is only 2.3 gHa, less than half that of the UK and a quarter that of the US, and only just over its global fair share which would be 2.1gHa. Meanwhile, largely unnoticed, Costa Ricans actually have the highest life satisfaction score globally, according to the 2008 **Gallup World Poll**, at 8.5 out of 10.0.

What are they doing right in Costa Rica? Why are they so satisfied with life? A full answer is worth a book of its own, but here some clues:

- + They have one of the most developed welfare systems outside of Scandinavia, with clean water and adult literacy almost universal.
- + The army was abolished in 1949 and the monies freed up are spent on social programs.
- + There is a strong “core economy” of social networks of family, friends, and neighborhoods made possible by a sensible work/life balance and equal treatment of women.
- + It is a beautiful country with rich, protected, natural capital.

There is clearly much we can learn from Costa Rica, and that is before we consider its environmental credentials: 99% of electricity is from renewable resources (mainly hydro); there is a carbon tax on emissions; and deforestation has been dramatically reversed in the last 20 years.

Creating a single ranking of nations

To achieve the powerful goal of a single index on which all nations can be ranked, we need to combine the two indicators: Happy Life Years and Ecological Footprint. But it doesn't make sense to just lump them together in a weighted average. It's more meaningful to create an efficiency measure. The idea is to follow how economics thinks of scarcity: when you have a scarce resource and you want to create a desirable outcome with it, you think in terms of using that resource efficiently. In fact, Herman Daly, a former World Bank economist and one of the founding fathers of ecological economics, has called the HPI "the ultimate efficiency ratio – the final valuable output divided by the original scarce input."

So the HPI can be thought of as the degree to which happy and long lives are achieved per unit of ecological resource consumption:

Happy Planet Index ~ $\frac{\text{Happy Life Years}}{\text{Ecological Footprint}}$

This is not a precise equation, as there are certain statistical adjustments we make that produce an easy-to-interpret figure ranging from 0 to 100. You can see some of the results in Table 1 which gives HPI scores for a selection of countries around the world including the top and bottom three. Full details of all nations' scores are available at the website www.happyplanetindex.org

Table 1: HPI results table for a selection of countries (2005–2008)

Countries	Life Sat	Life Exp	HLY	Footprint	HPI	HPI Rank
Costa Rica	8.5	78.5	66.7	2.3	76.1	1
Dominican Republic	7.6	71.5	54.2	1.5	71.8	2
Jamaica	6.7	72.2	48.5	1.1	70.1	3
Vietnam	6.5	73.7	47.8	1.3	66.5	5
China	6.7	72.5	48.6	2.1	57.1	20
India	5.5	63.7	35.1	0.9	53.0	35
Netherlands	7.7	79.2	61.1	4.4	50.6	43
Germany	7.2	79.1	56.8	4.2	48.1	51
France	7.1	80.2	56.6	4.9	43.9	71
United Kingdom	7.4	79.0	58.6	5.3	43.3	74
Japan	6.8	82.3	55.6	4.9	43.3	75
Ireland	8.1	78.4	63.8	6.3	42.6	78
Australia	7.9	80.9	63.7	7.8	36.6	102
Russia	5.9	65.0	38.1	3.7	34.5	108
United States of America	7.9	77.9	61.2	9.4	30.7	114
Nigeria	4.8	46.5	22.2	1.3	30.3	115
South Africa	5.0	50.8	25.2	2.1	29.7	118
Luxembourg	7.7	78.4	60.1	10.2	28.5	122
United Arab Emirates	7.2	78.3	56.2	9.5	28.2	123
Estonia	5.6	71.2	40.1	6.4	26.4	131
Botswana	4.7	48.1	22.6	3.6	20.9	141
Tanzania	2.4	51.0	12.5	1.1	17.8	142
Zimbabwe	2.8	40.9	11.6	1.1	16.6	143

Source: Happy Planet Index 2.0 www.happyplanetindex.org

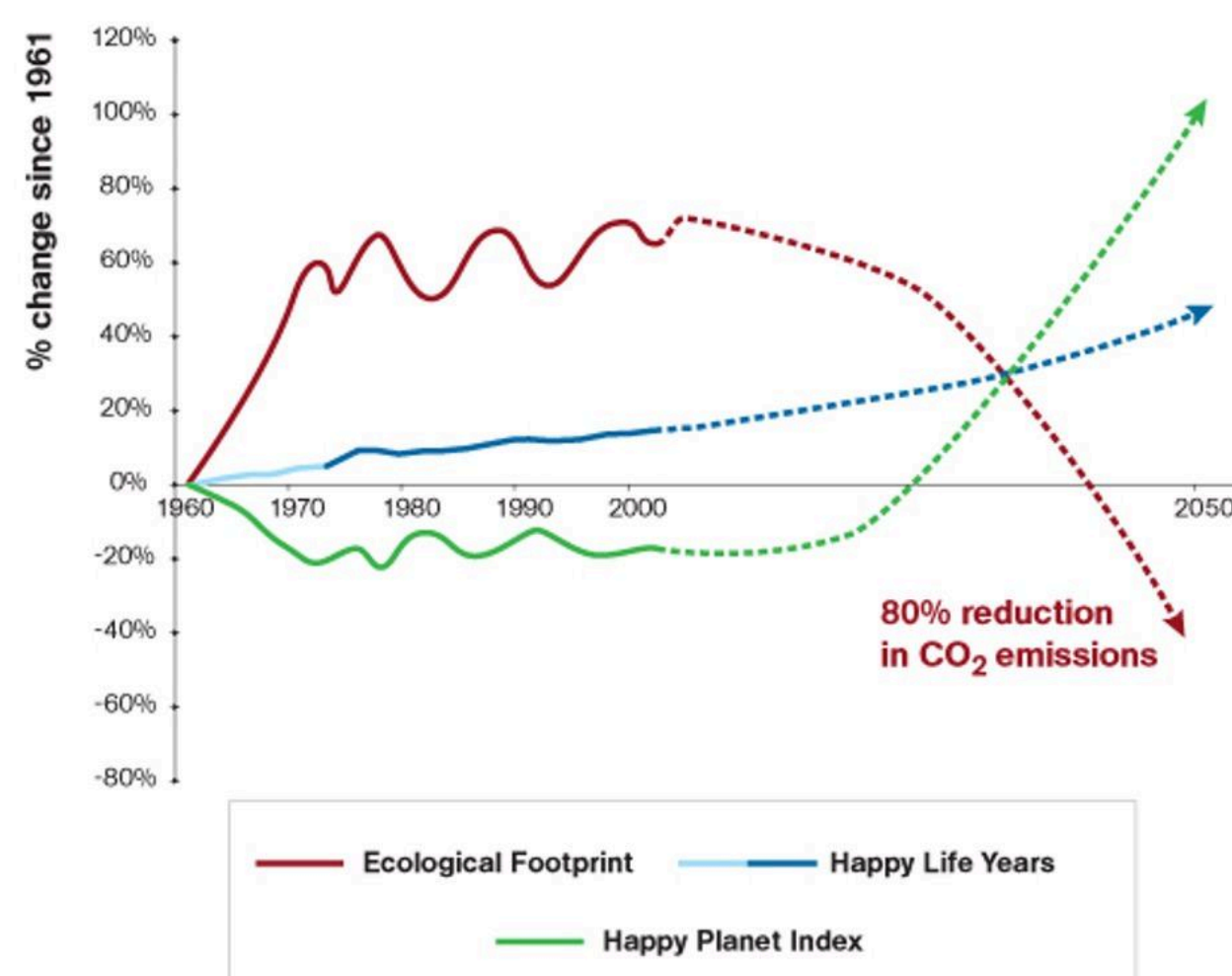
Progress or regress?

Both Figure 1 and the Table 1 are really just a snapshot in time of how nations are doing now. They can highlight good and bad examples, but they tell us nothing about the direction in which we are headed. And this is exactly what we need to know: are we getting better or getting worse? We want to assess whether we are progressing towards a society where good lives don't cost the Earth.

The problem we face is data availability. Historical data for happiness simply doesn't exist for most countries. In fact, it is only in the last couple of decades that the **World Value Survey** has been carried out, and this has more recently been followed by the **Gallup World Poll**. For some of the richest countries, however, we do have consistent data back to the early 1970s and even a few surveys back through the 1960s. The historical data on life expectancy is much more readily available, and the Global Footprint Network also produces estimates of ecological footprint back to 1961 for most countries.

So using all the available data we created a graph for the second HPI report for a group of 25 countries including the US, Canada, Mexico, the UK, France, Germany, Japan, South Korea and Australia, as well as many other rich economies of the world, all of them part of the OECD group. Figure 2 shows two things. On the left we have the historical data from 1961 to 2005 for 25 countries; on the right we project forward to 2050 some targets for the indicators.

Figure 2: Happy life years, ecological footprint and HPI over time for OECD countries and targets for 2050



The top line on the graph is for ecological footprint, which shows a sharp increase (up 55%) till the OPEC-induced oil shock in the early 1970s but still some increase, another 10%, after this time.

The middle line is for happy life years, which shows a small, steady increase (23%) over the time period. This increase is mainly driven by increases in average life expectancy, which rose by ten years from 68.8 to 78.8 years over the period. There was hardly any increase in happiness over this time, but it is important to recognize that we don't really know what happiness levels were in the 1960s, as nearly all of our data from before 1973 is estimated (as shown by the faded line).

Change of direction

The bottom line is the time trend for the HPI in these rich "western" nations. As the HPI is an efficiency measure, it illustrates that despite making some gains in well-being, we have actually become less efficient. Our consumption of ecological resources has grown at a faster rate than our gains in well-being. This is disappointing when you think how much more aware of our environmental impact we are now than we were in the 1960s. But the data shows clearly that we have been, and still are, heading in the wrong direction.

The HPI shows clearly that we need to change direction. The right-hand side of the graph with the dotted arrows illustrates the challenges we face if we are to get on the right track. The British government passed its Climate Change Act in 2008, committing the nation to a legally binding 80% reduction in CO2 and other greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The "reducing ecological footprint" arrow represents the scale of this change. It is quite a significant challenge. It is not a business-as-usual scenario; it is a changing-our-business scenario. This is a scenario that no doubt scares some people. Indeed I believe that this is what a lot of climate-change skepticism is really about: People are worried about the prospect of having to change their lifestyle, so it becomes tempting to doubt whether the problem exists at all. Avoiding the issue does not help, of course; it will only create more problems.

This is why a happiness and well-being focus is critical. While we might have to do things differently to create a happier planet, it's worth it if we can also create happier lives. To put it crudely, a sustainable future will be much easier to "sell" to people if it is also a happier future.

Not only is happiness an important goal in its own right but it is also part of our adaptive evolutionary nature – helping us respond to any challenges we face. It is here that we need to turn away from statisticians and national measurement and more directly towards people's happiness – from a focus on our nations to a focus on our nature. Let's start by looking at some research on emotions in general and then turn to happiness in particular.



Happiness is in our nature



Psychologists tend to categorize our emotions into positive and negative feelings, though emotions are understood as more than simply a “feeling state” -- they also involve bodily changes and create a readiness to act. The terms “positive” and “negative” can be a little confusing: Although we don’t particularly want to experience sadness, anger or fear, there clearly are occasions when their experience – and their expression – is very appropriate. There are also times when to be happy or content would be entirely inappropriate. The negative and positive labels can be thought of as the types of stimuli they are in response to, so threats = negative, and opportunities = positive. Evolutionary psychologists suggest that emotions have evolved as part of a dynamic process of responding to stimuli and galvanizing appropriate actions. At some level it is obvious that our emotions must have evolved for a purpose; having emotions must have enabled our ancestors to survive and thrive. Fear, for example, is hard-wired to the flight mechanism. It served us well in our distant past: when we became aware of a predator it was very important to move quickly without too much thought. So fear is part of a larger dynamic system that enables us to survive and function well. Emotions act as a feedback mechanism, giving us a signal to act in a particular way.

Fear is only one of our emotional responses to stimuli in our environment, but it is often described as one of our basic emotions. Social psychologists first identified these basic emotions by studying people’s facial expressions and descriptions of what they were feeling at the time. In the 1950s, one such researcher, Paul Ekman, took photographs of actors displaying various emotions, which he then showed to people from very different cultural backgrounds. It wouldn’t matter if you were a psychology undergrad student in New York or a tribesperson in Papua New Guinea, you could still identify the images with specific emotions. In this way five basic emotions were “discovered”: fear, anger, sadness, disgust, and happiness. This sort of categorization is inevitably simplistic, and it is unlikely that emotions actually evolved in quite such a tidy way. However, while there is no precise one-to-one correspondence between an emotion and a particular action, a basic emotions approach is nicely illustrative of the types of actions that are linked to the arousal of emotions. Daniel Nettle, a psychologist who is particularly interested in the evolutionary purpose of emotions, created a matrix that shows the four basic negative emotions, the types of situations that are likely to evoke them and the probable actions that they promote (Table 2).

Table 2: The four main negative emotions, the situations they tend to be aroused by, and the possible actions they promote.

Emotion	Typical Situation	Probable Actions Promoted
Fear	Source of danger	Detect and Flee
Anger	Violation of a norm	Deter future violation (violently or non-violently)
Sadness	Loss of valued support	Save energy and tread carefully until conditions improve
Disgust	Potential contamination	Spit out and avoid

In summary, all these four basic negative emotions are mainly about withdrawing from, or actively resisting, adverse situations that are threatening us. Understanding their functionality raises the question about what the evolutionary purpose of positive emotions is.

Until relatively recently, the main functional understanding of positive emotions was that they were signals rewarding us for approaching a desired goal. If we are feeling happy, it’s because things are going well, so we don’t need to change things. However Barbara Fredrickson, an empirical psychologist who carries out lab-based research, has developed an impressive body of work exploring this issue.

Her core finding is that people in positive moods are more flexible and more creative, pay more attention, and are open to relationship building – she calls this functionality “a broadening of our repertoire of responses.” She shows that not only do we broaden our thoughts and actions but that these very acts go on to build our psychological, social and cognitive resources, such as our resilience, social skills, emotional intelligence and self-esteem. Her theory is commonly referred to as the “broaden and build” theory of positive emotions.

Norwegian psychologist Joar Vittersø further adds to the understanding of how we build our skills and resources. He suggests that some of the positive emotions, such as inspiration, interest, engagement and curiosity, actually enable us to commit to challenging tasks and thereby directly learn new skills. I like to think of this differentiation as between active and passive happiness. This is similar to what the influential Hungarian psychologist Mihály Csikszentmihalyi proposed when he researched people’s experience of “flow”; a state where we are so absorbed in an action that we lose track of time. Tennis players are in the zone; pianists become one with their music; and statisticians, like me, sadly lose themselves in Excel spreadsheets. It’s an experience that nearly all of us have had, and it’s most keenly experienced when we are able to respond to a challenge by marshaling our appropriate skills. If the challenge is too high for our level of skill, we become anxious; if it’s too low, we get bored. This stretching of ourselves in flow states can be very rewarding, enjoyable even – happiness in action. And, along the way, we acquire new skills.

These ideas – emerging from the field that is often referred to as positive psychology – really help us to understand some of the benefits of happiness (and other positive emotions). Effectively, our emotions are central to our evolved survival mechanisms; they are an essential part of the way we adapt to changes in our environment by facing challenges, approaching opportunities and solving problems.

And there is still a further point why it is important that we focus on happiness: it turns out that happier people contribute more.

Change of direction

If psychologists such as Barbara Fredrickson are right and our positive emotions actually do build our skills for future benefits, then it follows that the happier we are, the better we should do. Obviously we expect to feel better if we're happy, but can we expect to be more successful? Researchers have to be very careful in distinguishing direction of causality when examining this question. Clearly, success can cause happiness. We're in agreement there. But we are asking the question the other way round: does happiness cause success? Three well-respected positive psychology researchers – Sonja Lyubomirsky, Laura King and Ed Diener – undertook a massive meta-analysis of 225 studies to address this question. Their strongest body of evidence drew on longitudinal studies where the same people are tracked over time, which while not strictly a proof of causality, is strongly suggestive.

They looked at direct success across many aspects of people's lives including their relationships, their work, their earnings, their health, and also, crucially, their contribution to society. The headline message is that yes, happier people are more successful across all domains of their lives, they do contribute more to society and causality does run from happiness to success as well as the other way round. Some of the highlights of the research they uncovered include:

—+ HEALTH

Happier people suffer from fewer strokes, recover better from medical procedures and are even less likely to catch a cold. They are also less prone to unhealthy behaviors such as smoking, excessive drinking, and drug taking.

—+ MENTAL HEALTH

Unsurprisingly, happy people have fewer mental health problems, and this also translates into them being less likely to experience depression if they are made unemployed.

—+ RELATIONSHIPS

Happy people are more likely to get married, to stay married, and even if they do get divorced are more likely to find a new partner. They also develop stronger friendships, partly as their happiness and smiles signal friendliness.

—+ WORK AND INCOME

Happier people are more likely to be given a job interview, they secure better jobs, and their happiness predicts their job performance up to eight years later. They are less likely to be made unemployed and more likely to earn more money 16 years after their happiness was first assessed.

—+ LONG LIVES

Happy people live longer, some studies even suggesting up to ten years longer. The most famous study involves a group of nuns whose happiness was retrospectively estimated by studying their autobiographical accounts of their lives when they first joined as novices. By the time they were reaching their 90s, nearly 70 years later, three times as many "happy" nuns were alive as "unhappy" ones.

Happy people don't only create successes for themselves; they also reach out to others and create societal benefits through their generosity and creativity. The researchers found that happy people volunteer more, are more altruistic, generate more ideas, and are more entrepreneurial. These findings are supported by experimental studies where people are induced into a positive mood, by for example a short film, and then set various tasks. This research has highlighted how happiness not only makes us more sociable and helpful but also has considerable cognitive benefits. For example, being in a good mood helps us solve complex mental tasks by being more flexible and original in our approaches to solving them.

So happiness is very dynamic in that our actions, our feelings, and our skills all build on each other. It is good for us and it is a classic social good as it provides not only personal benefits but a cascade of social benefits, too. This is why happiness is not only a worthy goal for people and nations, it is also the key to how we will be able to develop creative solutions to the challenges we face.

So returning to the challenges that we face to become both happy and sustainable, I suggest that it is exceptionally unhelpful to overstimulate a fear response about the future of the planet. Environmentalists have tended to try and grab people's attention by describing worst-case scenarios and the horrors they entail. Fear grabs attention. But fear also tends to galvanize the action of fleeing. This is why talk of sustainability too often causes eyes to glaze over. Mentally, we flee the problem.

Instead it is time to bring these two goals of happiness and sustainability together. I am suggesting that sustainability can be thought of as creating future happiness – human happiness that lasts over time. This understanding of sustainability would enable us to harness our human nature and develop solutions that really would create a future where happiness does not cost the earth.

Taking stock

Let's pause a minute. We have seen how powerful measurement can be. By focusing on GDP we have grown our economies, but this has not nurtured happiness and well-being. In fact, it has led to increasing environmental impacts that are threatening the possibilities of future generations to nurture their well-being. Yet we have seen some hopeful signs. Some nations like Costa Rica are already nurturing well-being in ways that are (almost) sustainable.

We have also seen how happiness is part of our human nature. Happiness is not only a goal in its own right; it is also the key to unlocking the creativity and innovation we need to create a better future.

So we have a new emerging possibility – just like the founding fathers when they were declaring independence. We can align the purpose of our nations with the aspirations of people in the nurturing of happiness and well-being in a sustainable way.



A Happiness Manifesto



This happiness manifesto seeks to unlock this potentially powerful alignment. It offers nations and people potential ways of moving from a primary focus on the pursuit of financial prosperity towards the nurturing of well-being.

Below I propose five ways to personal well-being and seven strategies for national well-being as a way of starting to fulfill this vision. They should be considered as work in progress and not a definite solution.

Five ways to personal well-being

The five positive actions that individuals can take themselves were developed during a project we at nef did for the UK government's Office of Science.

From time to time it conducts what it calls Foresight Reviews of issues that are pertinent to the future of the UK. In 2008, the focus was people's well-being. We were commissioned to produce a list of positive actions that would enhance people's well-being. These actions had to target the individual, be universally applicable, and of course they had to be evidence-based. This was an exciting opportunity, especially as the output of the project was not to be an academic report but instead to draw on social marketing ideas to create the basis for communicating these actions directly to the public.

The Foresight project was a massive endeavor, involving over 300 experts and containing over 100 separately commissioned reports and reviews. Our positive actions project started just as all the other reports were being collated, so that we could use them as our primary source of evidence. We pulled out evidence of actions that promoted well-being and also interviewed many of the academics working on the reports. This was supplemented with a review of other literature, some of which I have referred to earlier. We whittled all this evidence down to five action themes, all of which had a strong evidence base and met Foresight's other criteria. We firstly created five headline positive actions, called the "five ways to well-being." Then underneath each of them we wrote suggestions about what these actions could entail. Here they are:



Connect

With the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbors. At home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

The evidence for social relationships being the foundation for our happiness and well-being is irrefutable; indeed the psychologist Ellen Berscheid highlighted this when she wrote, "relationships constitute the single most important factor responsible for the survival of homo sapiens." A bold statement but probably true; humans have always lived in groups, we are social animals. At nef we often talk about two types of relationships: thick and thin. Our thick relationships are our close, intimate relationships and our thin ones are our broader circle of friends, relatives, work colleagues, neighbors and people we know in our daily lives. Both types of relationship are nourishing to us; the way we interact with others, particularly those closest to us, will have a large impact on our happiness. Given our hectic lifestyles, finding time to do this is not always easy, but this is the challenge happiness research presents to us – are we prepared to put our energies into the activities that really matter for our well-being?



Be active

Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and higher well-being across all age groups. It is clear that physical activity prevents cognitive decline in later years and there are also links between physical activity and cognition in children. Some studies suggest that encouraging people suffering from depression to exercise is as effective as other treatments. In addition, exercise almost immediately improves your mood, so if you are in a bad mood the fastest way out of it is probably to get out and do your exercise of choice!



Take notice

Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savor the moment, whether you are walking to work, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

Research in the area of awareness and its relationship to well-being has been focused on interventions, such as mindfulness training, meditation, resilience training and cognitive behavior therapy. All of them show significant long-term positive effects, indicating that paying attention to our sensations, thoughts and feelings enhances our lives. There is also evidence that having an open awareness is particularly good for choosing actions and behaviors that fit with our interests and values. Psychologists call this “self-regulatory behavior” and it pretty much does what it says: it helps us regulate our behavior. In terms of the dynamic nature of well-being, these sorts of actions really oil the whole system, facilitating the entire process. So to feel happier it is important that we notice the world around us and savour the moment.



Keep learning

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favorite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.

While not all learning environments can be considered good for our well-being, when we actually are inspired to engage in learning processes we gain considerable benefits. These positive change processes are more about curiosity than accumulating knowledge. For children, learning plays a vital role in developing their cognitive and social skills, but throughout our life course learning benefits our self-confidence and our sense of purpose, as well as building our competencies. There is some evidence that older people who engage in learning activities suffer less from depression and low moods. In addition, the process of setting goals and seeking to accomplish them is known to improve our well-being, especially with the sense of achievement it brings.



Give

Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you.

Neuroscientists have shown that the reward areas of our brain are stimulated when we engage in mutually cooperative actions; other studies suggest that volunteering has been associated with more positive affect and enhanced meaning in life. In an experiment, two groups were given \$100 in the morning; one with instructions to spend the money on themselves, the other on other people. At the end of the day the group that spent the money on others was significantly happier. So expressing our generosity and altruism is not only good for those who are on the receiving end but also giving is good for us.

An invitation and a possibility space

These five ways are designed to be an invitation, an invitation to try out different activities and see what happens. They are designed to remind us of the important things in life if we want to be happier. In fact, if you think of people that you know who are particularly happy then I would be very surprised if these sorts of actions were not part of their daily lives.

While not quite the secret to eternal happiness, these five actions are ones we can all take, whatever our circumstances, actions that are likely to generate more happiness in our lives. Why not try them out in your daily life? See for yourself if over time you start to feel just a little bit happier and perhaps less stressed too.

And, interestingly enough, from the Happy Planet perspective, all of them can be achieved in sustainable ways. Indeed, the five ways are so aligned with our human nature that most cultures have addressed them in their own unique styles. Perhaps this suggests that we should worry less about changes to our lifestyles as societies seek to become sustainable. Life will probably be quite different in many material ways, but there is no reason why it can't be emotionally rewarding. This is what I sometimes call "the possibility space" that together, the five ways to well-being and the Happy Planet Index open up. We have serious challenges to address, but there exists the real possibility that we can create a future where happiness does not need to come at the expense of our environment, a future where instead we could live more harmoniously with the planet.

The role of government

As individuals, we can genuinely improve our happiness by integrating the five ways to well-being into our lives. But what of nations? What should the role of government be? It is obvious that governments cannot and should not attempt to directly make us happy, but they could put well-being at the heart of all their policy. The impact of government can have profound effects on the contexts within we which we live. By seeing its role as nurturing the well-being of citizens, governments could start to re-unite the purpose of nations with the hopes of people.

So what does government do? Can we imagine how it could refocus what it does already on nurturing people's well-being?

Very broadly there are three main areas of our lives that government policy has direct effect on; the economy, the provision of public services and the places we live in. How would it be to see the economy as serving the well-being of the nation rather than simply for the generation of economic growth? Could our public services, such as our schools and health systems, better help support people's long-term well-being? What would our communities, towns and cities look like if they were designed for sustainable well-being?

These are the types of big questions that a well-being focus immediately evokes. They are not questions that can be answered immediately, but they are questions that deserve our immediate attention. Attending to these questions opens up a space, a space for us to start to imagine different strategies, to see that there are genuine alternatives to the exclusive focus on the pursuit of economic growth.

Seven strategies for national well-being

The suggestions for personal well-being above offer us a clue about how policy could be refocused around well-being. Here are seven suggestions for strategies to nurture national well-being: including two for the economy, two for public services, and two for the places we live in. They should be seen as possible policies, not precise prescriptions. But taken seriously, they would transform public life.

1. CREATE GOOD WORK

Create a well-being economy based on good work, good work in the right quantities. Unemployment has terrible effects on the well-being of the unemployed, and job insecurity affects everyone. Work can profoundly affect our well-being by providing us with purpose, challenge, and opportunities for social relationships; it is a meaningful part of our identity. Some people have little or no work; they need support to help find more work. Others overwork and need to be encouraged to reclaim their time for other purposes that would bring them more happiness. Governments should systematically promote well-being at work, highlighting best practice and helping to redistribute work throughout the economy more evenly.

2. REFORM OUR FINANCIAL SYSTEMS

Put social and environmental value at the heart of the financial system. The global financial crash revealed the full extent of the dysfunctionality of finance. Banking is unlike any other industry; its role in creating and allocating credit underpins the whole economy and shapes its social and environmental impact. Lack of access to finance can lock the disadvantaged out of the economy and leave them vulnerable to predatory lenders. Over-indebtedness can create enormous stress and damage our well-being. It is time we put people before profit. We need a financial system in the public service rather than purely for private profit.

3. DEVELOP FLOURISHING SCHOOLS

The purpose of the education system should be to create capable and emotionally well-rounded young people who are happy and motivated. At its heart, education policy must acknowledge that the best way of enabling people to realize their potential is to value them for who they are rather than their measuring their performance against exams and targets. Children have multiple intelligences and all schools should have a strategy to develop pupils' overall well-being. The curriculum needs to be broadened to include more opportunities around sports, arts, creativity and other engaging activities. An education system which promotes flourishing would lead to higher productivity, a more entrepreneurial society and greater active citizenship.

4. PROMOTE COMPLETE HEALTH

Health institutions need to broaden their focus to promote complete health, which is defined by the World Health Organization as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. To do this, we need to accelerate the move towards a preventative health system. We also need to tackle mental health far more systematically. Treating people as whole people means that health professionals need to go beyond just curing the biomedical causes of disease to thinking about the social and psychological aspects of how patients are treated.

5. ENGAGE WITH CITIZENS

Being actively engaged with communities has been shown not only to give us a personal sense of well-being but also to have a positive knock-on effect for others. This bolsters the case for government to support different sorts of community engagement, civil society organizations, and volunteering. There is also a link between well-being and democratic involvement: we need to involve people in the design and delivery of the services that they receive.

6. BUILD GOOD FOUNDATIONS

We need to adopt a radically different approach to how we plan, design and develop the built environment. The spaces we live in shape our lives for the better or the worse. We need to build neighborhoods that work for the people who live in them both now and in the future, creating great spaces for people to live their lives, to work, to play, to bring up children and to connect with other people. To achieve this we need a more holistic approach to be taken which balances social, economic and environmental value with financial return.

And finally,

7. MEASURE WHAT MATTERS

While it may not be entirely relevant to measure “the beauty of our poetry,” it is important that we start measuring what matters, as Robert Kennedy so eloquently put it, measuring everything “which makes life worthwhile.” Governments should directly and regularly measure and be accountable to their citizens’ subjective well-being: their experiences, feelings and perceptions of how their lives are going, as a new way of assessing societal progress. They should also measure the impact of our lifestyles on the environment we all share – we cannot claim to genuinely nurture well-being as nations if it is at the expense of future generations.

A detailed set of national well-being accounts would allow us to understand well-being better and track changes over time. Local government could carry out local well-being audits of their communities in order to help integrate their services and allocate their funds more effectively and efficiently. Internationally we also need new measures such as the Happy Planet Index, which will provide a global context to assess nations’ progress towards sustainable well-being. Ultimately, we need to shift the goalposts for what nations regard as progress and success. Measuring what matters will help bring about change in how societies shape the lives of their citizens, both now and in the future.

A Happiness Manifesto: nurturing well-being**Five Ways to Personal Well-being****Connect . . .****Be active . . .****Take notice . . .****Keep learning . . .****Give . . .****Seven strategies to national well-being****Create good work . . .****Reform our financial systems . . .****Develop flourishing schools . . .****Promote complete health . . .****Engage with citizens . . .****Build good foundations . . .****Measure what matters . . .**

We are all in this **together**

We are all in this together: governments, and people. I have highlighted some ideas about how happiness can open up a very real possibility space where we can all lead good lives that are sustainable. Now we need to embrace these possibilities and seek to create a new vision for the 21st century. Currently we lack a positive vision of the future. Since biblical times, people have been drawn to think of apocalyptic futures; our visions these days seem to be generally full of despair and specifically about human-made environmental catastrophes. In a way this reflects the success of the environmental movement's campaigning; the potential dangers ahead really have entered the public consciousness. But there is a fatal flaw at the centre of this campaigning strategy: it is based on fear and fear tends to encourage us to run away. The problem is we can't run away. As my colleague Andrew Simms puts it, there is no "Planet B."

Martin Luther King, Jr. was familiar with positive visions. In the final speech of his life, he spoke of going to the mountaintop and seeing the Promised Land. As a preacher, it was natural for him to evoke biblical imagery, but I think he was making an analogy. The Promised Land was clearly his way of saying that the future can be better. And by "going to the mountaintop," he was surely reaching out to the best in humanity, the best in us all. He was expressing a timeless, almost universal, aspiration. This is why he still speaks to us today. This is why his words still stir something in us.

We urgently need a positive vision of our future. We need to stimulate people not to run away but instead to engage, to have compassion, to be open, to be flexible, to be creative and innovative. This happiness manifesto proposes twelve actions that we could take as individual people and nations. We need to find a better way, and we won't get there by just doing the same as before. These actions should be seen as an invitation, an invitation to try things differently: in our families, in our communities, in our businesses and in our governments.

They just might enable us to make the great transition to a world we all want; a world where happiness does not cost the Earth.

REFERENCES

All the ideas in this book really build on the work that I started at nef in 2001, and they have developed over the years. I specifically draw on four reports we have done; A Well-being Manifesto, The Happy Planet Index (three versions), Five Ways to Wellbeing and National Accounts of Well-being.

A WELL-BEING MANIFESTO

Shah H and Marks N (2004) A Well-being Manifesto for a Flourishing Society. London: nef. Reprinted in the Journal for Mental Health Promotion and Huppert F, Baylis N and Keverne B (eds) (2005) The Science of Well-being. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

HAPPY PLANET INDEX

www.happyplanetindex.org

Marks N, Abdallah S, Simms A and Thompson S (2006) The (un)Happy Planet Index: An index of human well-being and environmental impact. London: nef.

Thompson S, Abdallah S, Marks N, Simms A and Johnson V (2007) The European (un)Happy Planet Index: An index of well-being and carbon efficiency in the EU. London: nef.

Abdallah S, Thompson S, Michaelson J, Marks N and Steuer N (2009) The (un)Happy Planet Index 2.0: Why good lives don't have to cost the Earth. London: nef

FIVE WAYS TO WELL-BEING

www.fivewaystowellbeing.org

Aked J, Marks N, Cordon C, Thompson S (2008) Five ways to well-being: the evidence. A report presented to the Foresight Project on communicating the evidence base for improving people's well-being. London: nef

NATIONAL ACCOUNTS OF WELL-BEING

www.nationalaccountsofwellbeing.org

Michaelson J, Abdallah S, Steuer N, Thompson S and Marks N (2009) National Accounts of Well-being: bringing real wealth onto the balance sheet. London: nef

These reports are all heavily referenced as to their sources and there are several other nef publications which I have drawn on, including: The Great Transition, Good Foundations, 21 Hours and Where did our Money Go? They can all be accessed from the nef web-site: www.neweconomics.org.

In addition I have drawn on work that I have done with nef consulting on well-being at work: www.well-beingatwork.net

BELOW I HIGHLIGHT FIVE OTHER KEY PUBLICATIONS THAT I HAVE DRAWN ON FOR THE SECTION ON 'HAPPINESS IS OUR NATURE':

Fredrickson, B (2009); Positivity. US: Crown Publishing.

Lyubomirsky S, King L and Diener, E (2004); The benefits of frequent positive affect: does happiness lead to success? Psychological Bulletin 131.

Nettle D (2005); Happiness: the science behind your smile. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ness R (2005); Natural selection and the elusiveness of happiness; in Huppert F, Baylis N and Keverne B (eds) (2005) The Science of Well-being. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vittersø J (2011); Functional Well-Being: Happiness as Feelings, Evaluations, and Functioning; to appear in I Boniwell & S David (Eds.) Oxford Handbook of Happiness. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



IN ADDITION I HAVE CITED EXTRACTS FROM:

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Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (2009); Final Report: <http://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/en/index.htm>

Martin Luther King's Speeches:

Carson C, Shepard K, and Young A (2002) ; A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr; Warner Books.

The Declaration of Independence:

Downloaded on 30th November 2010 from:

www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html

Other resources:

nef's Centre for Well-being:

www.neweconomics.org/programmes/well-being

nef (new economics foundation)

www.neweconomics.org

Action for Happiness:

www.actionforhappiness.org

My personal website:

www.nicmarks.org/



Nic + Marks

Nic was once described as a “statistician with a soul” due to his unusual combination of ‘hard’ statistical skills and ‘soft’ people skills.

He has been working in the field of happiness, wellbeing and quality of life for over 25 years with a particular emphasis on measurement and how to create positive change.



TED Ideas worth spreading

“

Nic Marks has an idea worth spreading – that promoting sustainable happiness and wellbeing should be the aim of nations and people alike.

We were very happy at TED to give him a platform to share his world view which he did with eloquence, passion and charm.

CHRIS ANDERSON
TED CURATOR

In 2010 Nic gave a TED talk on his previous work in public policy, which has now been watched over 2,000,000 times.

He was named as one of the **Top Ten Original Thinkers by the UK's Institute of Directors' Director magazine** and his work was also hailed as one of **Forbes magazine's Seven Most Powerful Ideas in 2011**.

As the CEO and Founder of Friday Pulse™, Nic has been applying his creative thinking to the world of work since 2012. Friday measures and improves employee happiness in order to help businesses build a positive work culture and its intelligent design is the culmination of Nic's work with over 1,000 clients on measuring and improving happiness at work.

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