Global Happiness
Policy Report 2018

Global Happiness Council

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The Global Happiness Council

The Global Happiness Council (GHC) is a new global network of leading academic specialists in happiness and key practitioners in areas ranging from psychology, economics, urban planning, civil society, business and government. The GHC identifies best practices at the national and local levels to encourage advancement of the causes of happiness and well-being.

Council members oversee the work of six thematic groups (education, workplace, personal happiness, public health, city design and management) who each produce a chapter of policy recommendations in the Global Happiness Policy Report, published annually. This report provides evidence and policy advice to participating governments on best practices to promote happiness and wellbeing.

The work of the Council will be complementary to the World Happiness Reports and other research on the measurement and explanation of happiness. The aim of the GHC is to survey and share best practice policies drawn from the research literature and government experiences around the globe.

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Chapter 1

Good Governance in the 21st Century

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The global movement to put happiness at the center of governance reflects a mix of inspiring idealism and down-to-earth realism. Skeptics of the happiness movement believe that power, not happiness, is the (inevitable) business of government. Yet pursuing happiness is not only idealistic; it is the world's best and perhaps only hope to avoid global catastrophe.

The paradoxical condition of modernity was stated by President John F. Kennedy in his inaugural address of January 20, 1961. "For mankind holds in his mortal hands the ability to end all forms of human poverty, and all forms of human life." When Kennedy uttered those famous words, the grave danger was thermo-nuclear war. Today there are other global dangers as well, most notably human-induced global warming, but also the rapid spread of emerging diseases and the human-caused destruction of biodiversity. Choosing happiness over power is therefore our path to global safety and survival.

The 2018 World Government Summit, an inspiring undertaking of the United Arab Emirates, takes place in the shadow of threatened and actual conflict. World leaders exchange threats and insults that one would expect in a schoolyard, not between nuclear powers and not at the podium of the United Nations General Assembly. Many countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia remain trapped in a cycle of war, with major regional and global powers vying for advantage while the local people suffer and die in proxy wars. Modern armaments continue to flood into these proxy wars.

It would seem unlikely that happiness can get much of a hearing in such troubled times. Yet people around the world yearn for happiness, not war, and some very wise politicians understand that their job is to deliver for the common good and common interest. Citizens today do not accept to be the cannon fodder for the wars launched by ambitious politicians. Good governance is nothing less nor more than political leaders acting for the average citizen and pursuing the common good.

The Global Dialogue for Happiness at the World Government Summit enables governments from around the world to discuss and compare best practices to put happiness at the top of the policy agenda. Whether governments will follow through in promoting happiness is a matter of

conjecture and hope; but it is the responsibility of scholars and moral leaders everywhere to encourage the UAE's important initiative and help it grow. On the encouraging side, this year's Nobel Peace Prize to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons recognizes the grassroots work of hundreds of organizations around the world in around 100 countries engaged in the effort to end the threat of nuclear war. On the worrying side, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists has put the hands of their Doomsday Clock at just 2 minutes 30 seconds to midnight, the closest it's been to midnight since the early 1980s at a dark moment of the Cold War. In short, the Global Dialogue for Happiness has its work cut out for it, at a time of promise but also very high anxiety and risk.

The conditions for achieving happiness within a nation are becoming increasingly well understood, thanks to advances in survey data, psychology, and comparative social analysis. The World Happiness Report has demonstrated that a country's ranking on happiness depends on six key conditions: economic prosperity, including decent work for all who want it; the physical and mental health of the citizens; freedom of individuals to make key life decisions; strong and vibrant social support networks (social capital); shared public values of generosity; and social trust, including confidence in the honesty of business and government.

It's no accident, for example, that the Scandinavian countries routinely top the list of happiest countries in the annual World Happiness Report. These countries are prosperous, healthy, and trusting. Corruption is low. Generosity is high. Individuals feel empowered to make key life choices. The social welfare state limits the inequalities between wealth and poverty, and delivers public services to all citizens. The rich do not run politics.

On the other hand, in some other high-income countries, the happiness ranking is far lower. Wealth may be high, but the wealth is accompanied by an excessive inequality of income, wealth, and political power. Trust, as a result, is often reduced by high inequalities of income. In unequal societies, public services tend to be of highly varying quality, often excellent in rich neighborhoods, and inadequate in poor neighborhoods. The public does not

trust its political class. Violence is often rampant in highly unequal societies.

How can the 193 member states of the UN choose happiness over conflict, the common good over the narrow interest? The work of the Global Happiness Council, a new global network of leading academic specialists in happiness and leading practitioners in areas such as psychology, economics, and urban planning, will be to identify best practices at the national and local level, and most promising diplomatic initiatives at the international level, to promote the cause of happiness. I am deeply honored and grateful to direct this new Council.

This volume contains papers by expert working groups on happiness in six important contexts: education, the workplace, the personal level, public health, city design and management, and metrics for good governance. Each of these working groups describes the state of knowledge about promoting happiness within their respective domain. Prof. John Helliwell, a world-renowned academic economist, co-editor of the World Happiness Report, one of the world's leading specialists in happiness studies, offers a synthesis chapter on best practices drawing on the excellent reports of the six working groups.

In my own short introduction, I would like to direct my thoughts to public officials around the world grappling with the practical challenges of governance in the 21st century. How can these officials keep happiness front and center of their crowded agenda? I will touch briefly on seven broad challenges of good governance: war and peace; mental health and well-being; government for the few or the many; the global environmental crisis; skills and the economy; inequality and redistribution; and the management of global power.

War and Peace

War is the greatest enemy of happiness. It leads to destruction and destitution, a sundering of social ties, the suffering and deaths of children, and a public health calamity. Promoting happiness therefore must begin with promoting peace. For that, we should put our efforts into global diplomacy over unilateral actions by individual governments. The greatest threats to the peace come when major governments take matters into their own hands, sometimes despite the strenuous objections of the UN Security Council.

The UN Charter is the most important document for global happiness. Keeping the peace is indeed the essential mission and purpose of the UN. When the major powers (the Permanent Five members of the UN Security Council, or P5) agree within the Security Council, peaceful solutions can almost always prevail. When the major powers disagree, and one then decides to act unilaterally, the dangers gravely multiply.

We should understand that most of today's major conflicts, even those called civil wars, are really proxy wars in which major global powers take sides with regional powers to stoke violence. Major global powers send in military arms and funds to local combatants, inflaming a local conflict and causing the harms to spill over to the wider region and the world (such as the flood of Middle East and African refugees to Europe). Ending such a conflict almost always requires compromise and power sharing, rather than a reckless quest for "victory" by one side over the other. Such a quest for total victory almost always leads to ongoing violence and instability.

Today, the world is calling on the countries on the brink of conflict to go to the negotiating table to find diplomatic solutions to reduce tensions and satisfy the legitimate security interests of both sides. It's often the case that a miscalculation by either side could lead to war, even nuclear war. Careful diplomacy, supported by the entire UN Security Council, could lead to peace and a normalization of relations between the two countries. In the quest for global happiness today, there is no more urgent cause than diplomatic solutions in the world's hotspot regions.

Mental Health and Well-being

We live in an age of tumultuous change, and have witnessed again and again how modern life creates new conditions that threaten our mental and physical well-being. Social ties, family connections, and social support networks are often deeply strained in the shift from rural to urban life. New products and technologies offer new kinds of excitement but also new kinds of addictions, such as to online gaming and social media. New fast-food diets, filled with sugar additives and ultra-refined grains, are contributing to obesity epidemics around the world. And the pharmaceutical industry, both legal and in the back room, are creating new kinds of addictive drugs, such as synthetic opioids that are spurring new public health crises. It is not surprising that major depressive disorder (MDD) and other affective disorders seem to be on the rise in many countries, including countries with great affluence.

Yet the field of happiness studies also has brought important good news for governance as well. In addition to direct interventions to ensure healthier diets, health-promoting cities, and more robust social support networks, there are also low-cost and highly effective public health interventions that can ameliorate many of the adverse mental and physical health burdens. Mental health counseling is, on the evidence, the single most cost effective intervention for reducing suffering and raising well-being in the population. Shockingly, in many countries, a very significant proportion of individuals suffering from depression and other debilitating affective disorders have no access to professional mental health services. Many governments have generally failed to recognize the powerful advances in mental health treatments that are now available. Moreover, since mental illnesses are often stigmatized, they are often kept hidden from view and from the public policy debate, despite the huge costs they impose on families and on society, and the huge benefits that would accrue to a systematic upscaling of mental health services.

Government for the Few or Many

The path to happiness requires broad social inclusion, meaning that all parts of society benefit from economic development, good health, and strong social capital. Inequality not only creates suffering among those left behind, but also adds considerable social and political stresses to highly unequal societies. To achieve social inclusion, governments must act as an instrument of the common good, rather than as a source of power for one faction or group within society. When parts of society are deprived of power and prosperity, not only do those particular groups suffer, but society as a whole is inevitably destabilized. Deeply divided societies turn to force and trickery to maintain the advantages for the privileged groups. Eventually, everybody loses as the quality of life in the society deteriorates.

Social inclusion is most easily achieved in ethnically homogeneous societies, those with a shared culture, language, religion, and history of relative economic equality. Scandinavia's successes today are at least partly the reflection of their history of such cultural, linguistic, religious, and economic relative homogeneity. Yet even when societies have such favored conditions, maintaining social inclusion in a modern capitalist economy (with all its tendencies towards inequality) requires active and creative politics. One can say that Scandinavia has "earned" its high happiness today through a century of creative social and political innovations that have built on a base of ethnic homogeneity.

For most countries, the starting point today involves significant cultural and ethnic diversity, often with many languages, religions, races, and classes jostling within the society. In the U.S., my own country, racial and ethnic divisions remain a legacy of slavery and the wars between European settlers and their descendants with Native Americans. As a result, on key dimensions of social inequality – wealth, income, education, health, social status, and political power – African-Americans and other minority groups continue to suffer relative deprivation.

I would argue that solving such ethnic puzzles is the single greatest challenge for happiness for many societies, especially the ones deeply divided by race, ethnicity, and language. The path forward, it seems to me, must involve

mutual respect and engagement, local self-government to empower minority groups when such groups are geographically concentrated, multi-lingual politics and public services (including primary education), and universal access for all ethnic groups to high-quality public services including health, education, and the rule of law.

Of course, there are many reasons other than ethnic diversity why politics might favor the few over the many. Plutocracies are governments for the rich over the poor; Corporatocracies are governments for powerful corporations against the interests of consumers; and Despotisms are governments of personal rule, putting the interests of an individual or a family above the rest of society. Plutocracies, Corporatocracies, and Despotisms are guaranteed paths to unhappiness, and all are to be resisted. The rich should not be allowed to dominate politics. Governments must be powerful enough to regulate corporations for the common good. And governments must never become the playthings of individuals who turn their back on the common good.

The Global Environmental Crisis

Governments will find it harder and harder to promote the happiness of their citizens if they continue to neglect the growing environmental crises sweeping the planet and their own countries. Global warming, ocean acidification, land degradation, chemical pollution, and destruction of habitats of other species are all intensifying rapidly, and most of these threats are still poorly understood by governments and their citizens, even as the environmental disasters mount. The costs of environmental disasters is soaring, with 2017 reaching record levels of costs, including extreme hurricanes, forest fires, floods, droughts, heat waves, and other disasters. Even the world's richest country is utterly vulnerable to rapidly intensifying environmental crises.

The implication is clear: happiness of the citizens depends on environmental awareness, environmental policy, and environmental justice. People everywhere need to be helped to cope with a rapidly growing global crisis, one that will impinge on food security; the safety of the infrastructure such as power transmission, roads, and dams; and the productivity of countless livelihoods, from farmers to tourist destinations.

In many countries, powerful lobbies including the coal, oil, and gas industries are using their political clout to slow climate action and to deny climate justice. Some fossil-fuel producers try to slow the transition to renewable energy; some automobile producers try to slow the transition to electric vehicles; some major agricultural companies try to slow the introduction of regulations against land clearing and excess water use; and some politically powerful real estate developers try to slow the transition to sustainable zoning and urban plans. If these powerful lobbies succeed in blocking the transition to sustainability, the results for the world will be calamitous. It will be hard to achieve happiness in a world of more frequent torrential storms, rapidly rising sea levels, and the growing intensity and frequency of other climate catastrophes.

Skills and Technological Change

One of the key challenges facing every society is to benefit from the rapid advances of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence. We are surely in a new world, where machines can learn "superhuman" skills (most recently in the games of Go and Chess) in just a few hours, leading to machine proficiencies that dwarf those of the top human experts. Such rapid technological advances will have enormous impacts on governance (e.g. on the delivery of public services), manufacturing, finance, agriculture, entertainment, health care, education, and much else. Even war will be utterly transformed, in ways that could be terrifying, with advances in cyberwarfare, autonomous weapons systems, war in space, and much else.

Every economy will be affected. Most recently, these technological advances have favored a few of the Digital giants, Amazon, Apple, Alphabet (Google), Facebook, and Microsoft, making these five companies the most highly capitalized corporations in the world, with a combined market valuation in December 2017 of $3.3 trillion dollars. These companies have pioneered new services and business models, but the evidence is also growing that these business models threaten personal privacy, the faith in our electoral systems, and the exacerbation of inequalities of wealth and income.

We know well that decent work is one of the most important underpinnings of happiness, as described well by the excellent chapter on happiness and the workplace in this volume. Yet the digital revolution will almost surely cause a labor force upheaval in the years ahead. Many existing jobs will be rapidly replaced by smart machines; millions of individuals will struggle to find a viable livelihood, and often will have to accept a much lower wage. Happiness, in short, will be threatened unless societies find creative new ways to ensure basic livelihoods and dignity for all those who seek work. The challenge of happiness in the digital age will be a major theme of the Global Happiness Council in the coming years.

Inequality and Redistribution

There is a basic lesson of market economics that all happiness-promoting governments should take to heart. Even when the population enjoys a broad equality of opportunity, the outcomes of the marketplace will tend to produce rising inequality over time. The rich will tend to become richer by using their various political, social, and economic advantages to invest sooner, better, and faster in emerging sectors; to benefit from political patronage; and to buffer against natural hazards and other shocks to the economy. Maintaining a reasonably low level of social and economic inequality requires creative and continuing efforts.

The most equal high-income economies, such as those in Scandinavia, have devised a range of institutions to "lean against" rising inequality. These institutions especially feature universal access to high-quality public services, including health care, child care, and education. The social norms in these countries also emphasize the value of social equality, and these societies tend to frown upon ostentatious displays of great wealth. The super-wealthy are expected, according to the prevailing social norms, to contribute to well-being through generous philanthropic initiatives and public service.

Few high-income societies outside of northern Europe have—as yet—mastered the arts of such egalitarianism, and most countries suffer from levels of income inequality far higher than in Scandinavia. In most political systems, the rich

have their hands on the levers of power, and try to manipulate public policies to their benefit. Globalization has further amplified the power of the ultra-rich by enabling them to hide their vast wealth in secrecy havens and tax havens around the world. In many parts of the world, the social norms promoted by the ultra-rich try to validate vast inequalities of income and wealth by portraying them (falsely, in my view) as inevitable. They pretend that vast wealth reflects the supposed greater talents, and therefore higher moral worth, of the recipients.

Global Power and National Happiness

Most of the world's citizens and most of the world's 193 national governments in the United Nations, yearn for peace, tolerance, and happiness for all. Yet the rich and powerful often act with impunity. The world may want peace but if a great power opts for war, what can stop them from doing so? The world may want prosperity for all, but if the world's most powerful corporations greedily accumulate profits at the expense of the poor or the environment, what can stop them?

My answer is global public opinion, mobilized through governments and through the diplomatic efforts of the United Nations. The United Nations is a remarkable yet fragile institution. It was envisioned by America's greatest President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, as a response to two world wars. The UN Charter sets out a universal framework to achieve peace, while the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, sometimes called the UN's moral charter, sets out a universal framework to promote dignity, human rights, and well-being for all.

In recent years, the UN has identified Sustainable Development as the overarching and necessary framework for global well-being. The UN member states have unanimously adopted Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the agreed framework for development during the period 2016-2030. They have adopted the Paris Climate Agreement as the guiding framework for addressing the emergency of global warming. Sustainable Development calls for economic development that is socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable. It is, indeed, a framework for global happiness.

In this context, the UAE's new initiative to promote a dialogue among governments in order to explore and share best practices for happiness is to be universally applauded. The Global Dialogue for Happiness will play an important role in enabling the world to fulfill Agenda 2030, meet the SDGs, achieve the objectives of the Paris Climate Agreement, and more generally, fulfill the hopes of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. All of us in the Global Happiness Council, a voluntary network of happiness researchers, experts, and practitioners, look forward to supporting the Global Dialogue for Happiness in the years ahead. The stakes are high and the potential of the Global Dialogue for Happiness to promote human well-being around the world is vast.