

Chapter 2

Global Happiness Policy Synthesis 2018

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The *Global Happiness Policy Report 2018* marks a new stage in refocusing the aims and content of government policies with the explicit aim of increasing equitable and sustainable human well-being. This change in policy perspective has been decades in the making, built on a growing dissatisfaction¹ with using GDP per capita as a sufficient measure of human progress, inspired by the Bhutanese choice more than 40 years ago to make happiness a national objective, and fuelled by decades of research aimed at creating a transdisciplinary science of happiness.² These converging threads came together on July 19, 2011, when the United Nations General Assembly adopted a Bhutan-sponsored resolution that “called on United Nations Member States to undertake steps that give more importance to happiness and well-being in determining how to achieve and measure social and economic development.”³

That resolution then led to a High Level Meeting on Well-Being and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm,⁴ convened by the Prime Minister of Bhutan, at the United Nations on April 2, 2012. That meeting marked the release of the landmark first *World Happiness Report*, which brought together the available global data on national happiness and reviewed related evidence from the emerging science of happiness. That report, which in turn built on many other reviews of the science of well-being, provided strong support for the view that the quality of people’s lives can be coherently, reliably, and validly assessed by a variety of subjective well-being measures, collectively referred to in this report as “happiness”. It also built upon, as did the UN meeting itself, the UK launch of a well-being initiative in November 2010, still unique in combining engagement at the highest level from the political, administrative, and data-gathering pillars of government.

Life evaluations were granted a central role in the *World Happiness Reports*, because they provide an umbrella measure by which the relative importance of the supporting pillars for good lives can be compared. The *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-Being*,⁵ which were previewed as a case study in the first report, also emphasized the need to measure life evaluations as a primary indicator, ideally in concert with monitoring affect (i.e., both positive and negative aspects of people’s more daily emotions and

experiences); “Eudaimonia” (i.e. measures of life purpose); and other factors that have been found to support better lives (e.g. income, health, good jobs, family and friends, welcoming communities, good government, trust, and generosity). Having an umbrella measure of subjective well-being permits the relative importance of these factors supporting well-being to be assessed, making it possible to move beyond a general wish to improve well-being towards some specific policies with established credentials for supporting better lives.

Both before and after the April 2012 UN meeting, attempts were made to sketch the possible implications of happiness research for public policies. A number of national and international efforts also aimed to develop a well-being policy framework, as summarized in the OECD chapter in this volume. The Bhutanese government has been exceptional in carrying out systematic national surveys every four years and using the results to investigate the relationship between various policies, well-being and happiness.⁶ But elsewhere there is much less information about what policies might serve to support a happiness agenda. The Global Happiness Council was formed in early 2017 to facilitate happiness policy development in interested countries. The first order of business was to assemble an inventory of happiness policy strategies and interventions that have been proposed or tested in communities and countries around the world.

This volume, the *Global Happiness Policy Report 2018*, contains the first attempts by the Global Happiness Council to assess the range and quality of evidence on possible best practices for happiness policy, as well as how happiness data are collected and used in policy. The first step was to form six policy theme groups, each with a particular focus: health, education, work, personal happiness, cities, and metrics. The initial work plan for each group envisaged this report and another to follow in 2019. This *Report* is our first attempt to assemble an inventory of happiness policy ideas. It should be seen as both preliminary and partial. It is preliminary because the number of relevant ideas is already larger than there has been time to survey, and is growing. It is partial because each theme group has chosen to start by addressing just a part of their topic area, with plans to expand and balance their coverage in the second report.

The chapters in this first *Global Happiness Policy Report* are devoted to the search for policies that could help to improve the levels and distribution of happiness. The chapters generally accept as a starting point that subjective well-being—especially, but not exclusively, assessed by asking how people evaluate the quality of their own lives—provides a good measure of the quality of life in society as a whole, and is a useful focus for public policy. The scientific basis for that starting point has been laid out over several years in the *World Happiness Reports*, and a host of scientific studies reviewed there and elsewhere. This report is our first effort to assemble global evidence about which policies are likely to be most effective in enabling better lives. Because the process of developing and testing policies for human happiness is still at an early stage, many of the chapters combine a review of current policy suggestions or interventions with recommendations for what needs to be done to select ones that could be considered best practices.

How Does a Focus on Happiness Change Policy Making?

How can evidence from the science of well-being be used to improve the science and practice of policy making? To answer this question requires an understanding of both *why* and *how* an emphasis on happiness changes the policy making process. There is a simple answer to the *why* question. Measures of subjective well-being, and especially life evaluations, provide an overall indicator of the quality of life. Having such an umbrella measure of well-being makes it possible to evaluate and compare the economic and social consequences of policies on a consistent basis.

There are three main answers to the question of *how* the practice of policy making changes when subjective well-being becomes the focus of attention. The first involves a fundamental change in the methods used to compare the results of alternative policies. In the absence of happiness as a policy objective, cost-benefit analysis compares the economic benefits and costs with policies recommended if they give the highest economic return in relation to their costs. One key problem with this procedure is that it is difficult to comparably value the social and

economic consequences, with social consequences in particular treated in footnotes or as complications. This changes when the measurement and analysis of happiness gets to the stage where it is possible to treat health, income, social trust and other features of life comparably as sources of well-being. The cost-benefit analysis can then be done using well-being as the objective, with policies preferred that promise to deliver the greatest net increases in the quality of life.⁷ The availability of research showing how different aspects of life are related to overall happiness thereby permits a fundamental shift in the way policies are analyzed. As observed from the heart of the policy making process, this change provides a method of analysis applicable across a wide range of government agencies and departments.

Second, and perhaps more fundamentally, using happiness as an overarching policy objective has the potential for building cross-government cooperation. Narrower objectives of government departments may be subsumed when greater happiness is the encompassing goal. This in turn may aid the achievement of a wider sense of common purpose.

Third, once happiness is established as the overall goal for policy, it is possible and natural to improve the policy making process in fundamental ways. It will now become important to consider not just the happiness of the recipients of government service but also the impact of the services on the happiness of those designing and delivering them, and those living in the surrounding communities. The various chapters in this volume provide many examples showing that the social context—how highly people think of each other and cooperate with one another—is vitally important to how highly they rate their lives. This is true on the job, on the streets, in families, in schools, and in the institutions of government and politics. This issue will be revisited at the end of this chapter after the evidence has been reviewed and synthesized.

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize the six main theme chapters of the report, viewed from a central policy making perspective. In short, how do the pieces fit together? What are the best practices that appear repeatedly in the different theme areas? How do the theme areas relate to each other and how can they

best be combined to contribute to the overall policy objectives?

The six theme chapters of this report fall naturally into two groups of three chapters each. Chapters in the first group of three each focus on best practices for happiness policies within the scope of what might be a ministry in the context of a national or sub-national government—namely, health, education, and employment. Most of the policy proposals considered likewise relate mainly to the powers and policies vested in the corresponding ministries. However, in all three cases, and especially education and the workplace, many of the most promising innovations under study are not within government ministries but within individual school districts, work groups, and organizations.

Chapters in the second group each address cross-cutting issues that are likely of interest to multiple ministries and to the center of government: personal happiness, cities, and measurement. Personal happiness is cross-cutting because all happiness is personal. This year's personal happiness chapter emphasizes the importance of social relationships, illustrated by a variety of case studies.

The cities theme is cross-cutting in two different ways. First, it is the only chapter to put spatial relations and geographic proximity on center stage, thereby exposing the great extent to which happiness depends on how one interacts with those nearby on a daily basis. Second, most of the world's population now lives in cities, and the proportion is rising every decade; hence, there is an increasingly strong relation between happy cities and happy populations.

The metrics theme is cross-cutting because in order to change policy to take happiness into account, the way in which such data is used in policy must be recognized and subsequently modified. This year's metrics chapter is mainly concerned with efforts to develop data frameworks relating to people's well-being and their use in policy settings at the national level. Future reviews will then discuss the needs of policy makers (in terms of data, research and analytical tools) and the barriers that must be addressed to firmly embed the widespread use of well-being metrics in policy making.

How can these six quite different chapters be synthesized to provide an understandable catalogue of best practices for happiness policy? First, it must be recognized that in this first *Global Happiness Policy Report*, written when there are still relatively few examples of rigorously evaluated happiness policies to review, our catalogue will have many tentative entries, as well as many places where the relevant policies remain to be developed and supported with evidence. Second, each chapter team has chosen to focus on only some parts of their topic areas, with subsequent reports to fill out and update the coverage. Thus, any synthesis will necessarily be only a snapshot of some part of what is known now about policy interventions that have been tried and tested. The synthesis will be of most use if it can draw some signposts from the current chapters to guide future research and policy development.

The synthesis will start with a brief summary of the main points made in each of these six theme chapters. This section will be followed by a summary of some key common elements, followed by a listing of some key features not found in some or all of the chapters in this first report. This structure naturally leads to highlighting of best practices found in some areas and worth emulating elsewhere. This high-level synthesis is supplemented by a more detailed inventory, comprising Appendix A of this chapter, of scores of specific policy strategies and interventions mentioned in the theme chapters.

Later in this chapter the whole package is viewed from a central agency or cabinet office perspective, paying special attention to how responsibilities for particular policies might be best assigned to different levels of government. The objective here is to identify what governments are currently doing to coordinate their policies so that the efforts of different agencies and citizen groups are aligned to facilitate successful innovation. We then consider what can best be done within and across departments and levels of government to improve the evidence base for the development of policies to enable greater happiness. The chapter ends with a look forward to future progress in how policies for happiness are created, analyzed, and applied to individuals, cities, and nations.

Main Contributions of each Thematic Chapter

Health

This year's health chapter, entitled *Mental Illness Destroys Happiness and is Costless to Treat*, first describes the effects of mental illness on happiness across the globe, and then illustrates how a variety of interventions, and especially cognitive behavioural therapy, can substantially reduce mental illness and thereby increase happiness. The gross costs of the proposed expansion are small, 0.1% of global GDP, relative to the gains in happiness that would result. The chapter stresses that most psychological elements of cognitive behavioural interventions aim not just at removing negative thoughts but at cultivating positive attitudes and activities.

Remarkably, when the standard mental health interventions are made available to an expanded proportion of the adult population, they are estimated to be accompanied by reductions in other health care costs equal to the cost of the mental health treatment expansion. At the same time each dollar of mental health expenditure leads to an extra 2.5 dollars of GDP, made possible by expanded employment of those with improved mental health. Ongoing work suggests that digitally assisted psychological therapies may be at least as effective, and a rapid expansion of their availability (and in a more convenient form for many citizens) could further improve cost-effectiveness by 2- to 5-fold. Happiness-based cost-benefit analysis ranks policy interventions by the amount of extra happiness gained for a given amount of net resources required. But this chapter's proposals for improved mental health treatment are calculated to have a negative net resource cost. Thus, in this case, the happiness-based cost-benefit analysis is not used, because the policies are beneficial even using conventional cost-benefit analysis without considering the amount of happiness created, and misery eliminated, by appropriate treatment.

The chapter goes on to consider the mental health of children, and concludes that the benefits of interventions for children and youth may be even greater than for adults, although they have been evaluated in less detail. Because one half of mental health problems for children

are behavior-related, many common interventions provide training for parents. One widely used parental-training program—the Incredible Years Program—has shown up to an 80% reduction in behavior problems over a follow-up lasting several years. Other promising developments include: building support around financial debt into mental health treatments; enabling more self-directed triage and referral; and a greater focus on subjective quality—being treated with respect and dignity—in the healthcare system more generally.

The final section of the chapter considers what might be done to reduce the incidence of mental illness by creating a happier and more resilient population. The main examples here are from schools and workplaces. The chapter argues that the mental well-being of children should be an explicit objective in every school. There are many examples of positive interventions designed to increase the current and future resilience of students, including, of course, the Positive Education programs surveyed in the education chapter. Furthermore, happier workplaces are the best means for preventing workplace stress, and the best places for spotting future problems before they arise. These issues are examined in more detail in the workplace chapter.

In summary, there is no need to choose between treating present mental illness and implementing positive measures to reduce its incidence, because well-designed interventions for both ultimately save money.

Education

This year's education chapter, entitled *Positive Education 2018*, provides a review of positive education programs in 11 countries around the world. The chapter's scope is limited to programs in primary and secondary schools that teach children validated positive education interventions and use validated indicators of happiness, unhappiness, academic success and other related outcomes. The interventions train students to engage in a variety of activities and exercises. These include remembering what went well today; writing letters of gratitude; learning how to respond constructively; identifying and developing character strengths; and training in meditation, mindfulness, empathy, coping with emotions, decision-making, problem solving, and critical thinking.

A review of positive education interventions around the world reveals that they significantly improve both standardized test scores and scores on a variety of measures of emotional well-being. Most important, from the point of view of happiness policies, is the finding in Mexico, Bhutan, and Peru that the strongest predictors of higher standardized test scores were higher connectedness, more perseverance, and more engagement. The implication of this finding is that there does not have to be a trade-off between academic preparation and the acquisition of skills that enable happier lives, because the increases in connectedness, engagement, and perseverance delivered by positive education interventions produce both academic success and happiness.

The positive education movement is marked by a high degree of international engagement and mutual support. The chapter describes a range of training schemes and conferences that have been effective in creating momentum, transferring best practice methods among schools and countries, and achieving common standards of evaluation. The chapter describes current efforts to accelerate the deployment of positive education in more than 20 countries, and concludes with several key pieces of policy advice. The most important of these is to continue focusing on rigorous evaluation—this is essential to reliably establish both the size and duration of the effects of positive education programs. This information, especially when available in comparable form covering all interventions, will be critical to demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of different aspects of positive education. These estimates, in turn, are likely to determine how much and how quickly the experimental research in positive education will ultimately translate into changes in education policies around the world.

Work

This year's work chapter, entitled *Work and Well-being: A Global Perspective*, first highlights the importance of having a job for several aspects of subjective well-being, including life evaluations and both positive and negative emotions. In all global regions, life evaluations are substantially higher for the employed than for the unemployed. Although the gap is large and highly significant everywhere, it is largest in the industrial countries—more than a full point

on the 0-10 scale used for life evaluations. Those who are employed also report more frequent positive emotions and less frequent negative emotions than those who are unemployed. The frequency difference is twice as large for negative emotions as for positive ones, driven by the tight link between unemployment and negative affect. Once again, these gaps are largest in the industrial countries and smaller elsewhere in world.

The chapter then refers to earlier literature revealing a close association between job satisfaction and life satisfaction as a prelude to using global evidence to show what job characteristics are associated with greater job satisfaction. Of the 12 job characteristics considered, two stand out—namely, interpersonal relationships in the workplace and whether the job is interesting. Each of those characteristics explains twice as much of the difference among employees in their job satisfaction as do pay differentials, and on average four times as much as the other job characteristics studied. Of the remaining job characteristics, two negative ones—work life imbalance and a combination of difficulty, stress, and danger—are the most important, but still less than half as important as the two positive headline items. For workers of all education levels, whether male or female, the evidence is consistent that workplace interpersonal relationships and a job's interest level are the most important determinants of job satisfaction.

To reduce the incidence of work-life imbalance, the chapter recommends more flexible and supportive working time arrangements, supported by a Chinese case study showing a significant performance increase, greater job satisfaction, and a lower quit rate among those given the opportunity to work from home.

For each of the other job characteristics found to be important for job satisfaction, the chapter reports evidence at the company level. This evidence generally shows that companies taking steps to improve working conditions related to these job characteristics (as shown for flexible work practices in their Box 1) achieve higher productivity and profitability. Thus, it appears that there remains in the workplace a considerable amount of low hanging fruit to be harvested, through a variety of measures that simultaneously raise employee happiness and boost conventional financial returns.

Personal Happiness

All happiness is personal happiness. Thus, the content in this chapter can provide a foundation for understanding the mechanisms at work in other chapters. The general coverage of this theme relates to individuals and families as they are affected by happiness policies and as they themselves are actors in the creation of happiness in their communities. This year's chapter, entitled *Social Well-Being*, has a special focus on social ties, especially within the family and community contexts. The quality of close social relationships is shown not only to improve the happiness of those involved, but to create important positive feedback loops for subsequent physical health.

The chapter starts with a review of the evidence showing the importance of good social relationships as supports for happiness, and then proceeds to discuss evidence and policies in three different areas: 1) steps to increase positive social connections within neighborhoods and cities, 2) ways of building justified personal trust in others and in public institutions, and 3) strategies to improve the quality of relations within the family. In each case, the authors emphasize the importance of using a positive framework with an emphasis on creating happiness, while at the same time considering policies designed to remove barriers to happiness and to reduce the misery of those in the worst of circumstances.

This chapter considers ways to create positive social connections within neighborhoods and cities, highlighting both top-down initiatives (e.g., zoning regulations) and bottom-up initiatives by community groups. The three topics they choose for special attention are urban design, green spaces, and housing. In each of these areas, they review a variety of research results and use a case study to illustrate possible best practices.

The chapter's section on trust (and corruption) starts by reviewing evidence of the importance of trust as a direct source of happiness, as well as a fundamental support for successful collaboration in all aspects of life. It also provides evidence that suggests that people may be too pessimistic about the trustworthiness of others, and hence are less willing than they should be to reach out to others. The chapter reviews and recommends a variety of local activities in communities and schools (echoing some of the interventions of positive education) that

demonstrate the power and value of pro-social norms, and show how they can be strengthened.

Perceived corruption, a negative indicator of trust, is shown to differ substantially among and within global regions, but found everywhere to depress well-being. To address corruption, the chapter lists a number of strategies, including anti-corruption laws, stronger investigative powers, greater transparency, and training that promotes ethical behavior and greater citizen input.

The final part of the chapter focuses on family relationships, where happiness is critically impacted by happy marriages and positive parenting. As possible workplace and public policy supports for happier families, the chapter advocates more flexible hours and family leave provisions (echoing the work chapter), a variety of parenting programs (echoing both the health and education chapters), and a number of measures aimed at reducing family violence.

Cities

This year's cities chapter, entitled *Happy Cities in a Smart World*, is intended to advise local governments working to increase levels of happiness and well-being in their cities. The "smart world" aspect comes into play in this chapter through the presentation of case studies of technologies that help to make cities more efficient while also increasing the subjective well-being of their residents.

The core of the chapter is a series of 14 case studies from all over the world, each of which is chosen to reflect one or more aspects of best practice. The first two case studies relate to the establishment of policy feedback loops. The first of the policy feedback cases is the Smart Happiness Project Evaluation (SHAPE) tool, which uses happiness-based weights to combine data from the six dimensions of the Smart Dubai strategy, ultimately providing for each proposal a cost effectiveness ratio representing the amount of happiness delivered per currency unit of cost. The second case study is the Boston CityScore which monitors key outcomes to make sure they are within target ranges.

There are then two case studies in each of six policy areas: the economy (new uses for technology in Dubai and the Local Initiatives Support Plan in the US), people and society (the Healthy Weight

Programme in Amsterdam and the community hub model in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan), governance (online links to government in Dubai, and the Mi Ciudad (My City) platform in Quito, Ecuador), mobility (demand management in Arlington, Virginia and the Autonomous Shuttle in Civaux, France), environment (water quality in Slovenia, and waste sorting and reduction in Seoul, Korea), and living enablers (making places for people in Melbourne, Australia, and a safety reporting system in Quito, Ecuador)

In reviewing their array of interventions, which include many examples beyond the chosen case studies, the chapter authors note the possible trade off required between innovation and rigorous assessment. They advocate a mixed approach that enables relatively unfettered innovation followed by more structured evaluation of particular interventions, as well as their replication at future time points and in other cities.

Metrics

This year's metrics chapter, entitled *Countries' Experiences with Well-Being and Happiness Metrics*, starts with a review of the progress made in a number of countries to move beyond GDP towards broader measures of the well-being of nations. It highlights the similarities and differences among the various national approaches, with a special focus on recent developments in the measurement of subjective well-being in national statistics. As shown in Appendix A, the chapter helpfully summarizes a number of the OECD's previously established principles for the measurement of subjective well-being. This involves widespread collection of a key set of five core variables, including life satisfaction, three affect variables (happy, worried, depressed), and a measure of life purpose. The national experiences in developing well-being measures share several common features, including widespread public consultation, collection of key indicators relating to people's well-being, and widespread collection of subjective well-being data.

The main part of the chapter is devoted to examining some national experiences of integrating well-being frameworks into policy. This includes descriptions of seven case studies in Ecuador, France, Italy, New Zealand, Scotland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

Looking at the list of national well-being policy programs and the seven case studies that are the centrepiece of the 2018 chapter, two general conclusions can be drawn.

On the one hand, there has been considerable progress on the well-being measurement agenda, and several governments are taking active steps to introduce these measures, on a systematic basis, into policy decision making. This speaks to the momentum of the *Beyond GDP* agenda, and the desire to give more central positions to a number of social and other factors that have been shown to support happiness. The range of examples featured—from passing laws about the use of alternative indicators in budget processes, through to the establishment of a government ministry focused on well-being—provide a rich variety of insights into the challenges and opportunities of giving well-being metrics a more central role in policy. Nonetheless, the large majority of these initiatives have emerged within the last few years, meaning that most are yet to become firmly established as tried and tested approaches. This makes it difficult, at this stage, to identify “best practice”—and it is not at all clear that just one model will emerge to fit all government contexts.

On the other hand, the degree of emphasis on subjective well-being varies across the examples considered. While most frameworks do incorporate subjective well-being measures, only very rarely do the national programs or case studies under review place subjective well-being at the centre of their data gathering and policy analysis. In that sense, even these leading adopters are not yet able to provide the data and analysis needed to support the selection of policies according to their likely ability to improve human happiness—although the United Kingdom's *What Works Centre for Wellbeing* is working towards this goal. In some cases, for example Germany, the framework does not include subjective data in the range of variables that will be routinely monitored, although the motivation for the development of the German framework is clearly to achieve better lives, “gut leben.” Thus, while there is often a strong role for subjective well-being in the *Beyond GDP* movement, this is not always yet the case.

The case studies also highlight the value of well-being metrics throughout the policy cycle,

from the initial stages of identifying issues and setting strategic priorities, through to policy design, implementation, monitoring and finally evaluation of policy outcomes through the lens of well-being and happiness. This emphasis on the *process* of making policy helps to complement the other chapters which often focus on specific policy interventions and programs to raise happiness.

Policy Synthesis

Common elements

Most chapters highlighted the importance of measuring subjective well-being, and also its key supporting variables, with enough frequency and geographic breakdown to provide subjective well-being data at the level of cities and neighbourhoods. However, there are still only a small number of national statistical agencies that have data collections sufficient to support this degree of analysis; hence, it is common to see still a gap between the data being collected and what would be needed for the design and selection of policies to improve happiness, especially at more local levels.

Several chapters emphasized the importance of a more deliberately experimental approach to the development of a happiness policy agenda. This is for two related reasons. On the one hand, systematically considering the well-being consequences of alternative ways of doing things (as emphasized in the work chapter) broadens the knowledge base supporting the overall science of well-being. Second, several chapters (education, personal happiness, cities) advocated experimentation as the best-practice way to evaluate and rank specific policy interventions.

Several chapters also noted, although sometimes more in passing than as the central message, that the happiness effects and policy effectiveness were likely to be greater where there was greater engagement by all the actors, as contrasted to cases where the policy interventions were designed far away and dropped from above.

As befitting the first global survey of happiness policy interventions, the chapters all take pains to note the variety of national and local circumstances affecting the feasibility and consequences of policy interventions. What works here might not

work there—but then again it might. The implication of this uncertainty is that even the best of policy ideas deserve local testing to check their applicability in local circumstances. This also facilitates the building of a locally engaged set of experimenters, which in itself would help to increase the happiness consequences of the resulting policy choices.

Several chapters stress the value of programs and policies aimed at children, intended to increase their chances for happier and more meaningful lives now and in the future. The mental health chapter describes services targeted directly at children as well as their parents. In the personal happiness chapter the primary focus is on the parents, while in the education chapter the examples mainly relate to building positive attitudes and resilience among students and their teachers, with a few interventions covering parents as well.

Possible missing elements

As documented above, there are still relatively few countries collecting enough subjective well-being data to support the development and validation of policies designed to improve happiness. Perhaps it may be possible to build on the general acceptance of the need to move beyond GDP to gradually move subjective well-being indicators from peripheral positions to their more natural roles as overall summary indicators of the quality of life. There they would be better positioned to help to judge the relative importance of the variety of other social indicators that are already being given central roles in national programs for the development and analysis of well-being. Some of the national case studies in the metrics chapter give prominent enough positions to subjective well-being to provide a strong starting position for an eventual move closer to center stage. For example, Sweden's 15 New Measures of Well-Being, introduced as part of the 2017 Budget Bill and intended as a strong signal from the Swedish government, includes three key subjective indicators among its headline items: life satisfaction, self-assessed health status, and social trust.

There is very little attention thus far to the happiness consequences of different ways of finding and applying policies. What might it mean to pay more attention to how government

policies are delivered? In 2004, the government of Singapore introduced a “No Wrong Door” (NWD) policy designed to ensure that every request for information or services from a government employee would trigger best efforts to either deal directly with the request or find someone who can help. This government-wide policy aimed to redesign the social relationships between citizens and their government by changing the “how” rather than just the “what” of public services. The purpose of such an initiative was no doubt to increase the quality of life for citizens. Given the scale of interactions between people and their governments, closer attention to the “how” aspect of governance deserves more attention, and suitable evaluation of its consequences for the happiness of citizens and public servants alike.

The NWD policy has subsequently been adopted in many places, including services for children and youth in Durham Ontario,⁸ mental health services in Sydney Australia,⁹ services for the elderly in the US Commonwealth of Virginia,¹⁰ and more broadly to streamline access to long-term service options in US states,¹¹ and for young people served by the North Yorkshire County Council. In one application for children and youth services in Ontario, the NWD policy was directly paired with a positive “Warm Hand-Off” approach, with the latter indicating the willingness to go the extra mile, in a friendly way, to ensure that clients get connected to a service provider who can provide what they want and need.¹²

The recent North Yorkshire programme is rare in having been made the focus of a systematic effectiveness evaluation, from its introduction in April 2015 until March 2017.¹³ The evaluation criteria mainly reflected traditional outcomes, but also included significant improvements in overall scores in the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire, which screens for behavioral and emotional problems in children and youth. More collaborative and forward-looking linkages among government departments and agencies are central to this and other successful applications of the NWD policy. The effects of this closer cooperation on the happiness of the care workers are very likely positive, but remain to be properly evaluated. Similarly, although the children and families kept out of trouble and treatment by these early positive interventions almost surely have happier lives as a consequence, these

effects are still relatively unstudied. This limitation only reflects, as is clear from many of the policies listed in this report, that most of the policies under review have not been developed and evaluated as part of an overall happiness strategy.

There is also scant evidence available yet on the roadblocks that are likely to impede or at least complicate the design and implementation of happiness policies. Introducing a happiness policy agenda would require major changes in the way policies are designed and delivered—changes on a scale large enough to threaten many entrenched methods and objectives. What efforts have and should be made to foresee and forestall the inevitable objections to these changes?

There are some key areas of public policy—such as the justice system (including policing, courts, and prisons) and the management of political institutions—that do not have their own theme groups and have thus far not received much attention in the cross-cutting chapters. Some of the relevant issues are discussed in the trust section of the personal happiness chapter, and an alternative model of policing is central to the Prince Albert Hub example in the cities chapter, but a fuller analysis of policy best practices remains to be completed.

Practices worth emulating in other areas

As highlighted in Appendix A, the various chapters contain several cross-cutting principles designed to facilitate a happiness policy strategy, and worth emulation in all areas. These include regular widespread monitoring of subjective well-being (education, workplace, cities); rigorous happiness-based evaluation of interventions (health, education, workplace); measurement of subjective well-being before and after interventions (personal happiness), and in comparable comparison samples; and using happiness and other outcome data to help set policy priorities on a continual basis (cities).

Several chapters illustrate the value of developing and testing the same program in a number of different countries and contexts. This approach benefits from lessons learned in previous applications, and makes it easier to compare effectiveness in different contexts, which enables faster diffusion of good examples. It deserves fuller application in all theme areas.

The health chapter provides an extended case study showing how cost-benefit analysis can be used to convincingly rank the cost effectiveness of different established treatments for mental illness. In their mental health example, however, the net negative resource costs forbid a full application of cost-benefit analysis based on happiness, because the happiness cost-benefit ratio rises to infinity as the net resource cost approaches zero. Future editions of the health and other theme chapters should provide more detailed examples implementing cost-benefit analysis using happiness as the objective.

The health chapter also is unusual in the specificity of its proposals, thereby facilitating more precise estimates of costs and benefits. Another helpful feature of the health chapter, worth emulating, is its emphasis on the practical but often difficult steps needed—from general approval, and even budget allocations, to delivering the policy on the ground. In the case of mental health, such steps involve identifying the treatments to be delivered, deciding which service is to provide them, and ensuring the necessary training for providers.

The cities chapter is unusual in the number, detail, and specificity of their chosen examples. Each is selected because it adds a fresh element of innovation, coupled with enough experience to enable others to pick up and apply their ideas. The chapter emphasizes the role of technology for happy cities, but in fact, the examples reveal that the key secret for smart cities is human imagination rendered effective by community cooperation.

What are the implications for the structure of governance?

Evaluating policies from a viewpoint based on the science of well-being makes a real difference. Most obviously, policies are thereby evaluated based on their likely impacts on happiness. Perhaps more importantly, the happiness impacts of policy frameworks depend not just on what is done, but how it is done, and for what reasons. The most promising and innovative policies involve open collaboration at the very local level, providing opportunities for individuals and groups to work together to improve their own communities. Even more effective are innovations that are intended to be shared with other groups and communities. Although the primary examples

of such collaborative policy innovations are in the city and community contexts, the same principles seem equally applicable in health, education, workplaces, and even policing, prisons, and public administration. The No Wrong Door interventions described provide good cases in point, as all involve much more open and collaborative relationships among departments and agencies previously more used to operating under their own procedures and rules, and with less regard for whether the system as a whole was working or not to deliver more happiness.

Many of the case studies suggest some specialization of function by level of government, with the higher levels setting the broad policy objectives and designing an institutional framework flexible enough to facilitate innovation at the lower levels. Making room for local innovation is important for all policies, but especially for policies designed to support happiness, given the importance of local circumstances and of collaborative local engagement as sources of happiness.

The variety of case studies provided in these chapters and elsewhere suggest that we consider a broader definition of governance and best practices for creating policy. Sometimes a single individual who simply starts bringing people together, thereby creating social spaces and shared connections where none existed before, can not only make her own neighbourhood happier, but provide an attractive example for others to follow.¹⁴ Within firms or government departments, it is equally possible for innovation to arise from the actions of individuals with no assigned formal roles or authority to develop policies. Yet these examples, if they are emulated elsewhere, build positive social norms and networks and increase social trust, and have strong claims to be treated as best practices. What are the implications of this possibility? Those with more formal responsibilities to shape policy within governments, enterprises, and other organizations need to do all they can to encourage these individual innovations, and to make it easier for them to be understood and copied elsewhere.

The theme chapters together suggest three principles to coordinate policies among ministries and agencies. First, break down the ministerial and disciplinary silo walls to enable front-line delivery-level as well as policy-level collaboration

among agencies designing and delivering policies to their citizens. Second, given this aim, prioritize as candidates for collaboration those policies that look forward with the intention of foreseeing and forestalling bad outcomes and, even more important for the long haul, those with the greatest potential for generating happier outcomes from any starting point. Third, introduce and emphasize a happiness agenda as a central part of these cross-government collaborations, providing a positive encompassing purpose sufficiently attractive to subsume or override narrower ministerial objectives.

What might block faster adoption of happiness-based policy making in national governments? The metrics chapter identifies three general factors that might slow or block progress, and that are evident in some of their case studies. These include lack of a sufficiently legitimate political imperative, lack of sufficient consensus about what should be measured, and variety of structural barriers generally amounting to simple resistance to a new approach to policy making. Removing these blockages is likely to be easier when the whole policy cycle is engaged, from the highest political levels setting strategic directions and signaling the way forward to policy makers, through to the trenches of policy delivery on the ground, and back again to the higher levels.

Improving the evidence base

Taken together, the chapters in this report illustrate the interlocking importance of measurement, innovation, experimentation, and analysis. The examples in the cities chapter together weave a strong case for an essentially iterative process whereby innovation, small scale experimentation, evaluation, redesign, new tests, fresh evaluations, trials in different contexts, and sharing of results together provide a low-cost and low-risk way to test ideas before larger-scale experimentation and policy adoption.

The chapters in this report, in their lists of best practices collected in Appendix A, contain a mix of policies, some aimed at building happiness and others more oriented to reducing misery, stopping crime and curing illness. What is still unclear is to what extent these different policy objectives, and the policies they suggest, have equal claims to be central parts of a happiness

policy strategy. To some degree, they should be seen as mutually supportive, because increasing the happiness of those in life's worst circumstances will raise average happiness, both directly through the increased happiness of the no-longer-miserable and indirectly because people are on average happier when they live in a society where there is a smaller happiness gap between the happiest and least happy members of their communities.¹⁵ Results also show that population-wide efforts to improve social trust are likely to improve the happiness of all, but to have even larger benefits for those who are unemployed, in ill health, or subject to discrimination.¹⁶ Both of these pieces of evidence suggest possible consistency between the misery-reduction and happiness-building policy approaches.

Two important qualifications need to be made, however. The first is a risk that continued emphasis on misery reduction will be accompanied by a failure to consider the possibly greater benefits of broader happiness-focused policies. The second is the argument that the use of narrowly-targeted support policies may lessen their positive impact on happiness, fuelled by resentment among some non-recipients and feelings of stigma by the recipients, accompanied by a loss of the social trust and voter support that a more universal set of safety net policies can induce.¹⁷

A great deal more targeted research is needed to show when and how misery-reduction and happiness-increasing policies can be made to dovetail in ways that do the most to improve the levels and distribution of happiness. This work will first require an expansion of the evidence base to collect more positive measures of subjective well-being alongside the more frequently measured indicators of illness and other bad outcomes. For example, although there are now validated positive measures of mental health suitable for use by medical practitioners,¹⁸ and found to be predictive of subsequent mental illness,¹⁹ they have not yet been taken up widely in medical practice. Second, while many positive interventions have been designed and found to improve social interactions and health,²⁰ including mortality,²¹ in both healthy and unhealthy populations,²² their health and happiness effects are not yet assessed alongside those of treatments of illness. Accordingly, the relative advantages of curing bad outcomes and creating good ones remain more uncertain than they need be.

Looking forward

It is probably fair to conclude that a great deal still remains to be done to develop a robust set of policy proposals suitable for wide application. Although the examples provided in the theme chapters of this report are often inspiring and informative, they can only rarely be said to be policies designed for and tested within a broader happiness policy framework. Many of the example policies have been designed and proposed for quite different objectives, and drawn into the happiness policy review because they have credible claims to support happiness. This is understandable at this early stage, but it is subject to four major limitations.

First, many of the existing evaluations of the proposals in question are based on traditional outcomes, with no explicit measurement of their implications for happiness. As a result, it is hard to decide which ideas might qualify as best practices. To change this will require more regular and widespread collection of data on subjective well-being, thereby improving the scientific basis for evaluating policies intended to improve happiness.

Second, policies developed before the introduction of a happiness policy framework, and without reference to the available research in the science of well-being, are likely to exclude policies that may have their biggest returns through improvements in well-being rather than through more conventional channels.

Third, only recently has more attention been paid to the happiness effects of how policies are designed and delivered—that is, the analysis of the all-important human contacts between those delivering and receiving policies. The No Wrong Door initiatives provide clear examples, equally applicable within and across different agencies and ministries, of policies designed to change how policies are delivered. They deserve both emulation and evaluation within a happiness policy framework.

Fourth, in the absence of a happiness emphasis in the choice and evaluation of policies, the policies chosen for experimentation and evaluation are likely to remain those designed bearing in mind the traditional objectives of the ministry in question; whether they are concerned with economic development, health,

education, the administration of justice, or foreign relations.

Looking forward, there is thus ample scope for happiness-motivated policy strategies to become better coordinated across government activities, better supported by experimental evidence, and more broadly and consistently based on the still emerging science of happiness. Coordination and broad application are more likely where they are supported by government-wide guidelines for happiness-based policy evaluation. Good examples of such government-wide guidelines are provided by Bhutan²³ and the United Arab Emirates.²⁴

What will it take to make a transformative shift towards happiness-based policies across the whole range of government activities? One pathway forward may be through moves by government departments and services to place more focus on how much users like the government services they receive. For example, drawing on ‘net-recommender’ scores in the commercial world, patients and relatives are now regularly asked at UK hospitals whether they would recommend that particular service to friends or relatives. As was found in the Canadian citizen first program a decade earlier, the net-recommender scores are driven substantially by ‘human’ and well-being factors, such as being treated with respect and dignity (not just clinical outcomes). The adoption of such measures more widely in public and private services, particularly when combined with transparency and at least some element of choice, in effect create a new driver for services to focus on the factors that affect subjective well-being.

Generally speaking, it is very difficult for the kind of evidence-based interventions reviewed in these chapters to organically influence cross-government policy making on a broad scale. Significant cross-government presence requires engagement throughout the policy cycle, from the highest political levels through to the delivery of policy and then to the accountable agencies. It may perhaps also require a defining political opportunity with a compelling alternative vision.

Happiness may well provide both a defining opportunity and a compelling vision, but what is needed to fuel such a transformation? Having the most influential central agencies involved will be crucial, including the highest levels of involvement

in the political, administrative, data-gathering and policy-development spheres. Enabled and inspired by this high-level support, the most important innovations are likely to come from those directly and immediately involved in delivering services. This will require a broad transformation of public thinking, coupled with top-level political will to support a widespread culture of local innovation, made effective by shared information, trust, collaboration and a common vision. Local innovation is to be cherished, as it requires less central coordination, unleashes and engages those in the front lines of policy design and delivery, and does more to ensure that the policies are appropriate for local conditions. It also provides the broadest and strongest evidence base for deep-seated policy reforms enabling better lives.

Endnotes

- 1 See Stiglitz et al (2009).
- 2 See www.grossnationalhappiness.com and Ura et al (2015).
- 3 Resolution 65/309. See <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=39084#.WhdODLYZP3h>
- 4 For the report of the meeting, see: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=400&nr=617&menu=35>
- 5 See OECD (2013).
- 6 See, for example, CBS (2016).
- 7 See Chapter 4 of World Happiness Report 2015.
- 8 See <http://www.rfecydurham.com/resourceportal/no-wrong-door>
- 9 See <http://www.pirsws.com.au/no-wrong-door/>
- 10 See <https://www.nowrongdoorvirginia.org>
- 11 See <https://www.acl.gov/programs/connecting-people-services/aging-and-disability-resource-centers-program-no-wrong-door>
- 12 See the posting: <http://www.hpechildrenandyouth.ca/2013/08/what-does-no-wrong-door-and-warm-hand-off-really-mean/>
- 13 See Lushey et al (2017).
- 14 See what Shani did in Hulbert Street, in Freemantle, Western Australia, as recounted in Weiking (2017, 57-63).
- 15 See Goff et al (2016).
- 16 See the evidence in Helliwell, Huang and Wang (2016).
- 17 This argument is made by Kumlin and Rothstein (2005).
- 18 See Su, Tay & Diener (2014).
- 19 See Keyes et al (2010).
- 20 See, for example, Gleibs et al (2011).
- 21 See Holt-Lunstad et al (2010).
- 22 See Jetten et al (2012).
- 23 The Bhutanese Cabinet uses its GNH policy screening tools for rapid assessment of all policy proposals. See Ura et al (2015) and CBS (2016).
- 24 See United Arab Emirates (2017).

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