

Flourishing in the Workplace

'The Art of Being Brilliant' has been delivered in businesses and schools around the world. It is designed to be simple, non-nonsense, thought-provoking and fun. Our tongue-in-cheek pledge is that 'no big words are harmed in the making of our workshops'.

So, although the end result is simple, it is important to understand that there are a lot of big words that have gone into the mix. The content is taken from many sources. It was originally born out of Andy Cope's PhD research. It also contains elements gleaned from popular psychology and the self-help genre. 'The Art of Being Brilliant' also contains elements of humour and a raft of 'silly stories' that are designed to give a real-world perspective. Hence, we do use a little 'poetic licence' in order to entertain as well as educate.

Most people seem happy to accept the messages at face value. To steal a phrase from the workshop, 'The Art of Being Brilliant' seems to be common sense but by no means common practice. Many people have told us that the information isn't new, merely a reminder.

However, there is also a group of people who want to know more and are interested in immersing themselves in some of the academia that lies behind the key messages. Our advice would be to read 'The Art of Being Brilliant' (Capstone, 2012) and progress through the books that appear in the appendix.

This paper is an attempt to go a little further. Its aim is to summarise some of the key points and explain the terms used in the workshops, as well as giving academic referencing.

The PhD thesis runs to 80k words. This paper is merely a flavour.

Background

Andy Cope is currently enrolled as a part-time PhD student at the University of Loughborough. He has been studying happiness, positivity and flourishing in the British public sector. The context is one of a prolonged ('double dip') recession and government cutbacks. By most estimations, reduced budgets, frozen pay and continual restructuring means it's a tough time to be working in the public sector.

Cope has sought out those who have maintained an upbeat and positive state of being. In the workshops, we call these people 2%ers. This phrase is unscientific and doesn't appear in the PhD – but is meant to illustrate that these upbeat people represent a tiny minority of the British population.

Cope's PhD seeks, broadly, to answer three questions:

1. Who are the 2%ers?
2. What are they doing that allows them to be happier and more upbeat than 'normal'?
3. What can we learn from the 2%ers that 'normal' people can replicate and thus raise their own levels of happiness?

The thesis

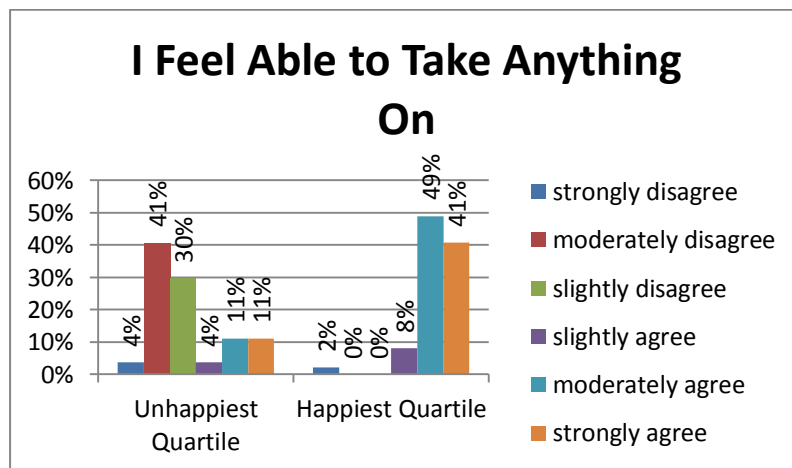
Cope's thesis explores the past, present and future of 'happiness' and acknowledges that 'happiness' is a subject that has been on the philosophical and research agenda through the generations. Cope's real focus is on 'flourishing' within an organisational context. 'Flourishing' goes a step further than

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happiness, implying that positive feelings are transferrable to work colleagues, creating resonance in the workplace.

Contemporary studies by Lyubomirsky (2001) and Diener (2002) suggest that happy people outperform their colleagues on a number of measures. Cope's thesis examines the linkages between feeling good and performing better. For example, does performing better enable individuals to feel good? Or does feeling good trigger employees to perform better?

What is clear is that being happy and positive is an enabler of high performance, inside and outside of work. Cope's simple comparison between the upper and lower quartiles of his respondents is illustrated in the graph below.



Why study 'happiness'?

Biswas-Diener (2008) argues that lasting personal fulfilment is a concern for every human being on the planet. It is, he argues, *'the pot of gold at the end of the emotional rainbow.'* (p. 20). Interestingly, Biswas-Diener notes that happiness is rarely a goal. Most people who set goals expect the by-product to be happiness.

Diener and Tov (2007) undertook research from 67 countries, interviewing parents from diverse cultures and incomes. One question asked what they most wished for their children. The number one answer, from across cultures, was 'happiness'.

There is recent interest concerning international comparisons of happiness and positivity. Veenhoven (2009) has rated countries to produce a happiness league table. The UK lies 41st with Costa Rica, Iceland and Denmark currently top of the league. This begs a question as to why the UK, one of the wealthy G12 nations, is languishing in 41st place in the world happiness league table?

Material standards of living have risen since the second world war but, according to Layard (2003) *'...GDP is a hopeless measure of welfare. For since the War that measure has shot up by leaps and bounds, while the happiness of the population has stagnated.'* (p. 3).

In the modern era, there is a proliferation of academic research as well as a burgeoning weight of non-academic books and articles around what is often termed 'popular (pop) psychology' – focusing on well-being, self-help and happiness. Amazon currently lists 208,899 titles in the 'self-help' section (Aug 27th 2010). Indeed, Holden (2009) suggests 'happiness is the new darling of the social sciences.'

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Smile and the world smiles with you

Happiness has been linked to an array of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The general conclusion of researchers such as Fredrickson (2009), Diener (2002) and Seligman (2002) is that happiness, well-being and associated feelings of positivity and esteem are good things, impacting not only on the individual concerned but also resonating with their family, work colleagues and wider society.

This socially contagious aspect of happiness is explored further by Cacioppo (2008) and Goleman (2003), who talks of 'limbic locking'; transmitting your emotion to those around you. Frequent smiling has many therapeutic and health benefits (Abel & Hester, 2002) particularly when the smile is a Duchenne smile (Surakka & Hietanen, 1998). According to Stibich (2010) smiling boosts the immune system, increases positive affect, reduces stress, lowers blood pressure and enhances other people's perceptions of whomever is wearing the smile.

If happiness is good for us, why aren't we happier?

According to Holden (2008), impediments to happiness lie in our environment as well as our personalities. Holden talks of a well-connected world. On the face of it, modern communication has certainly opened up the opportunities for communication. UK citizens increasingly have access to broadband connections, social networking, text messaging, Skype, iPhones, Facebook, Twitter, blogging and YouTube. Miniwatts (2010) shows that internet penetration rates are 82.5% in the UK against European and world averages average of 58.4 and 22.7% respectively.

And yet, despite an explosion of communication channels, an increasing number of people feel isolated and alone (Ornish 1998). Indeed, amidst the panoply of social networking, several studies show that loneliness has risen as a major cause of depression (Cacioppo et al, 2008)

Modern living and, in particular 'busyness' (Holden 2008) may also play a part in limiting levels of happiness. According to Holden (2008), 'busyness' is a term used to describe how many people in the modern era organise their lives. Organisations have been 'downsized'. Customer expectations are rising. Modern communication methods tend to demand an instant response.

Outside of work people battle through the oxymoronic 'rush hour'. Maybe they grab some fast food or a microwave meal. Holden (2008) poses the question that we use in our workshop; 'we're living life fast but are we living it well?' Modern life bombards society with information. For example, today the average home has more TVs than people (Nielson Media Research, 2006). Holden's work alludes to the fact that the pace of modern life may well be hampering our happiness levels.

The holy grail of happiness

An overwhelming majority of people place 'finding happiness' very high on their list of major life goals (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1999). Biswas-Diener & Dean (2007) suggest that happiness has been the 'Holy Grail' for writers and philosophers throughout the ages. The relatively recent advent of 'positive psychology' has led to an explosion of academic papers and popular psychology books which leads Diener and Seligman (2002) to suggest that the conceptualisation of 'happiness' is on the rise even if actual levels of happiness are not.

The historical development of happiness and positive emotions

Cope's thesis provides numerous statistics that paint a fairly bleak picture of happiness in the Western world. In short, to borrow a line from the workshop, it seems that many people are a million miles away from feeling as great as they could.

According to Layard (2003), *'People in the West have got no happier in the last 50 years. They have become much richer, they work much less, they have longer holidays, they travel more, they live longer, and they are healthier. But they are no happier.'*

Why is there so much negativity in such a comfortable age? Seligman (2002) blames human kind's perilous evolution: *'Because our brain evolved during a time of wars, flood and famine, we have a catastrophic brain. The way the brain works is looking for what's wrong. The problem is that this worked in the Pleistocene era. It favoured you. But it doesn't work in the modern world.'* (p. 39). Seligman's point is that it is easier to be negative because our brains are connected that way. Once again, this is a point that we reinforce in 'The Art of Being Brilliant' workshops.

This is often termed *'negativity bias'* (Haidt, 2006, p.28) based on the evolutionary principle that *'bad is stronger than good...responses to threats and unpleasantness are faster, stronger and harder to inhibit than responses to opportunities and pleasures.'* (p. 29). Haidt suggests that negativity bias shows up throughout psychology. For example, in marriage, it takes at least 5 good acts to make up for 1 bad one (Gottman 1994), in financial transactions the pleasure of gaining a certain amount of money is less than the pain of losing the same amount (Kahneman and Tversky 1979) and people estimate that 25 acts of life-saving heroism would be needed to make up for 1 murder (Rozin and Royzman 2001). Haidt proposes therefore that individuals cannot just will themselves to see everything in a positive light because our minds are wired up to react to threats, violations and setbacks. This backs up Seligman's point, that humans find it easier to be negative.

Modern life as an impediment to happiness

Research by Dunbar (1993), Hill & Buss (2008) and others suggests that the modern way of life may be a stumbling block on the road to happiness. Cope's thesis touches on the changing nature of the workplace and Holden's (2008) concept of 'busyness' as impediments of the modern age. Archaeological evidence suggests that humans spent most of their evolutionary history as hunter-gatherers, living in small groups of between 50 to 200 (Dunbar 1993). Our ancestors are likely to have spent the majority of their lives surrounded by close kin and allies. Hill and Buss (2008) suggest that social transactions typically occurred among individuals who engaged in regular contact. Although the modern Western world offers an array of conveniences not available to our ancestral counterparts, many of us do not have access to the immediate social support systems that likely characterised the conditions through which humans have spent the majority of our evolutionary history (Nesse & Williams 1994).

Out of focus?

Holden's concept of 'destination addiction' (2008), states that the majority of people have a subconscious goal of merely getting through the week. Happiness is, according to Holden, left to chance and is certainly not a primary focus for most people. Positive psychology begins to ask interesting questions, such as what if one's objective - one's primary purpose - was not to survive the week but to enjoy it? Or what if one's purpose was to 'be happy'? Would that change in focus bring about behavioural change? Holden (2008) concludes that most people are focused on being busy rather than happy.

'Affluenza'

Offer (2006) also argues that the modern way of life is an impediment to happiness. He proposes that the flow of novelty generated by today's market based consumer society is so strong that higher levels of commitment and self-discipline are needed to ensure that long term well-being is not sacrificed for short term gratification. Essentially, his point is that in a modern consumer society we

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are seduced by marketing media to become discontent with our current possessions. This 'must have' society is epitomised by what James (2007) describes as a 'celebrity culture'.

James argues that mass media has increased the exposure and power of celebrity. James describes the subject thus: *'An epidemic of 'affluenza' is sweeping through the English-speaking world – an obsessive, envious keeping-up-with-the-Joneses – that makes us twice as prone to depression, anxiety and addictions than people in other developed nations. And now we are affecting the rest of the world with this virulent virus.'* (book jacket). Hyperbole perhaps, but it does tie in with Offer's conclusions above.

Hedonic Adaptation

Studies show that people adapt quickly to changes in income and marital status (Diener & Oishi 2010; Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener 2003). Also, more attractive people are not happier (Diener & Seligman, 2002), and – assuming basic needs are met - rich people are only slightly happier than their less wealthy counterparts (e.g., Diener, Horwitz, & Emmons, 1985). What accounts for these counter-intuitive findings? Most likely, the reason that happiness is not strongly related to life circumstances is that such factors as income, beauty, and even marital status are particularly prone to adaptation and people generally don't dwell on them. Instead, these circumstantial factors tend to exist in the background of a person's emotional life.

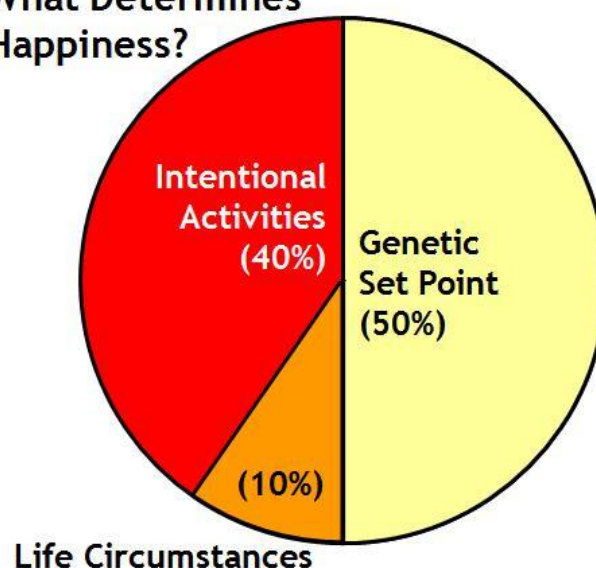
Seligman's concept of the 'hedonic treadmill' is another way of looking at adaptation. He states that the hedonic treadmill *'causes you to rapidly and inevitably adapt to good things by taking them for granted...the deeds and things you worked so hard for no longer make you happy; you need to get something even better to boost your levels of happiness into the upper reaches of its set range.'* (p. 49).

Some researchers have used the notion of hedonic adaptation to support the claim that the quest to improve happiness is a fruitless effort (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996). Fortunately, both the fact that happiness has a genetic component and the fact that individuals adapt to positive life events does not mean that it is impossible to become happier. Research by Lyubomirsky (2005) suggests that a person's level of happiness is not set in stone, and that he or she can raise this level by taking advantage of certain intentional activities.

This 'sustainable happiness model' (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005) proposes that happiness is determined by three factors: The genetically-determined set point, life circumstances, and intentional activities. Lyubomirsky's 'happiness pie' is illustrated below.

The implication of this model is that a large percentage of an individual's happiness is determined by their own conscious, effortful activities and, thus, that increases in happiness can be successfully achieved.

What Determines Happiness?



Media

Gitomer (1995) is adamant that the modern media is, at least in part, the culprit for dampening happiness levels. He advises that *'all news is negative. Constant exposure to negative news can't possibly have a positive impact on your life.'* (p. 6)

Competing with unbeatable rivals?

Hill & Buss (2008) suggest that social comparisons play an important role in happiness, and, once again, the argument is that the modern world acts as a curb on happiness. They propose that we live in a 'media saturated environment' (p. 68) and that the human mind has been shaped by selection to have a positional bias in judging our relative success against others. TVs, magazines and billboards advertise the richest, most successful and most attractive in the world. *'Large scale media exposure increases the size and attractiveness of our reference groups and the range and grandeur of the possible goals that we can set for ourselves.'* (Hill and Buss, 2008, p. 69)

The suggestion is that we always compare upwards not downwards!

Contemporary strands of happiness and positivity

Positive psychology

Peterson (2006) describes positive psychology as *'the scientific study of what goes right in life, from birth to death and all stops in between...it is a newly Christened approach within psychology that takes seriously as a subject matter those things that make most worth living.'* (p. 4)

Sheldon & King (2001, p. 216) describe it thus: *'It is nothing more than the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues. Positive psychology revisits "the average person," with an interest in finding out what works, what is right, and what is improving . . . positive psychology is simply psychology.'*

Gable & Haidt, (2005, p. 104) broaden the definition to include organisations; *'Positive psychology is the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions.'*

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Ironically, the modern resurgence of 'happiness' was prompted by a self-confessed negative person, Professor Martin Seligman. Seligman was, by his own admission a *'dyed-in-the-wool pessimist, a grouch, even a walking nimbus cloud.'* (2002)

'Positive Psychology' has existed formally since 1998. The term came into being during Seligman's tenure as President of the American Psychological Association. Strumpfer (2005) argues that if history is to be accurate it needs to acknowledge that the phrase 'positive psychology' was on the agenda and in fact appeared in print long before Seligman popularised it. Seligman himself acknowledges that positive psychology is not a new idea, *'it has many distinguished ancestors.'* (p. 7) Maslow (1943, p.354) alluded to the negative bias of psychology: *'The science of psychology has been far more successful on the negative than on the positive side. It has revealed to us much about man's shortcomings, his illness, his sins, but little about his potentialities, his virtues, his achievable aspirations, or his full psychological height. It is as if psychology has voluntarily restricted itself to only half its rightful jurisdiction, and that, the darker, meaner half.'*

Seligman's tenure as President of the American Psychological Association succeeded in bringing the positive aspects of psychology into mainstream discussion. *'Psychology is not just the study of disease, weakness and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue....it is also about work, education, insight, love, growth and play.'* (Seligman 2005, p. 7)

So, although popularised by Seligman it is unlikely that he would claim to have *invented* 'positivity' and 'happiness' – they have been on the radar for centuries. Positive Psychology is therefore probably best described as having 'a very short history with a very long past.' (Diener & Biswas Diener, 2008). One of the triggers for the emergence of positive psychology was Seligman's realisation that, since World War 2, psychology had focused much of its efforts on human problems and their remedies (Peterson, 2006). As a result, great strides had been made in understanding, treating and preventing psychological disorders. According to Peterson, there is a general acknowledgement that traditional strands of psychology have followed a 'disease model'. Imagine that 'well-being' is measured on a scale of +10 (feeling brilliant) to -10 (feeling awful). 'Psychology' has largely been focused on getting people from say a -8 to zero (i.e., to the point of 'not being ill'). Positive Psychology is much more about getting people from say a +2 to a +8. Burchardt (2006) links this to the term 'flourishing', the central theme of Cope's research.

So, rather than inventing happiness and well-being, positive psychology has merely brought the strands under a single umbrella. It has been a re-focusing exercise rather than a revolution (Peterson, 2006)

Happiness set point

Lyubomirsky (2001) alludes to the fact that individuals have an optimal happiness point to which they return. This baseline feeling is similar to the body's biological mechanisms (e.g., we are hot so we sweat in order to return to 'normal' temperature). Lyubomirsky argues that, similarly, we have a psychological gauge for emotions that protects us from excessive happiness or sadness. A faulty gauge can cause extreme unhappiness for a prolonged period. Or conversely, manic behaviour - bouts of extreme happiness and euphoria. Brickman, Coates & Janoff-Bulman (1978) compared happiness levels of lottery winners with accident victims. After a temporary rise in happiness of lottery winners and a corresponding fall in accident victims, there was almost no difference in the medium term. Both returned to their 'normal' levels.

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Adaptation

This 'set-point' is explored further by Fredrickson (2009) who suggests humans have a natural adaptive mechanism that prevents them from being 'over happy'. She alludes to the fact that humans tend to have a baseline feeling. Individuals vary slightly in their natural 'emotional set point' – but most are *mildly happy* most of the time (Lykken, 1999). This correlates almost exactly with Lyubomirsky's happiness 'set-point'.

Fredrickson (2009) links the set point to the process of adaptation. It is clear that people experience natural emotional highs and lows that come with success and failure. But, according to Fredrickson, we tend to gravitate back to a mildly pleasant 'resting emotional state' quite quickly. An example of workplace adaptation is a pay rise, which may give an emotional high for a short period before it becomes the norm and we gravitate back to our previous levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

So, is adaptation bad news? On the one hand it implies there is an emotional glass ceiling beyond which we have little hope of breaking through. If Fredrickson (2009) is right, *'individuals are doomed to be mildly happy most of the time.'* (p. 34). Adaptation suggests we are incapable of experiencing euphoric highs over long periods of time. Indeed, Fredrickson (2009) suggests chasing these highs can lead to alcohol and drug abuse.

But, on the other hand, adaptation also serves a very useful purpose in terms of buffering people against emotional lows. Essentially, it gives individuals a safety net so they can bounce back from adversity. Fredrickson (2009) suggests 'happiness is a kind of thermometer by which we gauge how well our lives are going.'

Circumstances

In Lyubomirsky's (2001) model of sustainable happiness, a further 10% of the happiness pie chart is accounted for by a person's circumstances. This is backed up by research by Argyle (2001) and Diener et al (2010) who concur that approximately 10% of an individual's happiness is determined by factors that constitute the background of their life. Examples include a person's demographics (e.g., gender, ethnicity), personal experiences (e.g., past traumas and triumphs), life status variables (e.g., marital status, education level, health, and income), physical appearance and the physical setting of where the person lives.

Lyubomirsky's (2001) proposal that life circumstances play less of a role than many people think is summed up thus, *'The general conclusion from almost a century of research on the determinants of well-being is that objective circumstances, demographic variables and life events are correlated with happiness less strongly than intuition and every day experience tell us they ought to be...we found that even the happiest people, the top 10% in happiness, have moods that go up and down – they are not stuck in euphoria. It is fundamental to have a mood system that reacts to events, including negative events. In some circumstances unpleasant emotions such as anxiety or sadness can facilitate effective functioning, and the happiest people feel such emotions – it is just that they do not do so very often.'* (p. 19)

Flow

Csikszentmihalyi (2002) suggests that 'the good life' is characterised by complete absorption of what one does, which he terms 'flow'. He argues that most people use their minds as little as possible and 'fall far below their capacity for processing information.' He postulates that 'only through consciously directed energy, congruent with our goals, do we create more optimal experiences or 'flow' in our lives.... 'Being present' or 'mindfulness' enables a person to focus, practice and further build our inherent strengths.' (p. 214)

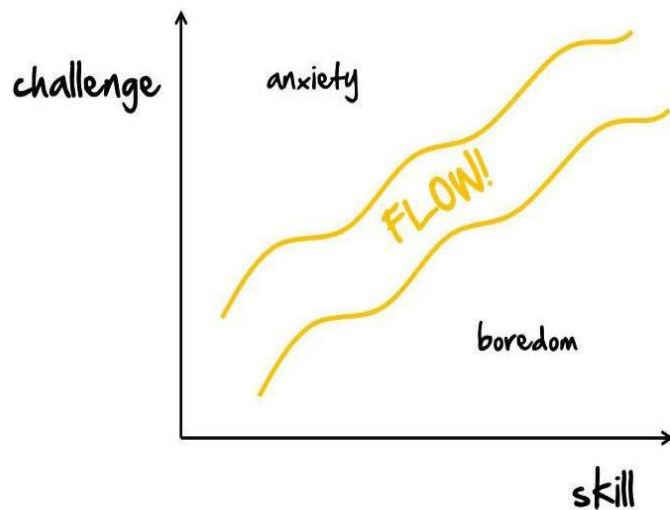
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Csikszentmihalyi argues that mindfulness plays a key part in lifting spirits, and elevates others as well, by increasing self-regulation. This is a key component of emotional intelligence or, as it is commonly referred to, an individual's emotional quotient (EQ). EQ, rather than IQ, has been linked to greater flourishing by producing positive outcomes across all domains of life (Goleman, 1996)

Csikszentmihalyi (2002) studied creative people and was struck by the fact that during the creative process artists persisted, single-mindedly, disregarding hunger, fatigue and discomfort. They were totally absorbed in the creative process yet rapidly lost interest in the artistic creation once it had been completed. Flow research has its origins in autotelic (intrinsic) activity. Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura (2005) suggest the conditions of flow include:

- The challenges must stretch (neither overmatching nor underutilizing) existing skills
- The individual has clear goals and receives immediate feedback about the progress that is being made

The diagram below illustrates, in its most basic form, the concept of 'flow'.



Crucially, when in flow, the individual operates at full capacity (Deci 1975). Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura (2005) suggest that the state of flow is one of dynamic equilibrium. The balance between overmatching and underutilising a person's capabilities is intrinsically fragile. If skill exceeds the challenge one first relaxes and then becomes bored. If challenge exceeds skill, one becomes anxious, which detracts from productivity. (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2005)

'The Art of Being Brilliant' brings the concept of flow into play by referencing the fact that 2%ers tend to be in occupations that play to their strengths.

Flourishing

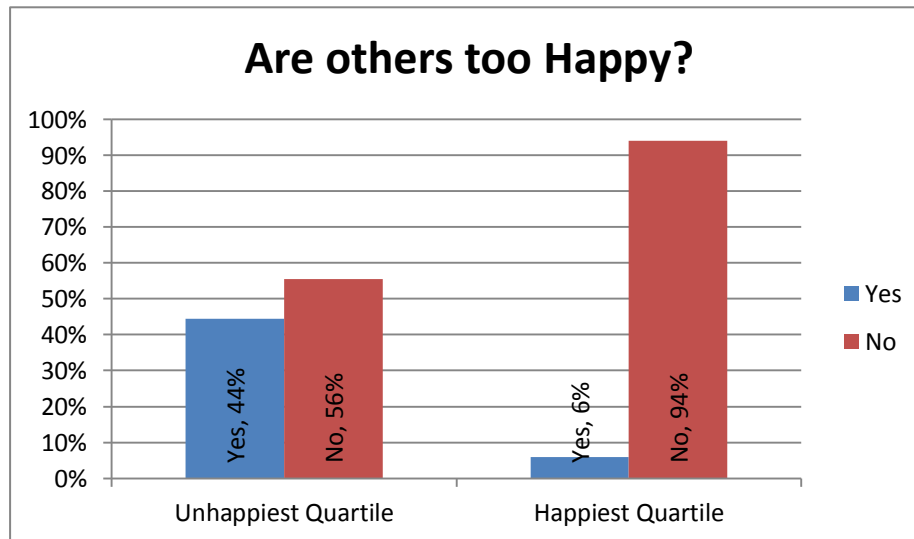
Flourishing is a word that crops up frequently in academic literature and popular psychology (Lyubomirsky 2008, Peterson, 2006) but is rarely defined. It is invariably used to describe individuals who are deemed to be in a state of happiness or who are deemed to be doing well in life.

'Happiness' and 'Flourishing' are therefore closely related.

Historically, 'flourishing' relates to Eudaimonistic theories of happiness and well-being. The idea behind such theories is that we flourish by fully exercising our human capacities. Accordingly, a ruthless corporate executive with little concern for others could not flourish, however successful he or she might be in relation to their own priorities. Therefore flourishing isn't just about the individual www.artofbrilliance.co.uk 'Flourishing in the Workplace' A brief overview of the literature, methods and content

feeling good, it is about the transference of positive feelings to others and therefore links to emotional intelligence (Goleman 2006). For example, an individual can be happy within themselves but merely succeed in annoying those around them. Or an individual's happiness can create an uplifting effect on those around them. The latter is flourishing.

Cope's research is able to illustrate that overly happy people do irritate those around them, leading ascertainably to the fact that one can indeed be 'too happy'. Once again, this a theme that punctuates the workshops (usually to humorous effect). It is important to note that it tends to be the unhappiest quartile who rate their work colleagues as 'too happy'.



Fredrickson (2009) talks about flourishing as being '*ripe with possibility and remarkably resilient in hard times*' (p. 17). She argues that people who flourish function at extraordinary high levels. '*They are not simply people who feel good. Flourishing goes beyond happiness, or satisfaction with life.*' (p. 17). Fredrickson states that flourishing involves doing good or, as she puts it, '*adding value to the world.*' (p. 17). Fredrickson (2009) argues that being a positive person is a pre-requisite to flourishing. She also suggests that the opposite of flourishing is languishing or '*barely holding on to life*' (p. 17)

'Flourishing' also appears in the work of Cameron (2008) and Rhoades & Eisenberger (2002). They suggest that a positive working climate is an essential pre-requisite to workplace flourishing.

Flourishing is similar to Diener and Biswas Diener's (2008) definition of 'psychological wealth', as '*the experience of well-being and a high quality life.*' (p. 6). They describe psychological wealth as more than simple fleeting joy and more than an absence of anxiety or depression. '*Psychological wealth is the experience that our life is excellent – that we are living in a rewarding, engaged, meaningful and enjoyable way.*' (p. 6)

Identifying '2%ers'

Cope's thesis is less about 'happiness' and more about 'flourishing'. In short, he has sought out those who feel good and whose positivity radiates to their work colleagues.

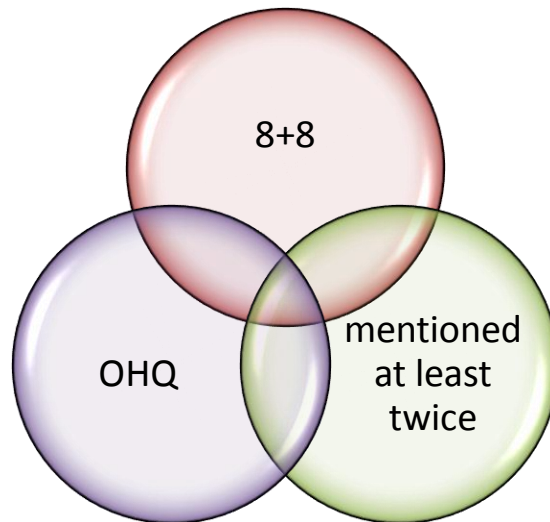
As has already been mentioned, it is very difficult to objectively measure 'happiness'. Cope's 'Methodology' chapter is critical of other researchers' methods and he is aware that his methods of data collection will also be criticised.

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Cope has created relationships with 9 public sector organisations and has worked with them for a 3 year period. He has surveyed 1400 people. Out of those, he has selected 58 '2%ers' from whom he has sought further data.

So, who are the 58?

Cope has gathered most of his data via on-line surveys. The 58 have emerged from scoring highly on 3 ratings, falling within the central section of the Venn diagram below.



Cope's first survey is entitled '8+8' and seeks to rate individuals own happiness/energy, plus asks who's the most upbeat person in their workplace.

Each employee also completed the 'Oxford Happiness Questionnaire' (OHQ) which is one of the most widely used measurements of happiness and allows comparisons of Cope's respondents with those who have taken part in other happiness surveys. Cope was able to rank respondents producing a league table of 'happiness'.

His final selection of the 58 came from those who scored themselves high on happiness and energy (ie, they scored 80% or higher on the self-test). Plus they also ranked in the upper quartile of the OHQ. In addition they had to be mentioned at least twice as 'the most positive person in my workplace'. This final qualification is important in terms of measuring 'flourishing'. While other surveys of 'happiness' have relied solely on self-report mechanisms, Cope has sought the ratings of those with whom the 2%ers interact. This is an attempt at triangulating the survey results and gauging those who rate themselves as happy and whom others are noticing as happy.

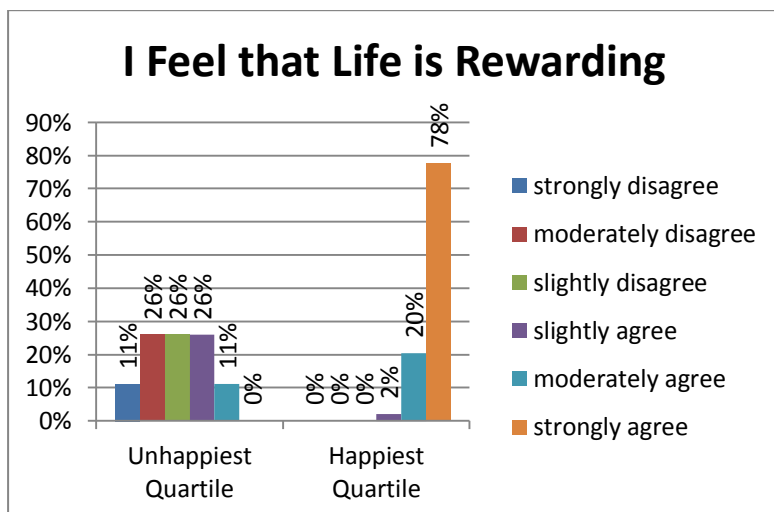
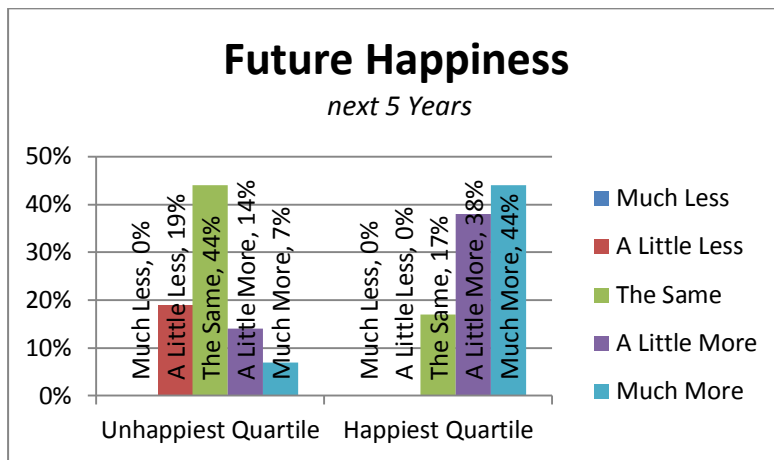
The 58 have been and continue to be 'cross examined' in order to find out the key ingredients that go into their happiness mix.

The findings

The most positive candidates have been followed up by face to face interview and on line questionnaire in an effort to determine their strategies for remaining upbeat. These results are still being compiled, but early results have formed the basis of the 'Big 5' characteristics that make up the core themes from 'The Art of Being Brilliant'.

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The plethora of data shows ‘2%ers’ to be much more optimistic about their future happiness levels and that, not unexpectedly, it correlates with a sense that life is rewarding.



Choosing to be Positive

This is an intuitively obvious point but, as is pointed out in the workshops, one that is often overlooked. Cope’s research shows it to be the biggest single factor cited as the reason for his respondents’ positive outlook.

More than 80% of the most positive people in the survey cite ‘choice’ as their number one strategy. Typical comments are:

“Being happy and positive is a conscious choice and some days it can be an effort.”

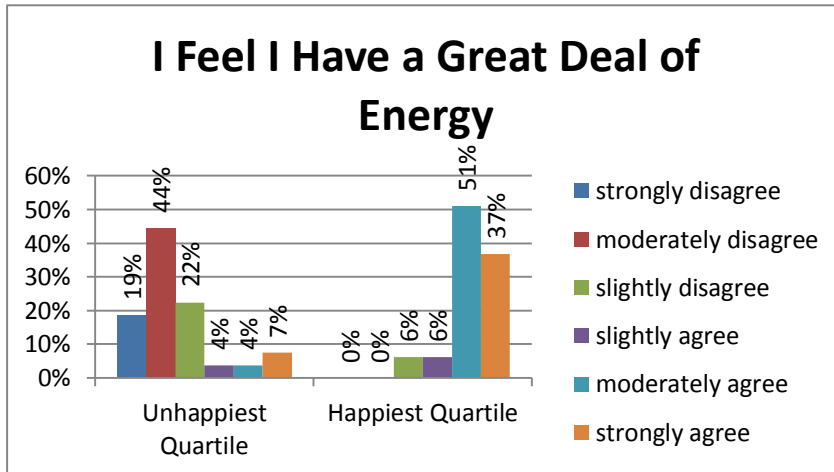
“I sometimes have to remind myself to see the positive side - depending upon the company I am with.”

“Being positive is a conscious, deliberate intentional effort. Happiness is something I think about. I spent years trying to chase something outside of myself. I’m not saying I’m happy every minute, but each day I’m getting more aware and making better choices to be happy.”

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Many of the responses allude to the effort involved in being positive. Hence, in the workshops, we often conclude that *choosing to be positive* is 'simple but not easy'.

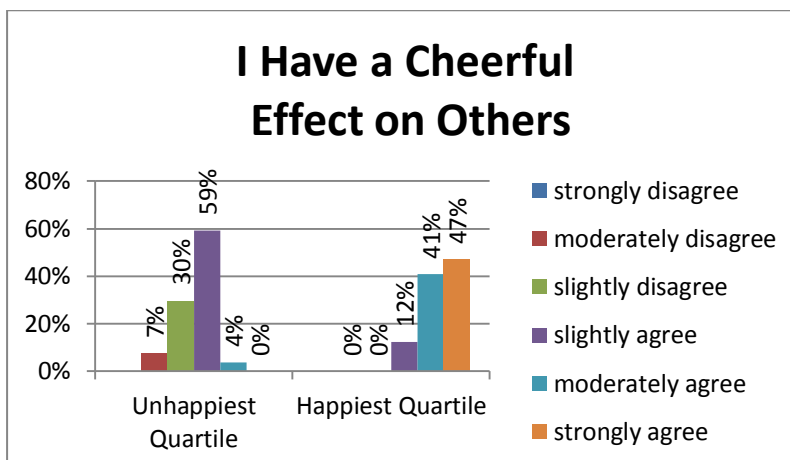
'The Art of Being Brilliant' also uses Cope's analysis of energy levels amongst the British population. Once again, the statistics show a marked difference between 'normal' people and '2%ers'. We often refer to 'corporate entropy' a highly academic term that crops up in physics and biology. It is clear that 'happiness' and 'energy' are linked but, at this stage, Cope's analysis hasn't focused on which comes first!



Impact

Understanding one's impact on those around them is linked with emotional intelligence. And, while the 2%ers haven't yet undergone formal EQ assessments, there is a pervading heightened awareness that they deem positive impact to be important.

These people have been nominated by their workplace peers as 'stand-out' examples of happiness and positivity. When questioned about this, the respondents' generally reply that they understand the importance of coming across positively and this forms part of their reason for choosing to be positive.



Cope is working on statistics that corroborate this point and they will appear in the published thesis.

Personal Responsibility

Cope's '2%ers' can be summed up using the academic terminology of 'high self-efficacy' and 'strong internal locus of control' (Rotter 1996). 'The Art of Being Brilliant' workshop steers away from this terminology, preferring to use the simple (and somewhat simplified) notation that positive/upbeat people have a strong sense of personal responsibility. In short, they are less fatalistic, believing that they are in control of their own destiny.

Several investigations have revealed that unhappy individuals are more likely than happy ones to dwell on negative or ambiguous events (eg, Seligman 2002, Wiseman 2004). Such 'dwelling' or 'rumination' may drain cognitive resources and thus bring to bear a variety of negative consequences, which could further reinforce unhappiness (Seligman 2002).

Cope's thesis shows this to be manifested in several ways, most notably the 2%ers ability to reframe negative occurrences and, to use an NLP pre-supposition, 'take the learning and move on'. The point we make in the workshops is that 'personal responsibility' comes with age. This is born out of Cope's survey comparison between school age and working age people. Those of working age demonstrate 60% higher internal locus of control.

Resilience

Cope's research ably demonstrates the intuitively obvious point that positive thinking does not mean that negative occurrences don't happen. Cope's '2%ers' work in the same organisations as everyone else and thus are subject to the same pay freezes, budget cuts and re-structures. Resilience (or, 'bouncebackability' as the trainers prefer to call it in the workshops) is a strong common factor among the 2%ers. Many cite this as a particularly difficult thing to do and this point anchors the research in the real world of turbulence and strife.

It is interesting that this is also a hot topic among the popular psychology movement. For example, Paul McGee (SUMO, 2005) suggests that 'hippo time' is perfectly normal and cites a series of useful questions to help people bounce back.

When interviewed, positive people invariably talk of 'downtime' or 'bouncing back'. It is thought that the 2%ers spend very little time ruminating on negative events. Indeed, resilience is often linked to their choice to be positive. Without making positive choices, it is very difficult to bounce back. Almost 20% of the nominated 2%ers cite a low point in their lives as a turning point. The death of a loved one, a major illness or redundancy – somewhat counter-intuitively, these negative events can trigger positive reactions. This tallies with the concept of 'post traumatic growth' (Woodward & Joseph 2010) as against the popular media and medical phrase 'post traumatic stress disorder'.

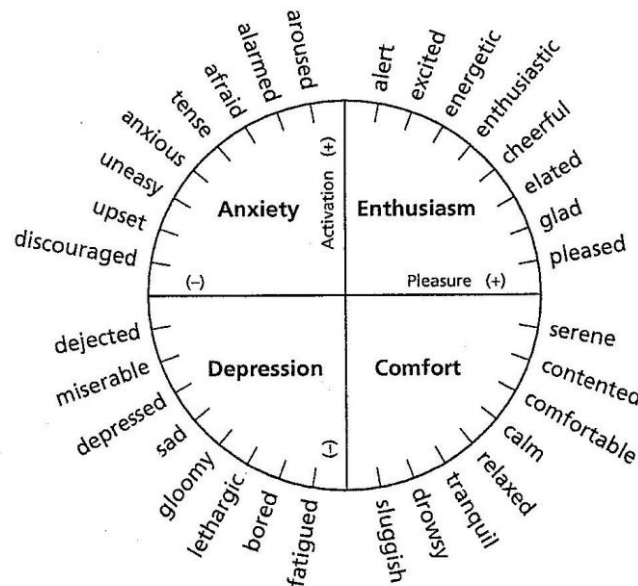
Bouncing back from a period of severe hardship/trauma represents a huge effort and a massive 'reframe', hence our observation that it is the most difficult of the 'Big 5'.

Goals setting

Cited as the 5th point of Cope's research, goal setting is practiced by 80% of respondents. There is a plethora of pop psychology and academic research on the benefits of goal setting and Cope doesn't major on this. Suffice to say, his nominated people have a strong proclivity for setting goals, often committing them to paper. There is a tendency for the goals to be inspirational (eg, running a marathon or writing a book) and they are typically 18 months in duration.

Next steps?

In a further arm of Cope's study, he is examining the work of Peter Warr (University of Sheffield) and relating his research to the Circumplex model below:



The body of research that makes up 'Organisational Development' has traditionally focused on particular workplace themes. For example, Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, and Grant (2005) examined "thriving" as a sense of vitality and forward movement, with new learning and personal development. Consistent with earlier ideas of psychological growth and self-actualization, they emphasized that people in their jobs as well as elsewhere want to make progress towards achieving their potential. Linked to that, difficult expenditure of effort can itself be rewarding if that is directed at personally valued outcomes (e.g., Ferguson, 1767/1966).

A related eudaimonic syndrome concerns the perception of meaningfulness in one's job. This involves awareness of some match between a job and one's personal values and self-identity, linked to the perception that the job has personal significance beyond providing mere transitory feelings. Meaningfulness may be perceived in everyday activities such as the use of valued skills or effective coping with personal challenges, or it may be a question of applying personally important moral principles. Perceived meaningfulness of a job thus reflects the degree to which in some (often ill-defined) way it matters to you. As reviewed by Ben-Shahar (2007), both pleasure and perceived meaning are essential for happiness in its full sense.

In studying workers' well-being, attention has traditionally been focused on the construct of job satisfaction, a relatively passive experience of low-to-moderate activation. Recently, this type of well-being has been complemented by the more energized form referred to as job engagement.

Engaged workers feel positively about their situation, but beyond mere satisfaction they are motivated to expend energy on a task. Thus Leiter and Bakker (2010, p. 1) defined job engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state of work-related well-being", and the review by Bakker, Albrecht, and Leiter (2011) identified a "growing consensus that engagement can be defined in terms of high levels of energy and high levels of involvement in work" (p. 22).

As a corollary, Cope's research is also looking at the degree to which 2%ers are 'satisfied' or 'engaged' at work. 'Engagement' is linked with a plethora of benefits (to the individual employee as well as their output) and this aspect of Cope's findings is keenly anticipated.

Further Information

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