

# How Bhutan can Measure and Develop GNH

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## Introduction

As an Australian Psychologist my work has recently moved into the area of Positive Psychology, a term promoted by the President of the American Psychological Society, Martin Seligman. He describes Positive Psychology as having “three pillars: First is the study of positive emotion” (such as happiness). “Second is the study of the positive traits, foremost among them the strengths and virtues, but also the “abilities” such as intelligence and athleticism. Third is the study of positive institutions, such as democracy, strong families, and free inquiry, that support the virtues, which in turn support the positive emotions.”

So this is a relatively new turn of direction for the profession and academia of Western Psychology. It is a turn away from therapy, towards increasing well-being; away from analysing the past, towards working on an improved future. Research is accumulating on positive life experiences such as satisfaction with life, happiness, the good effect that positive emotions have on health and the positive effects of optimism.

There is a growing body of research collected on happiness levels in many nations. A national norm could be used as a reference for an individual’s own level of happiness; are they more or less happy than the national average? It could be used to measure changes over time in the same population. And providing there was enough consistency in method, a national measure of happiness could be compared between nations. Which countries are happier? Which countries are least happy?

It is from a Psychological paradigm that I will describe a process to determine a quantifiable measure of Gross National Happiness for application in the modern Bhutanese context.

I shall introduce you to a model of the components of a national measure of happiness that results from a merging of Positive Psychology, Life Coaching theory, Life Skills training, and my own growing personal interest in Bhutan and Buddhist practices. It is a model of a theoretical pathway of how the policies and services of the government can contribute to the satisfaction and happiness of its citizens and hence endeavour to increase Gross National Happiness.

I define the components of the model, then describe the structure of the relationship between the components. This is followed by a discussion of the implications of the model for the individual and for the policy makers.

The national happiness model is built around some numerical measure of an individual’s happiness. A pilot study is proposed to trial

a measure of individual happiness and begin to explore the nature of happiness in the Bhutanese culture.

**A Model of the Relationship between individual happiness and GNH**

**Definitions**

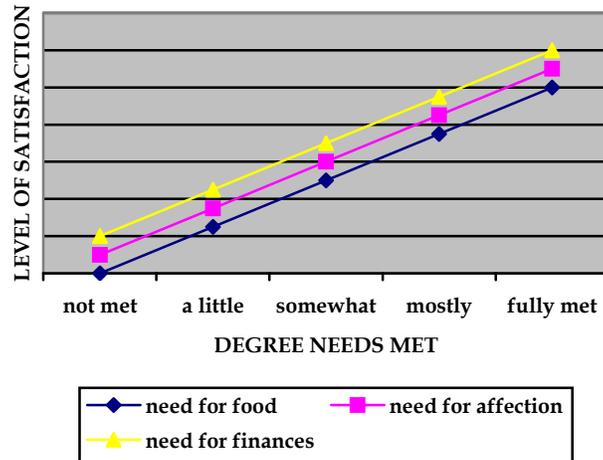
**Happiness**

Happiness is a subjective experience of positive affect. As an emotion it is intangible except by direct experience. Happy behaviour indicates the presence of happiness but is not happiness itself. This elusiveness presents obvious difficulties for measurement and researchers have come to rely on personal ratings.

The subjective enjoyment of life as a whole is defined as ‘the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his / or her life-as-a-whole favourably’. It requires a judgement on satisfaction with past, present and anticipated experience. Therefore a cognitive component is included in one’s experience of happiness.

Satisfaction with achieving goals or having needs and desires met has perhaps a more finite notion than happiness. It is the pleasant affect when an aspiration has been met. In relation to overall satisfaction one assesses the degree to which our wants are being met and reviews whether life seems to meet one’s conscious demands.

**SATISFACTION ARISES WHEN NEEDS ARE MET**



Happiness is functional in a biological sense. It motivates us to improve our living conditions, draws people together into communities and

parenthood, and is good for our health and longevity. Happy people are active, creative, helpful and adaptable to new experiences.

Happiness is not just a bipolar relationship with sadness as mixed feelings of happiness and sadness can co-occur. Various aspects of the one event can elicit seemingly contrasting emotions.

There is evidence of homeostatic level of happiness in an individual which varies between people. Life will bring challenges to this homeostasis by increasing or decreasing happiness conditions but we tend to return to our own set level. (Seligman). Personality factors may determine the level of happiness a person acclimatizes to. Extraversion and optimism are two likely traits that set the level higher than for introverts or pessimists. Coping strategies used will influence how soon one returns to their normal happiness level after being challenged.

Happiness is correlated with many indicators of Quality of Life. The strongest relationship is with social capital, a sociological theory of social connectedness. Public health research acknowledges that the quantity and quality of a person's social relationships and social networks play an important part in the maintenance of their health and in recovery from illness. Good social relations were found to be necessary for happiness in a study of American undergraduate students. People cope better with the challenges of life if they have good social support.

Other correlates are less strong in their relationship to happiness and often vary between studies. Increasing age for example has been associated with a small decline of positive affect and increase in negative affect, as well as increased well-being. A Swedish study also showed a U-shaped relationship of happiness with age, with lowest happiness in the age group 45-64.

Cultural differences in the experience of happiness can be traced to the different values held by the cultures as well as objective factors such as wealth. Culture can also moderate which variables most influence happiness and set the social norms for appropriate feelings and the individual's place in that society.

### ***Individual/Personal Happiness***

Individual happiness is both a transient experience and an enduring state. One can feel happy now but not be generally happy or not feel happy now but would describe being generally happy. It is the general state of happiness that is the focus of this paper.

Overall happiness can be described as the sum of satisfaction with the life domains. Happiness can be predicted from cognitive measures of domain satisfaction. Satisfaction with the various components of life builds to an overall level of satisfaction.

The satisfaction however is judged against the individual's and the society's values. 'Intraindividual changes in satisfaction were strongly

influenced by the degree of success in the domain that individuals value.' The personal value the individual places on a domain may or may not coincide with the values of that society. If they do coincide there is less conflicting tension and hence more well-being. Congruency with one's community values and expectations increases subjective well-being.

If satisfaction is the meeting of a perceived need or the attainment of some goal then the degree of satisfaction it would depend on how well the need was met or how close one is to the goal. One's judgement of satisfaction will draw on the inner perception of needs, how one appreciates when needs are met, how specific the goal is and what the payoff is.

The level of satisfaction may also come from extending yourself to reach high goals. Challenging one's self in positive and achievable ways builds all the positive emotions, including happiness. Making intentions and following through can require great effort.

Overall happiness is comprised of affect (emotion) and cognitions (thoughts) and their interrelationship. Evaluations are based on intuitive affective appraisal such as beauty and cognitively guided evaluation such as income. 'Happy (people) weighted their best domains more heavily than did unhappy individuals, whereas unhappy individuals weighted their worst domains more heavily than did happy individuals. Thus, happy and unhappy people used different information when constructing satisfaction judgments.

The hedonic level of affect is the degree to which pleasant affect dominates. As levels of satisfaction fluctuate over time, measures of hedonic level are an average over 1 month or 1 year. The pleasures of life do hold the promise of happiness, especially for the person who highly values pleasant affect. Physical pleasure is associated with daily satisfaction to the degree that one seeks for such an experience.

Hedonic happiness is dependent on the environment supplying the ingredients of pleasure and is a route to substance abuse. Therefore seeking solely hedonic pleasures can lead to greater suffering, from the effort required to acquire more pleasure as well as from social problems of addictions.

The eudaimonic approach focuses on meaning and self-realization and defines well-being in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functioning.

Both cognitive and affective meaning are associated with well-being, it is more important to feel that one has meaning in life than to have a structure for that meaning. Eudaimonic happiness is more dependent on the internal processes of the individual than the environment although certainly the environment can support it.

Veenhoven includes the utility of one's life as well as the enjoyment one experiences as a measure of making a good life from the given personal and environmental resources. The engagement of one's activities in the

service of the community is a prescription for experiencing more happiness. This level of happiness assumes some higher values of morals and aesthetics are held by the individual.

The external effects of a life that is good for something more than itself might be seen for example in contributions to society, being indispensable in the workplace and living in an ecologically sustainable manner. Satisfaction can be enhanced by applying ‘your strengths and virtues in the service of something much larger than you are’.

However virtuous living, although a high quality of life, does not require happiness and may not cause happiness. Conversely, happiness can be experienced without virtuous living. A virtuous life is likely to bring happiness to other people, thereby contributing to a happier community.

**Life Domains**

The conceptual organisation of one’s whole life into smaller divisions is an aid to considerations of how best to manage one’s life. By looking at various areas of life we can more readily identify problems and begin working to resolve them. Within the Life Coaching profession a person’s experience of their life can be divided into 8 domains. These are simply useful constructs not definitive boundaries. In reality all divisions overlap with each other in the complex matrix of the content of our lives.

It is the goal of Life Coaching to seek a harmonious relationship between the domains of life in order to create a balanced life. Overall happiness must include an estimate of the harmony versus conflict between the various factors of one’s life. One is faced with the task of reducing inner conflict such as finding a balance between looking after oneself and those who one is responsible for; maintaining one’s own integrity while trying to please other people; and wanting to be generous to friends yet maintain financial health.

I suggest that the various correlates of happiness will be found in the 8 Life Domains as follows. This anchors each domain with concrete measurable items and reveals some of the interrelationships between the domains .

<b>Correlates of Happiness</b>	<b>Life Domains</b>
Ages	all
Gender	all
Years of education	Career, Finances,
Family income	Finances, Career, Social, Physical envir.
Employment	Career
Socio-economic status	Finances, Career, Social
Married	Intimacy, Finances, Social

No. of children in household	Intimacy, Finances, Social
Memberships	Community, Social / Fun
Political concern	Community
Religiousness	Personal/Spiritual development
Health – self estimate	Health – Self care
Perceived fate control	psychological variable
Tolerance	psychological variable

### ***Health/Self-Care***

Self-care is one aspect of life that is apparent to the observer. How well are you groomed, how comfortable are your shoes, do you look healthy, do you value yourself? Personal health care demonstrates responsibility and maturity. As one of the tasks of growing up, we must learn to care for our body; to wash it, to nourish it, to protect it.

The more attention that goes into really caring for our body, including an exercise programme, stress management skills and nutrition, the more likely our body will last well into old age. The common diseases of old age such as heart disease, diabetes and arthritis are directly attributable to lifestyle. Emotions affect the way we eat. Anger increases hunger, impulsive eating and sensory eating with women being more susceptible than men.

Happiness is healthy. Laughing can boost immunity, strengthen hearts, and improve lung function. Being healthy brings a happiness that is often only appreciated when one is suffering from ill-health. Pain and discomfort is not generally accepted as being satisfying.

By actively maintaining our health, we are doing our best to avoid illness and hence minimise physical suffering. This would be the goal of many people. Yet some go beyond the norm to seek maximum fitness. The rewards in terms of increasing happiness come from the achievement of fitness goals, feeling more power in the body with greater fitness and lastly the biochemical spin offs such as endorphin releases.

### ***Personal/Spiritual Development***

This really is any experience that you would consider as part of your identity. It is your history, the values and virtues that form the principals by which you live, your perception of the greater scheme of things and the place you hold within it.

It may or may not involve any organised religion. Although 'religiosity may not be a strong predictor of life satisfaction across broad samples' it is beneficial for some people some time. Happy people see their religion not so much as something they "do" as what they "are".

Underlying most religions as well as cultures is the ethos that we must endeavour to improve our selves in some personal way. To grow towards some idealised notion of humanity. We make an effort to improve on

something we acknowledge is a personal weakness. Identifying a personal issue and working to favourably resolve it is the basis of Western psychotherapy.

These are the higher qualities of the human being, the capacity to analyse ourselves in relation to external cultural ideals. It is almost like the other domains of life serve to help us succeed in this human society to allow us the luxury of self-reflection.

### *Family/Friends/Community*

These are the people we encounter in our everyday lives. The people in our house, the neighbours, the shop keepers as well as relatives and friends who live away but remain in close contact. Relationship with family members is generally of higher priority and holds greater value than friends or the wider community.

Good relationships are characterised by care and consideration for others as well as being supported in return. In a recent Chinese survey 'both interpersonal support (including that from spouses, parents, friends, neighbours, and colleagues) and support utilization were significant predictors of happiness.'

Close groups of people provide a place of safety and security for the members of the group. There are opportunities to have good friends who accept and love you, and to whom you can feel a deep sense of connection. For adolescents a good relationship with one's parents will help them be happy and a bad relationship leads to depression. Adolescent well-being also benefits from self-esteem, perceived mastery and optimism.

Satisfaction with the community and attachment to the community are associated independently and positively with individual well-being. A sense of belongingness and closeness to the people in one's community enhances personal happiness as does an optimistic perception of the future both for the individual and the community.

"I believe that human affection is the basis or foundation of human nature. Without that you can't get satisfaction or happiness as an individual; and without that foundation, the whole human community can't get satisfaction either."

H.H. Dalai Lama.

The health benefits of laughing are derived not so much from the humour as from the building of personal relationships. Laughter brings us together and transcends language barriers.

### *Social/Fun*

In general, enjoying the company of other people and sharing happy experiences is pleasurable. A shared bottle of alcohol unveils this human attraction to having a good time. In fact many people come to rely on

alcohol and other recreational substances to enable them to 'get high'. This dependency leads to loss of happiness.

Sharing happy experiences with others enhances our own happiness. How contagious a genuine heartfelt laugh can be! People witnessing it will begin giggling, then chuckling without even knowing why the first person is laughing. When people around us are happy we enjoy their company and feel a slightly higher level of satisfaction.

A direct relationship has been shown between happiness and social activity among elderly American people. Participating in social activities brings connection with others to reduce loneliness. It also provides opportunities to develop social skills, social contacts, communication skills, emotional intelligence and other factors that equip us to operate successfully within a social context. Whereas sociability is correlated with happiness, loneliness, shyness and social anxiety correlate with unhappiness.

Seeking recreational activities that enhance other areas of our lives simultaneously brings compounded satisfaction. For example if your recreation involves an active group sport then you will increase your physical health along the way while providing opportunities for social connections.

The planning and anticipation of enjoyable activities is also conducive to feeling happy. Anticipating a holiday can increase overall happiness and decrease negative or unpleasant feelings. This may be related to an increased sense of hope and optimism. The recollection of recreational activities provides an ongoing resource of happy memories.

### ***Physical Environment***

This domain includes the house, the garden, the workplace, the greater natural environment and the buildings and bridges constructed by people. It extends in ever-widening circles from our room to the planet and beyond.

Where do we find satisfaction in the environment? How can we create a more satisfying environment in which to live? Do we need to purchase or construct something or perhaps spend time creating a garden or walking in nature?

The physical environment in which we live needs to provide basic minimal comforts and life supports before one can feel safe and content. Food, water and shelter are all basic requirements that must be satisfied before any happiness can be found. Once these are addressed then improvements to the physical environment can modulate one's happiness to the degree that one holds materialistic values.

It is not only our home that we live in. We live in a landscape that is generally a mixture of Nature and human endeavour. A garden is a place where we can develop an intimate relationship with Nature, learning the cyclic flow of seasons and how everything is interrelated through complex

balances. A village or town coordinates services such as electricity, health care and sanitation.

It is possible to increase overall well-being by developing a closer experience of Nature. One is removed from everyday worries and can review their place in the bigger scheme of things. Nature provides a rich resource of fascination that can engage the attention allowing the experience of flow. There is also the neutral, non-judgemental aspect of Nature that allow for relaxation and freedom of self-expression.

In the U.S. public recreation and parks are charged with providing people opportunities for enjoyment. By facilitating recreational use of natural environments these services contribute to the well-being of the community.

### ***Romance/Intimacy***

Intimacy is a deeper and closer type of social connectedness. Intimacy may not necessarily be romantic, but simply a deep and close friendship. However romance is generally believed to be a pathway to intimacy that leads one through the field of marriage.

In a comparison of long-term cohabiting, married, and remarried couples it was found that long-term cohabiting couples reported lower relationship happiness and fairness than other types of couples. This suggests that the institution of marriage supports individual happiness.

Very happy people were found to be highly social, and had stronger romantic and other social relationships than less happy groups. Romance can bring happiness but also distress as one risks emotional disclosure and opens the possibility of rejection.

This domain can have great bearing on life satisfaction, to the point that traumatic marital transitions can have long-lasting changes to the person's homeostatic set point of happiness. Satisfaction with one's marriage also transfers to levels of well-being of the children with conflict between parents invariably upsetting their children.

Yet staying in an unhappy marriage reduces satisfaction and is linked to high levels of depressive symptoms. It was also found to be associated with high levels of attachment insecurity both initially and over time.

### ***Finances***

The amount of money a person has does not necessarily make them happier although it can if the person values material goods above all else. Over the last 50 years, as US GDP and income have risen by 450%, life satisfaction has stayed essentially stable.

Researchers propose that 'the societal norms for production and consumption' in some way impact on a person's material goals, perhaps by setting a benchmark of what a person needs in order to participate satisfactorily in that society. If the societal norms change as when a new

product becomes popular, then one may also acquire the need for the product. This must be the psychological mechanisms underlying fashion. The product may or may not be useful or improve quality of life directly, but the indirect effect could be the satisfaction derived from complying to the norms of that society, yielding a continued sense of belonging rather than being marginalised in some way.

The way you spend your money also impacts on your happiness. Purchases made with the primary intention of acquiring a life experience are more likely to bring happiness than material purchases. Experiences are open to positive reinterpretation and form a meaningful part of one's identity. Enjoyable life experiences contribute to successful social relationships.

### ***Career/Business***

The work we do comprises a large amount of our time each day and forms such a significant part of our identity that it is not uncommon to hear someone describe themselves as their job. "I am a taxi driver. I am a housewife." Therefore job satisfaction is important to overall happiness.

Job satisfaction comes from a good fit between the person's abilities and interests and the challenges that the work provides. Then there is the value of the work to the greater community that provides a further source of happiness. This may even compensate for a poor fit to the job if the person highly values the social contribution of the work. The influence that work projects have on happiness was found in an Australian study to be based on their beneficial impact and their ability to enable self-expression, demonstrate social significance, and reflect confidence.

Being happy facilitates action and creative problem solving and in such ways happiness may open more opportunities for career advancement. However, there are ambiguous findings on the notion that happy workers are more productive due to the variety of ways that happiness is operationalised.'

### ***Gross National Happiness***

In developing an understanding of the notion of Gross National Happiness I began with a framework of economic measures.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the sum of all output produced by the economic activity within a country. The measure of an individual's economic output is an average dependent on the GDP and the size of the population.

Gross National Product (GNP) is GDP plus net income from abroad such as rent and profits.

Gross Domestic Happiness (GDH) could be the sum of all the happiness of the people within a country. It could be argued that this

measure should exclude the days spent out of the country by any citizen. On those days their happiness is produced outside the country.

The individual measure of happiness would be an average of the GDH per capita.

Gross National Happiness (GNH) then is GDH plus perhaps any of the following:

- happiness generated abroad and brought into the country, by locals or foreigners
- any change in happiness levels of visitors during their visit to Bhutan
  - o Is the visitor happier when leaving than when arriving? Could be due to looking forward to going home or perhaps glad that the visit is over.
  - o If less happy when leaving than arriving may be sad to be leaving.
- levels of happiness of visitors while they are in Bhutan
  - o a short questionnaire could be distributed at the airport on arrival and collected on departure
  - o asks for a daily rating of happiness to be recorded at the end of each day
  - o asks whether person feels generally happier during their visit to Bhutan than before they arrived
  - o asks what the person might attribute any change in their happiness to.
  - o Happiness items could be embedded within feedback questions regarding the various domains of satisfaction. This would be useful feedback for the government services in terms of providing satisfactory services to the visitors,

This is obviously more complex and difficult to quantify with the exactness that economic measures can use. However there is merit in pursuing the notion of GNH being more than simply an average of the sum of individual happinesses. Including visitors happiness would demonstrate a policy commitment to valuing and enhancing the enjoyment visitors experience.

For the purposes of describing the following model of national happiness I will define GNH as an average of individual measures of happiness within the citizens of the country.

## **Model**

The matrix style model of the relationship between life domains, personal happiness and GNH is a three dimensional model similar to an axel with two wheels.

### ***The Individual***

I shall begin in the centre of one wheel, the wheel of individual experience. The centre is conceptually the individual, the person who experiences life and experiences happiness.

Here is the experience of happiness, at the individual level. It is related to the happiness of those around us, ie a sense of a collective happiness, that is somewhat more than the sum of the individuals if they were alone; but any extra happiness is experienced by the individuals in the group.

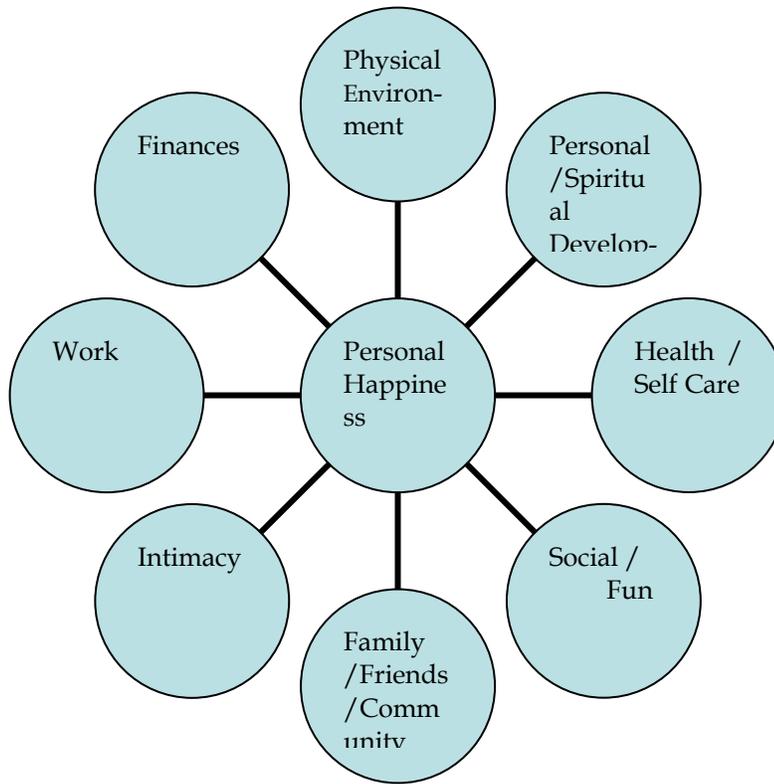
This individual happiness is the commodity to be quantified into a measure of GNH. Because it is an experiential commodity, self-reports have been regularly used although data is accumulating on physiological evidence of emotional experience. Neuroscience has demonstrated that the left prefrontal lobes of experienced Buddhist practitioners are active persistently, not just during meditation, which indicates positive emotions and good mood.

The content or the substance of happiness remains a sublime mystery but the experience of it is distinctly quantifiable. The quantity of happiness is the relative measure of a level. One experiences a certain level of happiness that may increase and decrease. The level is a position nominated in relation to greater or less amounts of happiness which the person has previously experienced, or which they believe would be possible for them to experience.

The happiness continuum offers the possibility of a rather limitless range of happiness. The notions of enlightenment and bliss suggest that greater levels of happiness are possible. We assume that the level of happiness is related to the experiences of one's life. However is it a measure of enlightenment that one's happiness can be independent of life's dramas? Or can there be no true happiness while other beings are suffering?

### ***Average Satisfaction in the Various Life Domains.***

If the centre of the wheel analogy is the individual's experience of happiness, then the tyre if you like is the wheel of life. Sub-divide the tyre into 8 distinct sections which become the 8 Life Domains. The spokes connecting the individual to each domain are the avenues through which the individual interacts with life.

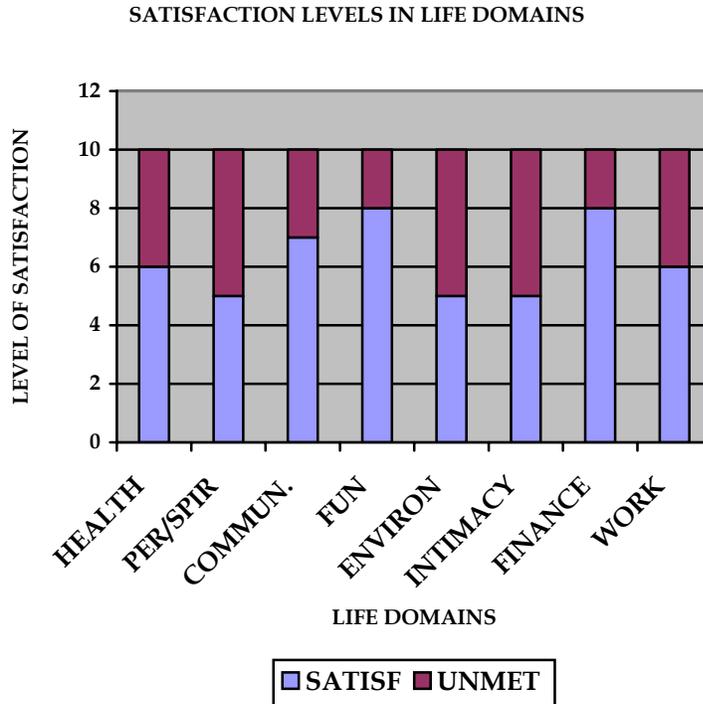


These avenues are shaped and coloured by individual and social values, personality factors, life abilities, and psychological variables. Through this individual filter one evaluates how satisfied they are with each area of their life. The satisfaction derived from each sector pools together in the individual's assessment of over-all-level-of-happiness.

The following graph demonstrates how the levels of satisfaction with each domain produce a somewhat individual profile of the content of personal satisfaction.

From such individual ratings an average is deduced which becomes the person's overall happiness score, in this example it would be a score of 6.25 or 62.5%.

This aspect of the model, the relationship of individual happiness to satisfaction with life domains, is not new. It is simply a visualisation of the relationship.



***The 3<sup>rd</sup> Dimension.***

Now overlay this wheel of the individual with a parallel wheel symbolising the level of the nation, here the Kingdom of Bhutan. It might be useful to consider what role other levels such as family, village / town, district, and global might play in supporting individual happiness. However I will just explore the wheel at the level of the Nation.

In the centre is the measure of national happiness (GNH) as previously defined. It arises from the input of individual happiness. The reverse is also possible. Community happiness at the national level can influence individual happiness. This relationship of individual happiness and national happiness is the central axis of the model.

If the core philosophy of the nation is promoting GNH then this will drive the policies of the government. The government, as the structure and people who manage the running of the country, are the national representatives who have a direct input into the well-being of the citizens. They are the conduit through which policy direction can become manifested into the services provided by government departments. The government then are the spokes of the national wheel.

The remaining link in this simplistic model is the intra-domain connection between individual and national levels. Visualise that each Life Domain is connected to each level via some type of cylindrical gauge. The level is the measure of individual satisfaction in that domain. However both the individual and the government have an input into that domain.

This describes the theoretical pathway of how the policies and services of the government can contribute to the satisfaction and happiness of its citizens and hence endeavour to increase Gross National Happiness.

### ***Implications Of The Model***

There are several courses for increasing satisfaction. Needs and expectations produce some sort of goal that one aspires to reach. The setting of the goal defines the benchmark of achieving satisfaction. The process of optimal goal setting can be learned. Make the goal realistic, achievable after some effort, action oriented, related to a process rather than an outcome, a step on the pathway to a bigger goal and specific enough that you will recognise when you have achieved the goal. As needs are met and goals reached it is possible to set further goals. This allows ongoing and renewable satisfaction.

It is also possible to reframe the satisfaction so that it is not dependent on the reaching of the goal but instead on the experience of the journey it took to get there. Enjoying the journey and being absorbed in the flow of the process is a practice of mindfulness, keeping the consciousness engaged in the present rather than distracted by the wanderings of the mind.

Mindfulness-based stress reduction programmes are gaining popularity in Canada. The five-step process used is: 1. find a suitable place; 2. close eyes and be mindful of the breath; 3. mentally scan your body for tension and release it while exhaling; 4. follow the flow of your thoughts and 5. acknowledge your emotions. Such programs have been demonstrated to ease medical conditions including preventing depression relapse, pain management, psoriasis, anxiety and other ailments exacerbated by stress.

Satisfaction can be lost when sold on the idea of requiring more consumer goods. The benchmark can be placed unreasonably high and the person may have to adapt to not acquiring the desired object. It may be more satisfying to not know about something than to desire something unattainable.

Satisfaction with personal efficacy is derived most from domains in which the self is the locus of control and the locus of causality. Consideration of the perceived locus of control one has in a particular domain may reveal a source of dissatisfaction. This could be addressed exploring the dynamics of control and whether it is appropriate or possible to become more empowered in that domain.

Life ability is defined as a person's psychological capital. It is described as:

- a. absence of functional defects: presupposes normal level of functioning with the body and mind working as designed.
- b. excellence of function, positive health: reality control, emotional intelligence, autonomy, creativity, innersynergy of traits & strivings.
- c. self-actualisation: acquiring new skills for living as one moves through life. Able to realise one's potential at one's current level of development.
- d. art of living: associated with refined tastes and an ability to enjoy life in an original style.

Therefore one would first look for any functional defects that may be impacting negatively in a life domain, such as a physical or mental health problem. Any defect would need treatment to return as close as possible to normal or management to create a closer fit between the situation and the person's capability.

There needs to be a fit between living conditions and life ability. The context that we work, live and love in needs to fit the personal resources that we bring to the arena. Insecure and slow people may need regulated economy in which to work and energetic individualists may need a competitive free market society to be happy. If there is a disparity there will be dissatisfaction.

When there is a gap between our abilities and what is required for the situation it is possible to specify what skills are lacking and learn them. These could be practical skills such as typing or social skills such as communication.

Secondly, to develop excellence of functioning and positive mental and physical health, one can apply psychological techniques. Improving our psychological functioning is the groundwork of the positive psychology movement. Training in psychological skills such as stress management, goal setting, time management and discipline may also help achieve the desired level of satisfaction.

Having addressed these levels of life-ability further effort to become more self-actualised and further refine one's life should bring about a growing enjoyment of life.

We can learn from others about how to overcome adversity. Burns collated a list of psychological strategies to master adversity:

- a. Be optimistic rather than pessimistic 'Lucky it wasn't me rather than it could have been me'
- b. Specify the positive aspects of the situation
- c. Stay flexible and accept that bad things happen in life and we go on.

- d. Be other centred: motivated to overcome adversity for the sake of others (eg: family or company)
- e. Be hopeful and future oriented, not holding onto the past or stuck in a problematic present

Seligman recommends identifying your signature strengths and using them every day in the main realms of your life to bring abundant gratification and authentic happiness. The 24 strengths are categorised under wisdom and knowledge and include virtues and characteristics such as courage, humanity and love, justice, temperance and transcendence

By developing these strengths and applying them in the domains of life that are unsatisfying Seligman proposes that we can do something about increasing our own happiness. Just this simple realisation of having some sort of control over our own happiness in turn generates more happiness. This demonstrates the complex matrix of relationships between the many components of happiness.

***Work on the Self; Other Psychological Variables Contributing to Personal Happiness.***

In Chinese folk psychology happiness can be achieved with the wisdoms of discovery, contentment and gratitude, giving and self-cultivation. By discovering the nature of our own happiness we can learn how to cultivate it. Promoting happiness is in itself a therapy and antidote to treat afflictive emotions. Happiness also gives emotional immunity to protect against afflictive emotions.

One of the most widespread disorders these days is depression. Depression leads to suicide as well as other unhealthy behaviours such as smoking, high alcohol consumption and physical inactivity. If depression is at the opposite pole to happiness then treatment for depression should increase the happiness experienced by that person or at least reduce their unhappiness.

The four best practice treatments these days are medication, exercise, bibliotherapy and psychotherapy. Medications only serve to reduce unhappiness, at best to bring the person to a rather neutral affect. They can be useful in reducing depression but no more so than effective psychotherapy.

Exercise is very effective in lifting a depressed mood. The physiological effects of muscles moving, concrete body sensations, increased blood circulation to the brain and production of endorphins all contribute to feeling better. The context of the exercise can compound the benefits if there are opportunities to socialise and / or go into nature. Choosing an exercise that is appealing and enjoyable makes it easier to do the exercise.

Bibliotherapy is the use of therapeutic books for education and instruction. Learning to understand the nature of depression and some of

the things one can do to counter it empowers the person and brings the possibility of some hope. If there is no hope there is not motivation to change or do anything.

Psychotherapy is a counselling process, a talking therapy. In conversation with the therapist the client seeks to understand the dynamics of the problem and learn ways to resolve it. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is currently the most popular and demonstrably effective psychotherapy used in the West. It operates on the paradigm that the way we think about things is changeable and influences how we feel. 'Self-rated happy and unhappy people have been shown to differ systematically in the particular cognitive and motivational strategies they use.

In regards to happiness there are some myths of happiness that may be influencing our thoughts. Learning to have some input to our own happiness frees us from the passivity of believing in a genetic predisposition to happiness. We can be selective about what to believe.

Consider the effect of advertising which makes claims of happiness coming from a product or that you won't feel happy without the product. The entertainment industry thrives on idealised romance and unrealistic adventures. In fact seeking thrills leaves the rest of life rather dull by comparison.

Then there is the sense of agency we have with the things that go on in our lives. If we think that events, things or people 'make' us happy then our happiness is conditional on external factors. As external things are generally beyond our control we feel our emotions are at their mercy. We seek things that we think will make us happy but if we do get them we may not feel as good as we expected.

Psychotherapy provides a forum in which a person can consider the possibility of having more agency in their life, gain some experience of it and discuss the way it effects their experience of life.

When the psychologist's work is founded on an optimistic framework there is a presupposition of a positive outcome, communicated by questions that ask 'what' and 'how' rather than 'why'. The focus is on where a person is going rather than where they have been. Asking 'when' encourages a commitment to that goal.

Positive emotions have been linked to broadened scopes of attention, cognition, and action and enhanced physical, intellectual and social resources.

### ***Beliefs***

Optimism is a skill that can be learned and practiced. It activates the left pre-frontal cortex which corresponds to feeling in a good mood. Pessimism activates the right pre-frontal cortex. An optimistic assumption that a positive outcome is possible promotes happiness. Optimism provides an internal buffer to negative experience.

It is important to have some notion of the meaning of life and of some purpose to our own life. This may include a belief in God but it is not necessary to be religious to be happy.

### *Personality*

An examination of the importance of extraversion to the experience of happiness suggests that the personality trait of introversion-extroversion is an instrumental variable that mediates the ways individuals choose to achieve their own happiness. However extraversion is not always an essential correlate of happiness. Happy introverts do exist. But if the introversion is related to confidence and social skills it may be changed by building confidence and skills training enabling more extroverted behaviour. Then simply by acting extroverted one may increase their well-being.

In a reframing of the term 'neuroticism', emotional stability was found to be more strongly associated with happiness than extraversion and was the sole significant predictor of the happiness of younger people.

### *Perceived Freedom*

The perception of freedom is related to the notion of locus of control and sense of agency. It may be freedom at work, in expression or in life as a whole. This individualistic value is likely to be higher in Western capitalistic societies as it is a value that might conflict with a social value.

If there is a gap between perceived freedom and desired freedom dissatisfaction will arise. Perhaps cognitive therapy could firstly correct the perception if it is wrong. If their perception is accurate CBT could help the person accept they are not as free as they desire and start to explore options of reducing the gap.

Further psychological variables influencing happiness include tolerance towards groups as neighbours and trust in people and official institutions. Conscientiousness is an additional dimension of personality relevant to understanding subjective well-being. Gratitude is an effective trait important to happiness. Grateful thinking can improve mood.

Competitiveness can impact negatively on the happiness of a society, especially if the women are equally as competitive as the men.

At the community level there are dominant cultural narratives that can have deleterious effects on some individuals, for example socially marginalising people with mental illness, behavioural or substance abuse problems. Narrative theory, including description and critical analysis of community narratives and personal stories, can assist the community and its individuals to reconstruct narratives that are more respectful and helpful.

People responsive to their bodily, personal cues (versus situational cues) experience the mood of the emotional behaviour they consciously

practised and recalled more life events with an emotional content associated with their training.

Generosity has been linked with happiness. Six primary motivations have been identified for donations to charity: 'happiness for oneself, family and others; gratitude – a sense of blessing and a desire to give back; identification with others, such as church or school communities; "hyperagency", or the desire to make an impact on others' lives and the community; aspiration to care for or meet the needs of others directly; and ..the recognition of one's own fortune and empathy for other's misfortune."

Breathing patterns have been differentiated among joy, anger, fear and sadness and used to manipulate emotional experience by modifying the breathing to match the desired emotion.

Facial expressions reflect emotions and can be modulate emotion experience. Even the simple act of smiling can activate the experience of joy. Note that a genuine smile includes eye muscles not only the mouth.

In addition to psychotherapy Burns suggests twelve steps an individual can practice for enhancing happiness:

1. Be active
2. Be outgoing
3. Be flexible
4. Be passionate
5. Be compassionate
6. Be focussed
7. Be positive
8. Be aware of possibilities
9. Be a problem solver
10. Be a sensory seeker
11. Be connected
12. Behave in a happy manner

### ***Government Services Can Increase GNH***

In his introduction to *Well-Being: the Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*, Daniel Kahneman expresses the hope that hedonic science will prompt economics to shift its focus from 'those aspect of life that can be traded in the marketplace' to 'desirable goods such as love, mental challenge and (reduction of) stress'.

This model predicts that the government can increase GNH by delivering services that strive to increase consumer satisfaction. By exploring the ways in which Government Departments contribute services that influence the various life domains, avenues open up for influencing personal happiness.

An American study in the late 1970's examined the linkages between public policy and quality of life and found the strongest relationships were

between specific public services and specific domains of life quality that might logically be expected to have close association.

The Health Department could explore ways it could utilise the skills of Positive Psychology in the community. As there are currently no psychologists working in Bhutan there is a lot of scope for developing psychological services.

The Education Department for example provides education to children. This lies in the domain of Career. The delivery of that service will already have aims regarding quality and content of curriculum, school environments, teacher training and so forth. Happiness can be included as an aim of education. Providing a happy and supportive environment should be more satisfying for students and teachers alike. In Norway it was found that social support from teachers significantly enhanced students' happiness.

A recent book entitled 'Happiness and Education' proposes helping children understand what happiness is and how to develop it. Children can be allowed to retain happiness as a value rather than have it supplanted by economic values. The book also explores ways in which to make schools and classrooms happy places.

If the Education Department can increase the work satisfaction for the teachers and increase life abilities and school satisfaction for the students then it would be contributing to the development of GNH.

Each Department could review its provision of service to identify first whether the service is satisfactory and if not, then find ways to make it so. The Department could also work from the ground up and request feedback from people about ways of providing a more satisfactory service.

When implementing change it is useful to obtain some measure of its effectiveness in achieving the desired aim. Again consulting with the end-user about any significant change in their level of satisfaction would be the clearest measure of a successful outcome.

In the process of linking governmental services to the domains of life which comprise the source of individual satisfaction, it is not necessary to be too fixed about finding a match to the domains that I have described in this model. As previously mentioned these are somewhat arbitrary constructs that are simply a useful way to understand the complex picture of life. Different sub-divisions could be utilised in the same way to assist in identifying the multiple pathways linking government services to people's lives.

### **A Pilot Study Proposal to Test the Model in the Bhutanese Context**

In order to evaluate individual happiness in Bhutan a somewhat comprehensive pilot study is proposed, which incorporates measuring individual happiness, collecting individual data on a list of correlates of happiness and seeking feedback about what brings them happiness.

There are geographical and cultural considerations for assessing happiness in the Bhutanese context so that the data will be nationally representative and useful in cross-cultural studies. Access to subjects is of practical relevance with many people living in remote areas. This may also influence a willingness to participate if it requires people to travel for an assessment. Variations in education and literacy may influence response capability and an appreciation of the value of such research.

Although English is widely spoken it would be unrepresentative to only assess Bhutanese people who speak English. A translation of any survey would be required as well as translations back into English for any open-ended questions. As well as Dzongkha other dialects may require translations. The subtleties of emotional concepts may not be directly translatable and could possibly be unfamiliar to Bhutanese people.

The application of the Life Domains used in this model may be inappropriate in Bhutanese society. Exploration and definition of appropriate domain constructs would be most useful. Even the dynamics of the contribution of domain satisfaction to overall satisfaction may be surprisingly different than expected. For example, job satisfaction has been shown to contribute to global satisfaction more for Euro-Americans than for Asian-Americans or African-Americans.

The research implications of the integration of Buddhist philosophy into the Bhutanese psyche is worth considering. Buddhist values are likely to dominate personal values as well as provide meaning to life for most people. The large proportion of people living in monasteries may need considering as a special sub-population that may have distinctive features in relation to their experience of happiness.

There is also the issue if the inclusion of non-Buddhist immigrants into the figures of GNH. This presents a rather political dilemma of whether and how to include refugees and other people who's right to live in Bhutan is under question.

I propose a pilot study to test some of these concerns and begin to understand the nature of happiness as experienced by the Bhutanese.

### ***Sample Selection***

A sample of English speaking Bhutanese with some degree of education would conveniently avoid most of the above mentioned difficulties of language. Language issues could be explored before expanding the survey to a national sample.

Subjects need to be able to make a cognitive judgement which integrates the sensory, cognitive and affect modes of appreciation. Cognitive appraisals are based on aspirations, expectations and values which require data collection. These are then judged as to how favourable they are, does on like or dislike something. So the subjects would need to be

of a minimum age of say 15 years old as well not have cognitive impairments.

The sample needs to be large enough to cover the ranges of correlates measured to be considered a reasonable cross-section of society. An initial sample size of 100 would be adequate for a pilot study.

The subjects would include both males and females, of ages 15 to elderly, who work in a wide range of occupations and live in families or communities of all descriptions, with a variety of health issues and a mixture of income levels.

### ***Survey Selection***

There are four scales currently in use to measure individual happiness: the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS), the Subjective Happiness Scale (83), the Oxford Happiness Inventory (84) and the Bradburn's Affect Balance Scale.

If resources allowed the use of all four scales in the pilot study, a comparison of the practicalities of survey administration could be made as well as gaining a more comprehensive understanding of each individual's happiness. This would in turn provide some insight into the nature of Bhutanese happiness.

### ***Survey Method***

Along with the administration of the happiness surveys, data could also be collected on some of the correlates of happiness. These would include age, gender, years of education, family income, employment, socio-economic status, marital situation, number of children in household, memberships, political concern, religiousness, self-estimate of health, perceived fate control and tolerance.

Some open ended questions could be presented either by interview or questionnaire to capture information that may be overlooked by the surveys. Questions such as "What brings you happiness?", "How important is happiness to you?", "What activities do you enjoy?" could be generated. More specific questions could target on suggestions to improve satisfaction with government services.

### ***Conclusion***

In the current global climate, the peaceful and seemingly happy lives of the Bhutanese people are endangered by the increasing pressures of Westernisation. An exploration of the nature of happiness in Bhutan is of benefit to the global community as it allows us to learn more about traditional human happiness. The people and government of Bhutan can also learn how to preserve the qualities of life that give rise to personal happiness and to direct government services to increase GNH.

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