

“It is hard to claim that pyramid-shaped tea-bags (developed at great expense over four years) have added much to the sum of human happiness”yet....”without the urge for material improvement people would still be wearing woollen underwear and holidaying in Bognor”. (The Economist, Jan 07)

At the start of this year, the highly respected “The Economist” magazine led with the cover story “Happiness and how to measure it”. Wellbeing, happiness, satisfaction are receiving serious attention in all disciplines of life and work, including policy makers, economists, think tanks and politicians who are raising it to national and international levels.

Tony Blair established the Whitehall Wellbeing Working Group, a committee of civil servants, which has been charged with finding out how ministers can make citizens more cheerful. The report was commissioned by the environment department, which is leading the Whitehall effort. It consists of a review of research carried out around the world into the factors influencing happiness and how governments can affect it.

(http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/newspapers/sunday_times/britain/article1290324.ece)

In his 20 July 2006 speech, the UK leader of the opposition, David Cameron, introduced the idea of measuring GWB – General Well-being: “We have to remember what makes people happy, as well as what makes stock markets rise. It’s time we focused not just on GDP, but on GWB — general wellbeing. We should be thinking not just what is good for putting money in people’s pockets but what is good for putting joy in people’s hearts. When politicians are looking at issues they should be saying to themselves ‘how are we going to try and make sure that we don’t just make people better off but we make people happier, we make communities more stable, we make society more cohesive.’”

General Wellbeing and Australian Public Policy

Dr Martin Seligman, the ‘father’ of Positive Psychology (about whom I have written in the past) is working with a member of the UK Whitehall Wellbeing Working Group. Here in Australia, Marty will be meeting later this week with a select group of high-ranking executives in the Australian Public Service to discuss this General Wellbeing.

Children: Wellbeing and Education

In early 2008, Marty, along with his team of leading expert colleagues, will work with teachers at Geelong Grammar School, to shape its curriculum around the principles of Positive Psychology. “As a school, we would like to know how to make all students more resilient, how to turn depressing thoughts into positive ones. When we adopt a positive-psychology approach, it will be seen and practiced in all that we do.” (Charles Scudamore, head of the project at Geelong Grammar, quoted in the New York Times, 7 January, 2007). This is the first Australian school to be working with leading positive psychologists in this way, and is occurring in two similar schools in the UK and USA.

The interest and action is happening in other ways and in other places. For example, in the UK, Jennifer Fox Eades, an education consultant (and fellow colleague in the International Positive Workplace Alliance), is having great success working with schools to bring positive psychology to the teachers and children. See Jenny’s wonderful website: www.celebratingstrengths.com.

Locally in Australia, Jan Elsner (also a specialist in the application of positive psychology), tells a recent story about her son Elliott's experience with the Ceres Community Environment Park: "Elliott's private co-ed school class (aged 9-11) went to Ceres, an environmental education centre. The class completed a questionnaire, asking them to select options regarding their future: how many children you want, immigration policy options, where do you want to live, how big a house, type and number of cars, household possessions etc. Only Elliott and one other boy scored in the 'sustainable future' range. All the other 24 kids scored very low on a viable future. The most 'popular' kids scored lowest wanting the most material possessions and least green options.....yet.....when asked if they were happy with the future their choices created, e.g. loads of possessions, only four of the 26 kids thought they would be happy. Despite saying they wanted all these things, 22 kids thought they would *not be happy*...in 2030. What is going on that a 10 year old can see they are going to replicate their parents' material consumption but that it's not going to give them happiness? Elliott could see the connection, not all the other children could."

Unicef Report Card on Child Wellbeing

Released this month (February 2007) Unicef reported "there is no strong or consistent relationship between per capita GDP and child well-being". The Czech Republic, for example, achieves a higher overall rank for child well-being than several much wealthier European countries. The US and UK ranked bottom of the list at 20 and 21 respectively. Australia was not included in this overall ranking but was assessed along individual categories. See: <http://www.unicef.org.au/mediaCentre-Detail.asp?ReleaseID=721>

Child Wellbeing - Organisations and their influence

Most adults, in one way or another, impact the wellbeing of children e.g. as a parent, teacher, role model. This is where **BISI Australia** has an important role to play. BISI Australia (Business Initiating Social Impact) is a not for profit corporate membership company. It helps companies with family friendly policies by delivering information, research, training and workshops in the workplace on parenting. At the heart of it all is helping kids have a better life by helping their parents juggle family and work responsibilities. In turn, organisations benefit through reduced stress and increased productivity at work. Longer term, BISI "believes family-friendly policies will assist in retaining and attracting quality employees. Hence we are also very interested in how to help promote a positive, healthy culture at work – it has a direct impact on kids: better parents means better children" (my dear friend, Judyth Wiley, CEO, BISI Australia). I encourage you to contact Judyth at BISI to explore how your organisation can benefit from being involved. For more see: <http://www.bisiaustralia.com.au/>.

"Our politicians, economists and business people have yet to learn that what we need in our lives is not more money, but more balance."
Ross Gittins, Economics Editor, The Age and The Sydney Morning Herald, 13 July 2005

"The important question is not whether parents to go work but the time they come home and the state in which they come home."
Adele Horin, Sydney Morning Herald, 11 Nov 2006

This article...

...aims to provide you and your teams with information for your professional and personal development. Topics are based on areas of interest raised by clients and colleagues, with material drawn from journals, books, articles and shared experiences.

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