



Student Wellbeing



Dr Aaron Jarden
Wednesday 21st February 2018



aaron.jarden@sahmri.com

The Next 60 Minutes

All about me

A little bit about wellbeing

Some fun stuff

10 mins of Q&A

Applause

My Short Academic Story

Hated school

- Cards.
- Sports.

No idea what I wanted to study

- But I did know I wanted to leave home and explore.

**Philosophy → Social Psychology → IT → Clinical Psychology →
Positive Psychology → Academic → Entrepreneurship**

20 years and 6 universities later:

- Bachelors of Social Sciences with a double major in Psychology and Philosophy, Bachelors of Social Sciences with honours in philosophy, Graduate Diploma of Applied Ethics, Bachelor of Arts with honours in psychology, Masters of Arts in psychology, Diploma in Clinical Psychology, PhD in psychology, Post-Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching.

What are the three most important things to first year students?

- Getting boozed.
- Having sex.
- Finding a park.

But, students as a group have considerably lower wellbeing than the average public – for a number of reasons:

- Financial pressures.
- Social pressures.
- New experiences and learning curves.
- Stress.
- Lack of social supports.

A Little Bit About Wellbeing

Today is an introduction and taster session...

- Wellbeing science + positive psychological interventions
- Know stuff + do stuff (knowledge + experience)

Positive Assessment

Let's do a “back of the napkin” assessment.

- How happy are you right now in life?

What would you pay / give / do / sacrifice /
commit to in order to be, on average, one
point happier?

- 10 - Extremely happy
- 9 - Very happy
- 8 - Pretty happy
- 7 - Mildly happy
- 6 - Slightly happy
- 5 - Neutral
- 4 - Slightly unhappy
- 3 - Mildly unhappy
- 2 - Pretty unhappy
- 1 - Very unhappy
- 0 - Extremely unhappy

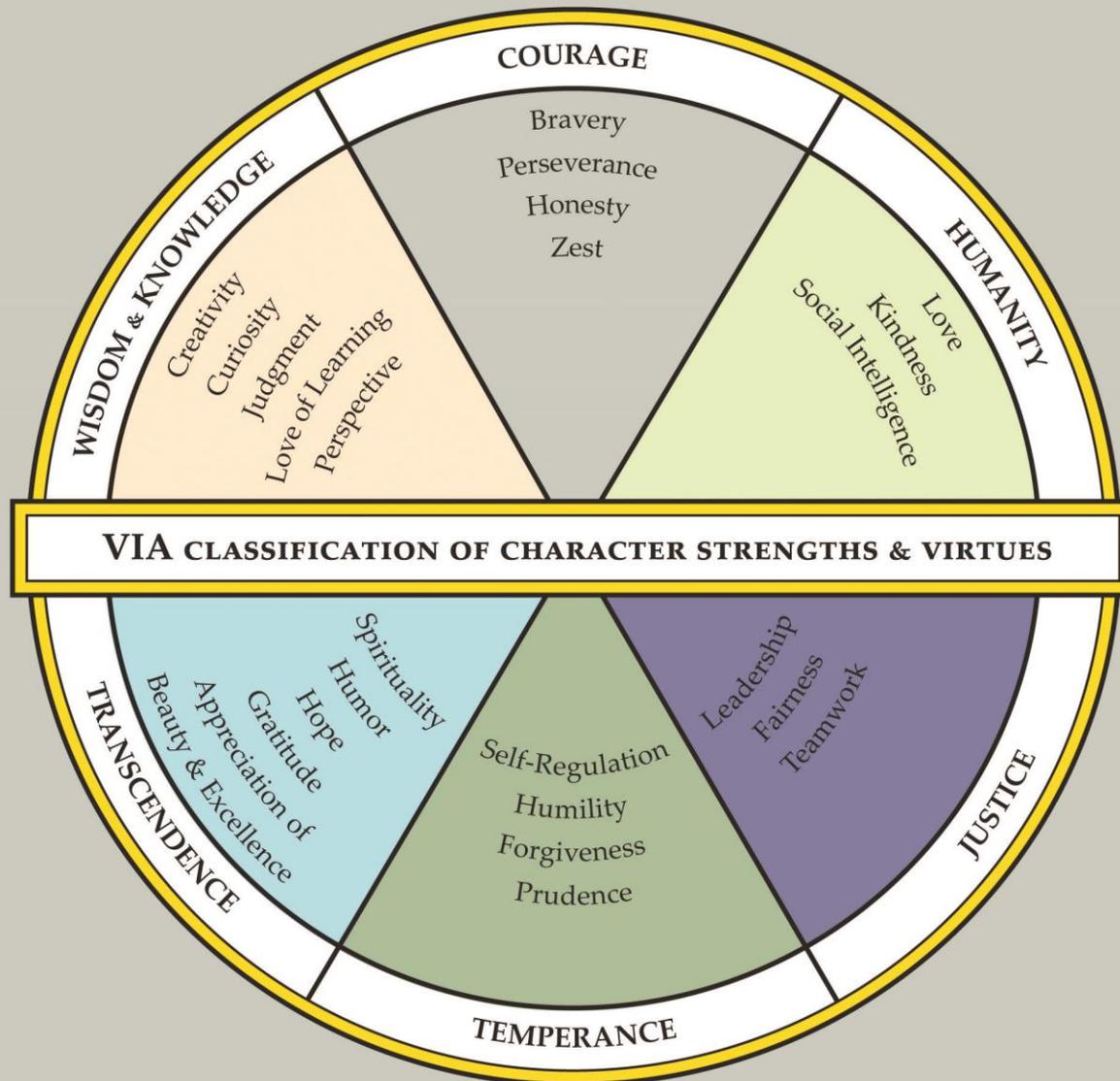
Positive Introductions

- **Step 1:** Pair up.
- **Step 2:** In 2 minutes (1 minute each), tell a story – a thoughtful narrative with a beginning, middle and end – that illustrates when you are at your best.
- **Note:** Swap when you hear the bell the first time after 1 minute, stop completely when you hear the bell the second time after 2 minutes.

Positive Introductions

Key point: Wield your strengths – they are paths to engagement and enjoyment.

<http://www.viacharacter.org>



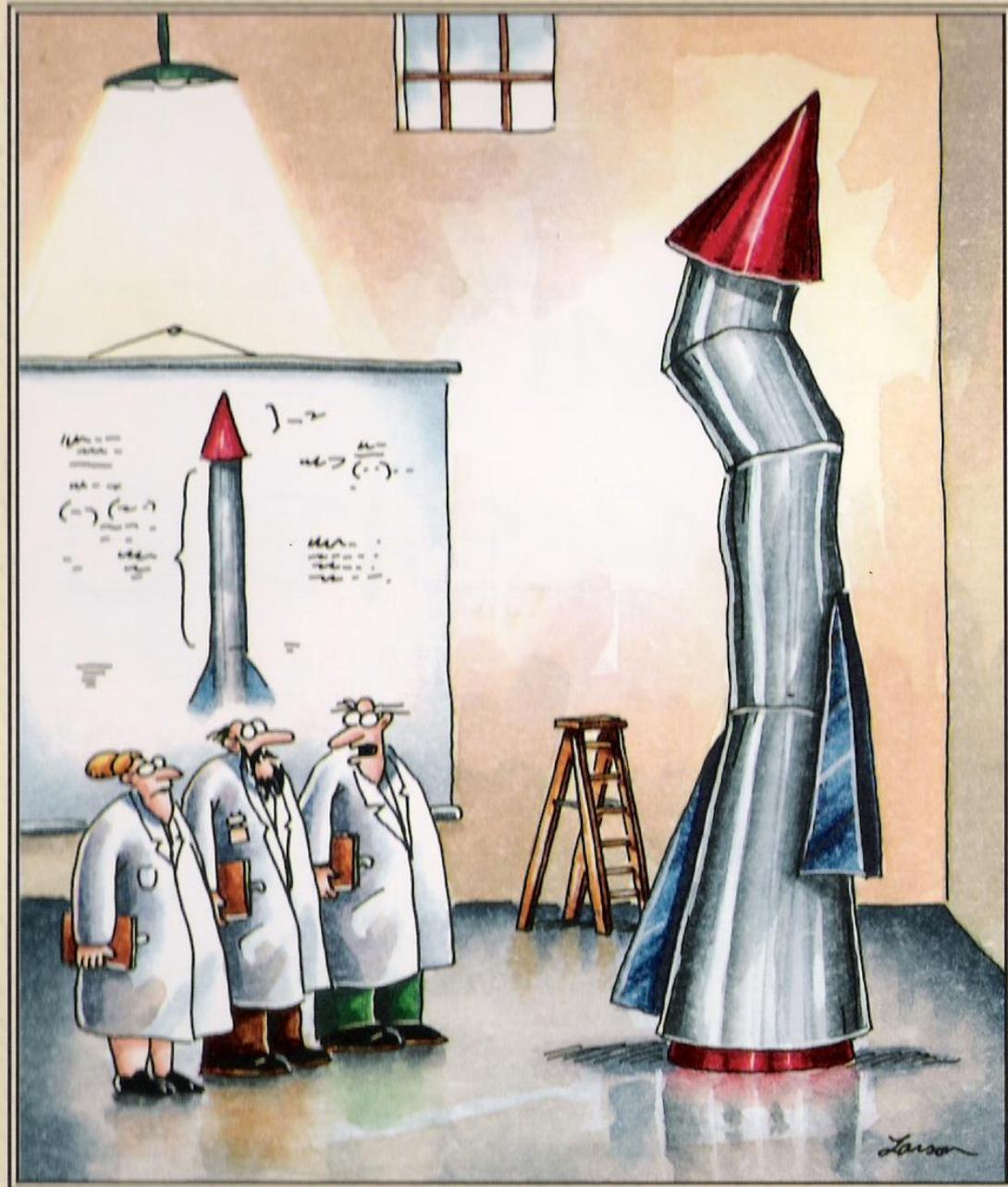
No Expert

I'm no expert on your wellbeing

&

“happiness is not a spectator sport” (Chris Peterson).

- Hard work required.
- One healthy meal or one gym session will not impact much.



“It’s time we face reality, my friends. ...
We’re not exactly rocket scientists.”

Positive psychology (PP) & wellbeing science

- Positive psychology is a branch of psychology that conducts scientific inquiry into the factors that help individuals, communities and organisations thrive by building on their strengths and virtues.
- Positive psychology is the study of topics as diverse as happiness, optimism, hope, flow, meaning, subjective wellbeing and personal growth.
- Positive psychology aims to expand psychology from its focus on repairing the negatives in life to also promoting the positives in life.

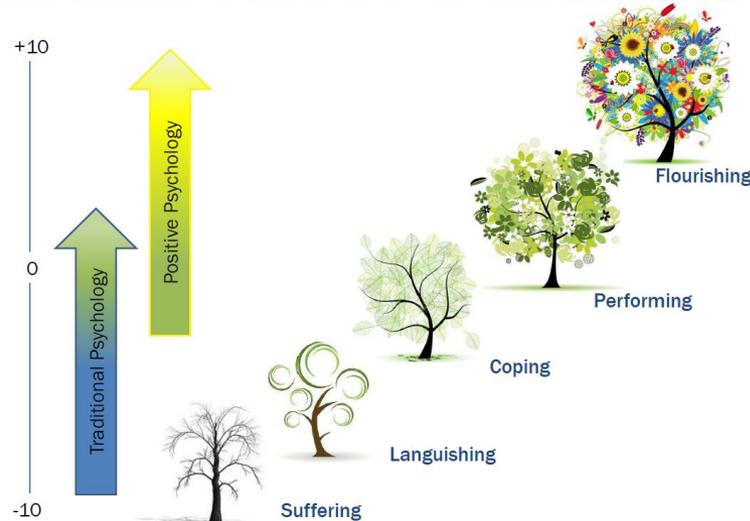
What is optimal human functioning?



The Cheat Sheet

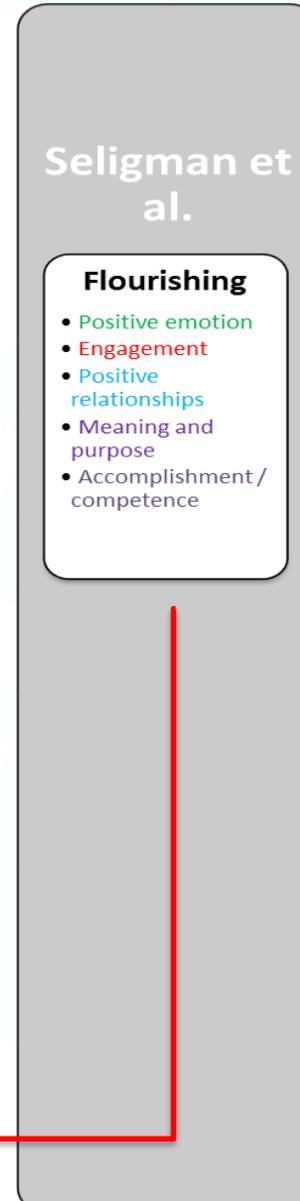
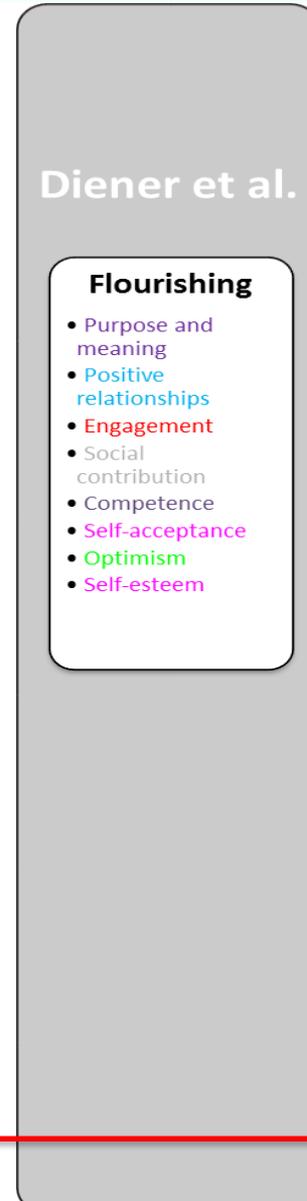
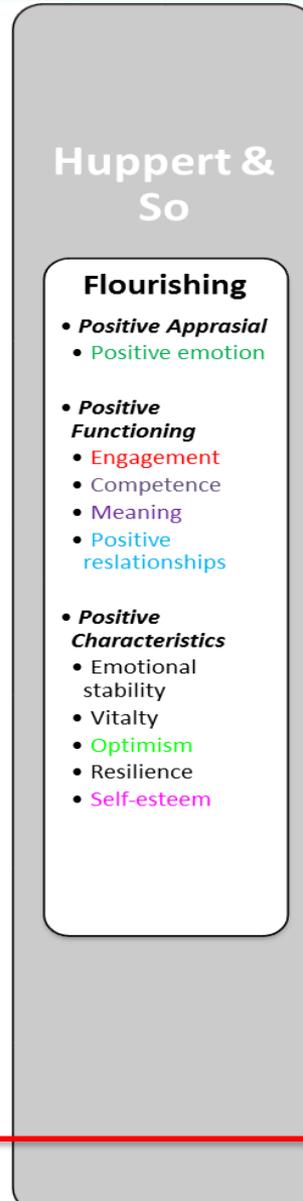
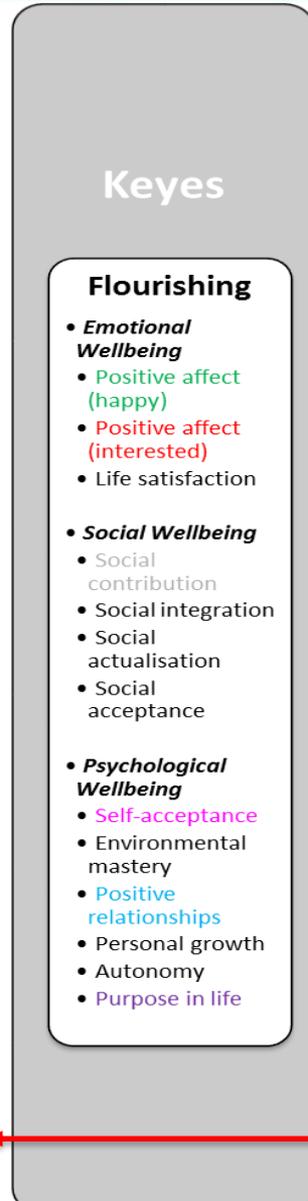
- The good life is best construed as a matrix that includes happiness, occasional sadness, a sense of purpose, playfulness, and psychological flexibility, as well as autonomy, mastery, and belonging/connection.
- For me it's not just about learning to be more positive – it's about using scientifically-informed tools and strategies to make my thinking more flexible, accurate, clear, and expansive. This thinking (I hope) leads to happiness and more healthy behaviours.

The Wellbeing Continuum



What Is Wellbeing

- Different definitions and theories of wellbeing and flourishing.
- SWB = Satisfaction with life + high positive affect + low negative affect



Ways To Wellbeing

- **Step 1:** Pair up with a partner, get a pen ready, as well as a blank A4 page...
- **Step 2:** Raise a hand in the air when you're ready...
- **Step 3:** Without looking down at your blank page, and ONLY looking at your partner's face, you have 1 minute to draw a portrait of your partner, starting on the bell!
- **Step 4:** Sign your name, date it, and swap pictures with your partner...

Five Ways To Wellbeing



Five ways to wellbeing

Connect, be active, take notice, keep learning, give

- **Connect** – Make connections with friends, family, colleagues and neighbours. When you build these connections they help enrich your life with new experiences and opportunities.
- **Be Active** – Get moving. Walk, skip, run, dance – move your muscles. Exercise not only makes you feel good, it keeps you healthy. Pick a physical activity that you enjoy.
- **Take Notice** – Be mindful. Be curious. Like a child, see the wonder and beauty of the world. Notice the things around you – the weather, the landscape, the mood and feelings of the people around you. In noticing you learn to appreciate the things that matter.
- **Keep Learning** – We never stop learning. Keep trying something new – a new course you've been wanting to do or a more challenging task at work. Challenges keep us on our toes and increase our confidence and excitement in our day.
- **Give** – Be generous with your time, your knowledge and your talents, giving to friends, family and even strangers. Be thankful, smile at people, and volunteer. Sharing to a wider audience gives you a greater reward than just doing things for yourself.

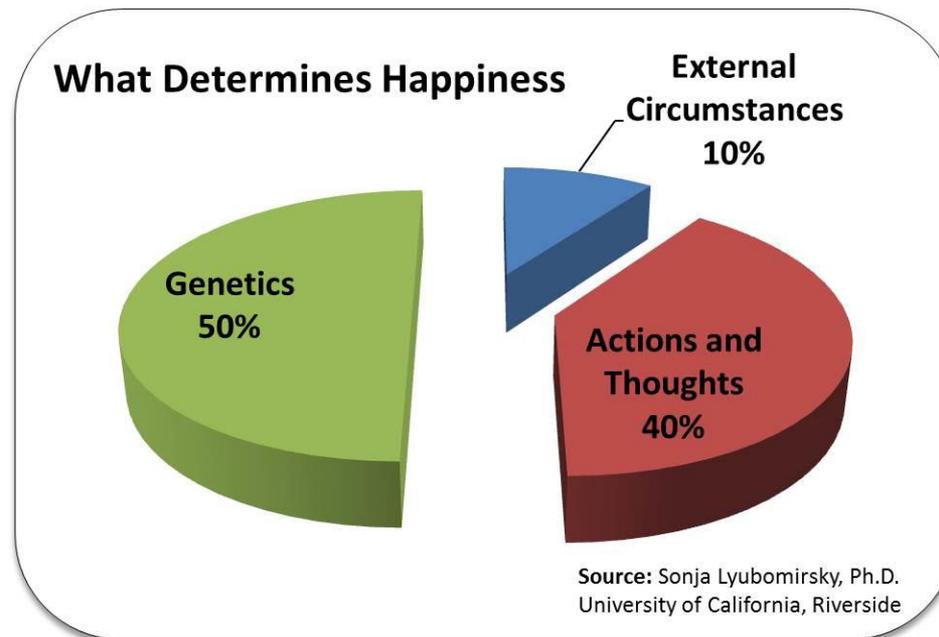
Ways To Wellbeing



Happiness Control

Is happiness within your control?

- Yes genetics play a big role, but turns out our external circumstances don't necessarily have to have a big hold on our wellbeing.
- Wellbeing is a CHOICE: daily practices in life have a big impact on wellbeing.



Four ways of responding, and “active constructive responding” has been shown to build solid, strong and lasting relationships the best:

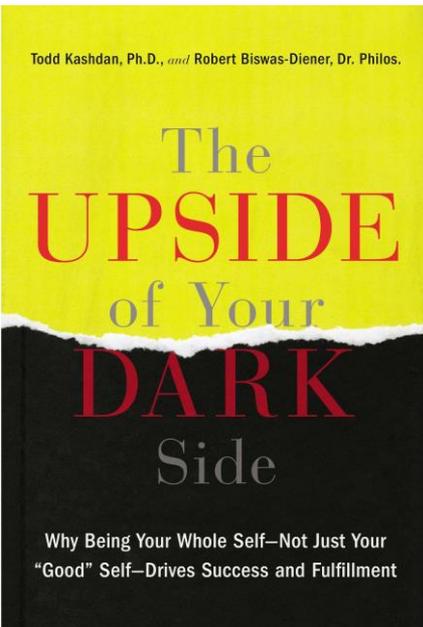
- **Active Constructive Response** involves expressing enthusiastic positive support = “That’s really great. Your wife will be pretty proud of you. I know how important that promotion was to you. We should go out and celebrate”. During such communication the person is maintaining eye contact and displaying positive emotion, such as laughing or smiling.
- **Active Destructive Response** involves expressing a derogatory or critical response = “That sounds like a lot of responsibility to take on. There will probably be more stress involved in the new position and potentially longer hours at the office”. The person is displaying negative emotions, such as frowning or anxiety.
- **Passive Constructive Response** involves showing benign disinterest = “That’s good news”. The person is displaying little nonverbal communication.
- **Passive Destructive Response** involves distancing or failing to respond = “What are we doing Friday afternoon?” The person does not acknowledge the good news, is not in eye contact, and may be turning away or leaving the room.

Using active constructive responding is a good way to convey understanding, validation and caring, and to increase the wellbeing of your existing friends, as well as to make new friends.

Discomfort

Embrace negative emotions – they are functional.

- Embrace discomfort – chances are the best days of your life to date included an element of discomfort.

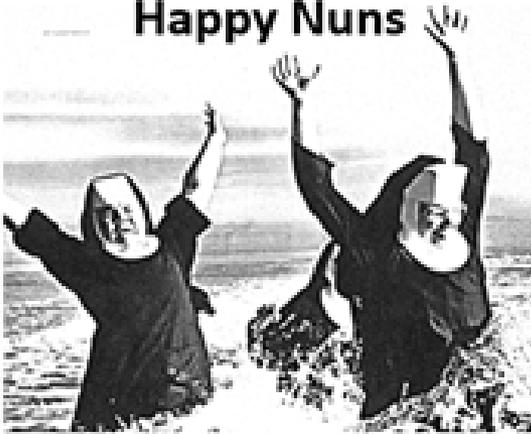


Longevity

Age 85

Age 94

Happy Nuns



90%

54%

Unhappy Nuns



34%

11%

*(The Nun Study: Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001
Positive emotional content, 180 nuns, mean age = 22 years)*

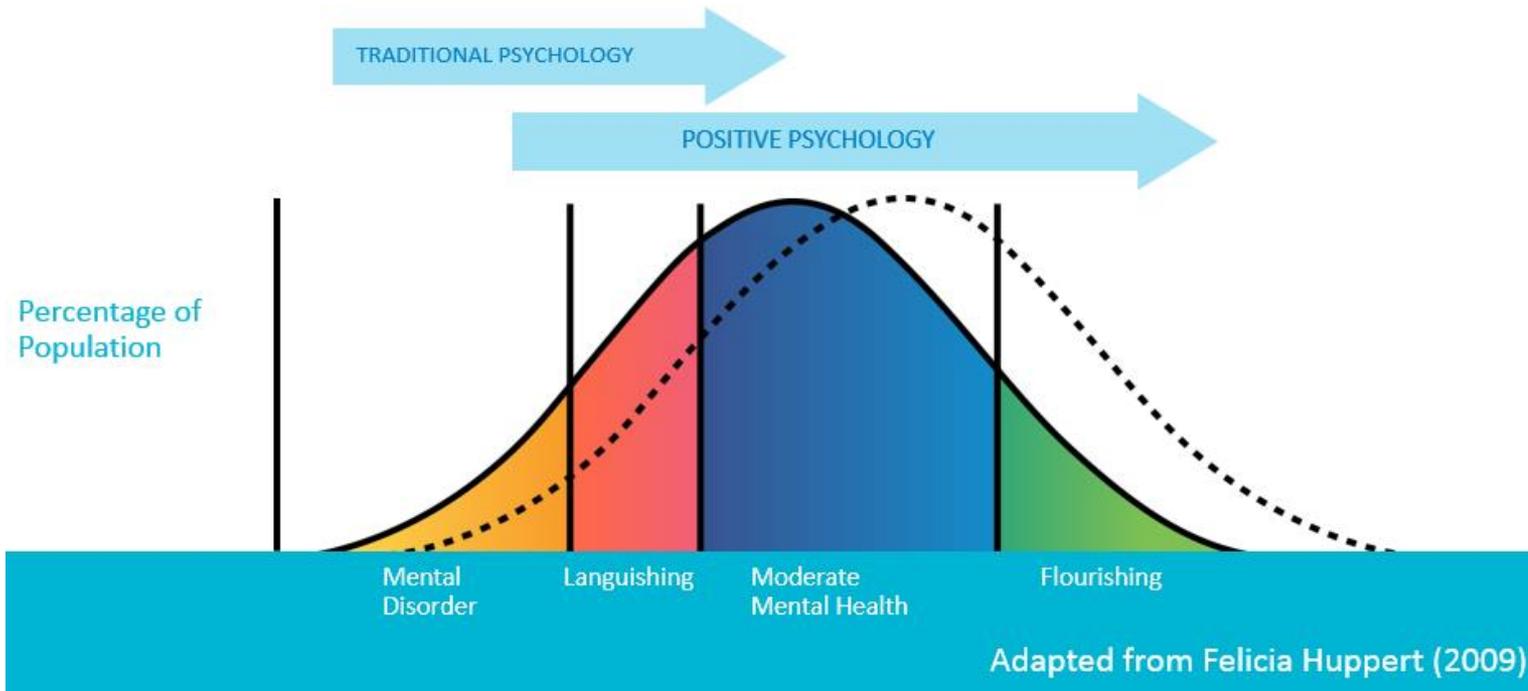
What I Do Now

Building a State of Wellbeing



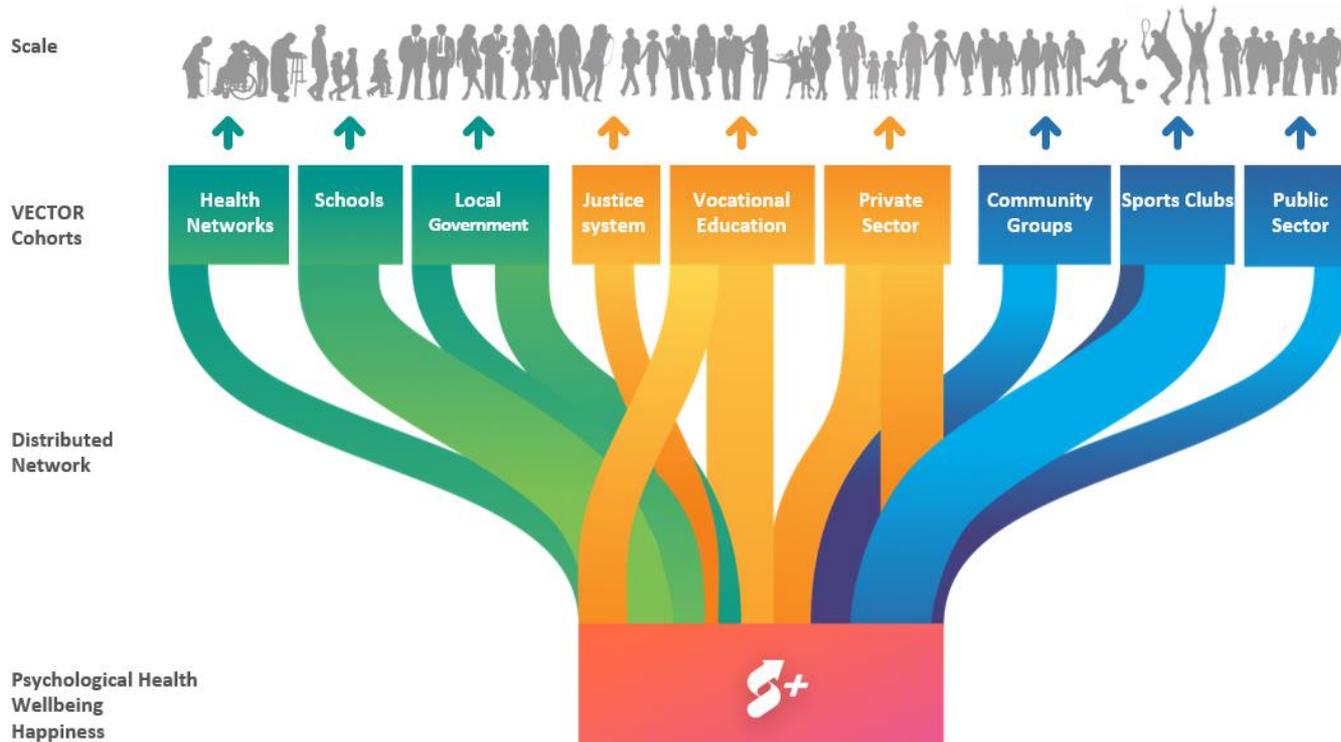
What I Do Now

“Wellbeing is measurable, teachable and learnable”



What I Do Now

A vector approach



What I Do Now

PERMA+

P
E
R
M
A

Positive emotion
Engagement
Relationships
Meaning
Accomplishment



Physical activity
Nutrition
Sleep
Optimism
.....

Iasiello, M., Bartholomaeus, J., Jarden, A., & Kelly, G. (2017). Measuring PERMA+ in South Australia, the State of Wellbeing: A comparison with national and international norms. *Journal of Positive Psychology & Wellbeing*

Dr Martin Seligman: Flourish (2012)



What I Do Now

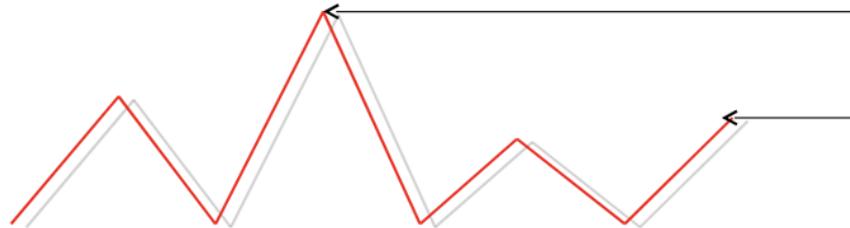
Building a State of Wellbeing



Peak-End Theory

Peak-end theory states that people's judgments of their overall experience (like of this 60 minute talk) is greatly influenced by the peak of their experience, and how it ends.

- It has to do with our memory of experiences...



A Wellbeing Overview

- Invest time and effort in **family** connections.
- We are social creatures so be enmeshed in a community of **friends** - deep and meaningful relationships.
- Know your personal **values** and live by them. Similarly, know your **purpose** and what derives meaning for you.
- Know your personal **strengths** and find ways to exercise them every day.
- Develop and **optimistic** thinking style.
- Invest your **money in experiences** rather than things.
- Be in work or study, and work or **study that you enjoy**.
- Be **grateful**.
- **Savour** the now regularly – rather than the past or future.
- **Slow down** and do less – perhaps meditate?
- Be **curious**.
- **Monitor** your wellbeing.
- Look after your **health** (the below 5 can make approximately 14 years difference to your life expectancy).
 - Eat real food – not too much, and mostly plants (LCHF).
 - Exercise regularly – and different types: aerobic, resistance, flexibility, balance.
 - Drink alcohol in moderation.
 - Don't smoke.
 - Get enough quality sleep.

Caveat: Genetics and upbringing also make a slight bit of difference, but since you can't do too much about those, don't worry about them...

Dr Aaron Jarden
aaron.jarden@sahmri.com



www.sahmri.com