Supercharging Positive Psychology
5th Australian Positive Psychology & Wellbeing Conference, Adelaide, Australia
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22nd September, 2016
My plan

• Touch on *where* we are now, and *where* positive psychology is going
• *How* we and positive psychology are going to get to where we and it aims to go – i.e., when, who, and how it will impact on global wellbeing
• 32 slides, 25 minutes, you do the math – *buckle up*...
My main point today

We need to focus more on what success looks like for positive psychology
Where are we now?

• We live in a world which has major issues with:
  • Increasing inequality (gender, racial, political, social, economic, etc)
  • Increasing complexity (work, health, pace of change, systems, etc)
  • Keeping the earth healthy (global warming, pollution, water, etc)
  • International cooperation (terrorism, war, democracy, etc)
  • Messing with evolution (species extinction, viruses, etc)
  • and bad fashion sense…
Where are we now?

• It’s not all doom and gloom - good stuff is also happening:
  • Remarkable declines in global poverty over the last 40 years...
  • Most people are happy...
  • 75% have phones, 83% can read and write...
  • Medical science is impressive...
  • Population is growing rather than declining...
  • There are 200 million people less dying of starvation compared to 25 years ago...
  • Season 6 of Game of Thrones was awesome, and more seasons coming!
What does the future look like?

• Some good stuff and some bad stuff – a little bit of both:
  • New technologies
  • New ways of working (e.g., flexibly, remotely, many jobs)
  • New ways of getting around (driverless cars, space travel)
  • New ways of getting along (electronic voting, transparency of crime)

• Are you excited about our future? I am...

• So, given what we can reasonably expect to happen in the future, what role can positive psychology play in shaping this future for the better?
Where is positive psychology going?

• What is the purpose of positive psychology?
  • Martin Seligman’s view
  • Chris Peterson’s view
  • Ask other key influential positive psychologists
  • Look at journal publications for trends and recommendations
  • Aaron’s 10 speculations...
Where is positive psychology going?

• **Seligman**: “Positive Psychology is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play.” 51 percent of the world could be flourishing by 2051

• **Chris Peterson** 2006 chapter “The future of positive psychology”:
  • Positive psychology will fuse into psychology
  • The negative will always be appealing
  • Clarity over hedonic set-points
  • The components of the good life exist in degrees
  • Better longitudinal studies needed
  • How well will interventions generalise and scale
  • Happy pills are only a matter of time
  • Social settings that will enable the good life
Where is positive psychology going?

• Ask other positive psychologists:
  • Book series: Positive Psychologists on Positive Psychology (Vol 1, 2, & 3)
  • 44 interview in total.

• Themes:
  • Importance of interdisciplinary collaboration
  • Training and enabling the young scientists
  • Some cool new topics (psychological flexibility, positive parenting, time perspective)
  • Some topics are getting too much attention (e.g., strengths) at the expense of others
  • Focusing on funding streams
  • Very high quality science needed
Where is positive psychology going?

• What do the publications focus on and recommend?
  • Positive emotions and the broaden-and-build theory
  • Positive psychology interventions
  • Strengths
  • All recommend more research needed
Where is positive psychology going?

• **My view** of the adventures in store for positive psychology. 10 New-ish areas of focus for the future:
  • Discomfort
  • Laziness
  • Play
  • Sex
  • Slowness
  • Nature
  • Wellbeing technology
  • The most disadvantaged (little samples)
  • Physical health and wellbeing
  • Positive parenting & failure
Where is positive psychology going?

• 10 not so new-ish areas will carry on:
  • Positive neuroscience
  • Positive education
  • Positive health
  • Military
  • Positive organisations
  • National accounts of wellbeing
  • Culture and wellbeing

• If could go beyond ten I would speculate at things like our attentional resources and their impact on wellbeing, the media and wellbeing, urban design and wellbeing, social detachment and wellbeing, positive therapy, sport and wellbeing, leisure centres (gyms, cafes, bars) and wellbeing, criminals and recidivism, retirement and wellbeing etc
How is it going to get there?

• 10 (mostly new-ish) ways positive psychology can thrive and have impact:
  • Simplifying messaging
  • Better studies - going beyond anecdotal evidence, and a focus on theory
  • Start a movement - beyond academia
  • More people know and learn (let’s teach it), more passion
  • Better dissemination: Media, public policy, organisations, schools
  • Tailor wellbeing interventions better: supercharge them, focus on the individual
  • More collaborative plan
  • Address the critics
  • Become entrepreneurial and embrace technology
  • Make some conceptual friends
How is it going to get there?

- Simplifying messaging
How is it going to get there?

- Better studies:
  - Complex research design – observational data, self-report, biological markers, behavioural data, time-series studies
  - Social network analysis
How is it going to get there?

• Start a movement – beyond academia
  • Cue 3 min video
How is it going to get there?

- More people know and learn, more passion:
  - Let’s teach it
How is it going to get there?

• Better dissemination: Social media, public policy, organisations, schools
  • International ‘Wellbeing and Public Policy’ conference series
How is it going to get there?

• Tailor wellbeing interventions better:
  • One-size-fits-all interventions
  • Authentic delivery
  • More experiential learning (activities)
  • More group based learning
  • Supportive environments for change
  • Better evaluation
  • Longer term impact (china)
  • Efficacy vs effectiveness
  • Selling false hope
  • Supercharge them
Geelong Breathing

• **Breath One.** Take a deep breath in through your nose and fill your lungs with as much air as possible. As you are doing so, notice your physical body and any points of pain or tension. As you breathe out slowly through your mouth, imagine you are pushing or releasing any tension away. Feel yourself sink into your chair or the floor if you are standing.

• **Breath Two.** Take a deep breath in through your nose and fill your lungs with as much air as possible. Now as you breathe out think about what you are grateful for right at this very moment. Not what you are grateful for that has happened in the past, or looking towards the future, but right in this very moment think about one thing you are grateful for and exhale slowly. Say to yourself "Right now I am grateful for..."

• **Breath Three.** Take a deep breath in through your nose and fill your lungs with as much air as possible. Now as you breathe out think about your frame of reference and what intentional state you want to be in right now. Do you intend to be kind? Do you intend to be open minded? Do you intend to be peaceful? Whatever intention you wish to have at this present moment, cultivate it when you exhale by saying to yourself "My intention right now is to be open minded and curious"

• Credit: This exercise was developed by Justin Robinson, Head of Positive Education at Geelong Grammer School in Australia
How is it going to get there?

• More collaborative plan:
  • We needed everyone in the room...
  • We need to understand how change happens - change management frameworks, and that change is always difficult, even if it is change for the better...
  • At the moment we have thrown things up in the air and don’t know where they are going to land...
How is it going to get there?

• Address the critics better, regardless of their bad fashion sense
How is it going to get there?

• Become entrepreneurial and embrace technology:
  • E.g., Noba Project
  • E.g., Plus Wellbeing
  • E.g., Happify
How is it going to get there?

• Make some conceptual friends:

• With the helping professions:
  • Slade, Oades, and Jarden have fostered a long-overdue conversation within this book – between clinicians focusing on recovery, and positive psychologists focusing on well-being. Although the first group has traditionally focused on returning clients to baseline, the other group has tried to leave the baseline behind, for new heights of well-being. The upshot of the conversation is this: *That the processes bringing recovery and the processes bringing well-being are much the same, though they have been focused on in isolation* – Ken Sheldon

• With coaching psychologists:
  • Motivation theories can help us understand how to get the best out of ourselves and others – one of the essential goals of positive psychology

• With the social psychologists:
  • Just because they are fun to hang out with...
How is it going to get there?

• And of course work on better fashion sense
How is it going to get there?

• So, to recap:
  • Simplify our messaging
  • Better studies - going beyond anecdotal evidence, and a focus on theory
  • Start a movement - beyond academia
  • More people (let’s teach it), more passion
  • Better dissemination: Media, public policy, organisations, schools
  • Tailor wellbeing interventions better: supercharge them, focus on the individual
  • More collaborative plan
  • Address the critics
  • Become entrepreneurial and embrace technology
  • Make some friends
My main point again

We need to focus more on what success looks like for positive psychology
How is it going to get there?

• I think we have gone from “good” to “not good” to “not good enough” to “maybe, not bad”. There is still a long way to go to “awesome”

• There are many new areas of focus (the body, comfort addiction, etc.) that will come into the research agenda

• With regard to building a better future for the world and positive psychology, if we simplify our messaging, design better studies, teach about our topic more widely, go beyond academia, focus on how we disseminate our messages, tailor our interventions better, man-up to the critics, embrace technology, and make some conceptual friends, this is a good way to get there and make an impact
How is it going to get there?

• Sure we all have problems, but there are a lot of things on the horizon to be optimistic about and hopeful for – both for humans and for positive psychology
• Let’s think big, be bold, be creative, be authentic, and most of all be collaborative
Go well!

- These slides are available at:
  
  www.aaronjarden.com