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APPLYING WELL-BEING ASSESSMENT FOR SERVICE DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

Service design is transformative when it has a measurable, even optimizing, positive affect on human well-being. Any prospect for such felicitous outcomes, however, requires accurate assessment or measurement of well-being in and for target populations. Such assessment raises two immediate issues: conceptualization (How should well-being be conceptually operationalized?) and measurement (Given an operationalization of well-being, how can it be measured?). We begin to explore and address both questions in this paper by reviewing existing conceptualizations of well-being and then by describing the relevance of well-being measurement (and its methodologies) which are presently available.

INTRODUCTION

There has been an upwelling of attention directed at understanding and measuring well-being. Human flourishing, a marriage of well-being and personal happiness, is being researched as a conceptual and practical complement to myriad macro and micro economic indicators, for mental health assessments, and as policy- and decision-making tools. A prominent example is the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, formed by Nicholas Sarkozy during his recent term as president of France (Stiglitz et al., 2009). This working group and report are the most notable examples of reconfiguring “standard” measurements like GDP (gross domestic product) and related constructs as measures of national progress and well-being. Due in part to its provocative findings, on-going efforts are in place worldwide, including the recently concluded Commission on Development, Welfare and Quality of Life in Germany (Deutsche Bundestag, 2013).

Our specific interest in the study of well-being is occasioned by questions arising in a research initiative on service design and management, viz., How can organizations discover how best to serve and engage their stakeholders? Can the effects of organizational policy changes be estimated prospectively? If so, how? Upon investigation, it quickly became clear that it would be necessary to go beyond the “happy-productive worker” thesis (Taris & Schreurs 2009). Merely assessing stakeholder affect towards particular policies and arrangements is

insufficient. We find that general well-being is increasingly recognized as a strategic indicator in a plethora of business-critical domains including health, productivity, turnover, absenteeism, customer loyalty, profitability, and overall cohesion (Diener and Chan 2010; Harter et al. 2003). Institutions are finding it in their interests to monitor and respond holistically to indicators of both happiness and well-being among their stakeholders. Benefits accrue on the positive side (e.g., empowering and encouraging top talent) as well as on the negative side (avoiding unforeseen developments and the prospect of supporting actions to mitigate them). Given this, the application of transformative service design and management becomes more complicated (and more interesting). Two urgent questions arise: (1) How should the concept of well-being be constructed for service management and design? and (2) What data already exists fulfilling this measurement and how were the data obtained?

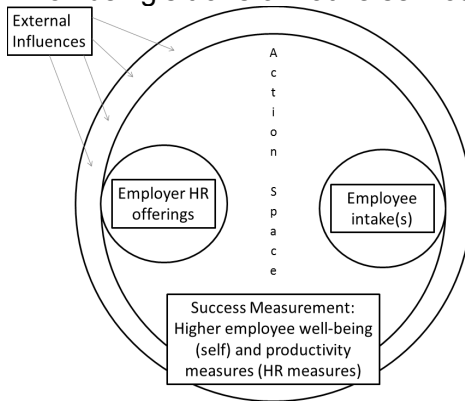
DELINATION OF HUMAN FLOURISHING

This research addresses the psychological construct of human flourishing as a measurement of well-being. The construct is standardly understood as combining both the feeling of happiness (hedonic well-being) and the existence of conditions constituting or promoting a good life (eudaimonic well-being) (Ryan and Deci, 2001, Huppert and So, 2011). Whereas hedonism is the more thoroughly researched agenda across the social sciences, there is notable hesitation to design services and policies based on seemingly capricious assessments of personal happiness or even pleasure (Ahn et al. 2011). In contrast, operationalizing eudaimonia (the state of having eudaimonic well-being) is problematic, since the entirety of conditions conducive to human flourishing are too varied, subtle, and difficult to measure accurately. Due to these challenges, well-being is thus delineated as the multi-layered human flourishing for use in decision-making or as a consideration in service design.

CONSTRUCTION OF ORGANIZATIONAL WELLNESS

We propose a human-centric wellness system which holistically measures hedonistic and eudaimonic flourishing for transformative institutions. Figure 2 illustrates the service environment of organizational well-being measurement as a modification of the transformative service research framework in Anderson et al. (2012). Organizationally sponsored well-being measures can help to create and maintain transformative organizations (Rosenbaum et al. 2011). This includes the interaction of personal and community assessment and environmental factors affecting well-being, information which is usually off-limits due to privacy concerns.

Figure 2: Well-being's transformative service environment



Such a comprehensive service system builds customized reports based on user attributes which actively complement the attainment of personal, thus institutional, well-being. Strategic actors can access a wellness management dashboard giving near realtime feedback on the areas of aggregated health and wellness, with open space for recommended assistance in the fulfilment of individual and institutional well-being.

EXPANDING THE VISION: WELLNESS AS A KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR

Our research program, which is underway, and our proposed system combines existing, validated measures for organizational management. We have only described the starting point. The system serves as a platform for testing alternative measures of well-being, and tracking changes in behaviour and sentiment. Thus we envision delivering a dynamic capability for institutions to monitor and track well-being, and respond with appropriate policies. The platform itself will be used to refine how well-being is measured. Increasing the wellness of individuals, and leadership capability to foster wellness organizationally co-creates the conditions necessary for healthy, happy institutions.

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