

# **Annie Timmins**

## **Happiness consultancy report**

**CST228, “Happiness: investigating its causes and conditions”**

**Autumn session, 2013**

**Cultural Studies, University of Wollongong**

**Subject coordinators: Chris Barker and Brian Martin**

### ***Assignment***

The consultancy is a continuation of your reflective journal.

- You continue with the activity you used for your journal, or a different one, and/or an additional one.
- You recruit two or more individuals — called clients — to undertake an activity known to increase happiness, either the same activity as your own or a different one.
- You introduce your clients to the activity, for example through a presentation, talk, workshop and/or handout.
- You monitor their engagement with the activity on a regular basis (at least weekly) through observations, interviews, survey and/or other means.
- You evaluate the effect of the activity on yourself and your clients using questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and/or other techniques.

For more details see [http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/CST\\_13outline.pdf](http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/CST_13outline.pdf)

*Annie Timmin's* consultancy report starts on the next page.

This document is located at <http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/happiness-consultancy-tops/>.

# CST228: Happiness

## Investigating its causes and conditions

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Happiness Consultancy

Activity:  
Practicing Mindfulness

Student No. 3664478  
Tutorial Group: Thursday 1:30

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## The Activity

This consultancy focuses on meditation as a happiness enhancing activity. I chose to continue with meditation because I found it beneficial, was interested to see if I continued to improve, and was interested to see how it affected others.

My experience with meditation began with a few quizzes on happiness and mindfulness and much trial, error and research. I managed to undertake a 20 to 30 minute meditation most days and upon re-quizzing my self, found that I had achieved significant results for both my happiness and mindfulness scale.

The most notable benefits I achieved were a reduction in stress and anxiousness while attempting to sleep and at university and an increase in my ability to focus on one thing at a time, improving my productivity. I also developed the capacity to take things in my stride and was less bothered by small annoyances. These positive outcomes remain prevalent as a result of my meditation in the 6-7 weeks since.

## Recruitment

### **Why were these individuals chosen?**

#### CLIENT 1

The first person that came to mind as a good recruit for the happiness consultancy was my 56 year old mother, Liz. She is a self-managed

superannuation funds adviser at an accountancy firm in my hometown.

She was an obvious choice because we have a trusting relationship and she is always willing to assist me with anything she can in order to make my life hassle free.

Liz shows many of the qualities that guarantee happiness, particularly in her devotion of time to family and friends, which is one of the most important signifiers (Lyubomirsky 2007). I propose that as a result, she does not devote enough time to her self, and attempting to make her own life hassle free.

Liz is often stressed at work, and this stress leads to headaches and other hindrances to her everyday life. A large amount of the strain is caused by clients and colleagues relying on Liz's expertise and good nature, which causes an enormous level of pressure.

She is several years off retirement, and often finds herself fantasising about the future, where she will be 'happily' spending her days outdoors on the farm with her loving husband and no job.

As such, Client 1 (Liz) was chosen not simply because she was willing, but also because of the assumption that she would benefit significantly from the happiness increasing activity.

## CLIENT 2

The second client I successfully recruited was my housemate, Jane\*. Jane is a fourth year student at the University of Wollongong, studying her final year of primary school teaching.

This choice was suitable not only because we live together and as such can communicate easily, but also because she has witnessed my own implementation of the activity on several occasions, and is familiar with the meditation process.

Jane has issues with managing stress and anger, which is intensified by her busy lifestyle, which includes university, work and a strict exercise regime. She suffers from stomach, jaw and head aches as a result of anxiety.

Jane was not initially willing to partake in a happiness enhancing activity for four weeks, insisting that she was too busy, though following a persuasive argument that guaranteed positive results on the basis of personal experience, she agreed to attempt the activity, though with shorter meditation sessions in comparison to my own.

\*name changed to protect anonymity

### **How were the individuals introduced to the activity?**

Both clients were contacted via email (along with another 2 prospects) in the first instance to ask if they were interested in meditating for 4 weeks

and reporting back to me as a part of a positive psychology university assignment.

Liz replied immediately in the affirmative, with no instant response from the others. I sent her through a scan of the 'subjective happiness scale' (Lyubomirsky 2007, 33), the 'Oxford happiness questionnaire' (Lyubomirsky 2007, 84-85) and a link to the online Berkley University test (Cardaciotto et al. 2008). She also received a copy of my report and diary, the ethics form and some research on the best ways to be mindful to give her an idea of how to go about the activity. I instructed her to keep an account of her progress (or lack of) in whichever way she found convenient and report back to me in 4 weeks. It was also made clear that I was available for contact most days via email or phone should she have any issues.

Two of the others emailed, I was quite confident would be willing to undertake the activity. The other prospect (Jane) I was confident would be unwilling initially, though could be swayed and would benefit the most from assuming a mindfulness activity. Luckily, we share a home so I was able to argue my case backed up by my own experience and get her on board with the consultancy. Jane was emailed the same material as Liz and issued with the same instructions. The difference was that I was able to monitor much of her experience directly being that we are under the same roof, though this was an advantage seeing as she was more in need of supervision than the other client.

## Advantages

The advantages of approaching clients that I know well were that our trusting and open relationships along with an already established mutual respect meant that they were completely honest with their observations and committed to the cause. The clients also knew that any difficulties they encountered would be easily resolved because of the casual nature of the consultancy and thanks to our affinity in the previous weeks, began with a substantial bank of knowledge regarding the activity.

Email and mobile phone contact proved more than adequate as a form of communication and no interviews were conducted. The content of any conversations conducted over the phone however, were not recorded and are thus exempt from this report.

## Disadvantages

An initial feeling of guilt was apparent for me in the first few weeks when the clients had not experienced much progress and the activity seemed more like a favour than something that would genuinely improve their well being. This was particularly because of each of their problems with stress, largely a result of their busy lives which were made even busier by the happiness activity. I believe my conscience would not have been so affected had I chosen random clients with whom I had an objective relationship.

## Summary Of Client Experience

Each participant's progress was monitored through bi-weekly emails and questionnaires/quizzes at the beginning and end of the 4 week period. Most of the information in the subsequent section is summarised from the reports they were asked to write at the closing of the trial. Liz's summary is divided into each week, Jane has an outline of the first 3 weeks, then gives more detail for the 4<sup>th</sup>.

### CLIENT 1 | LIZ

#### WEEK 1

Liz decided to practice mindfulness by meditating in bed in the mornings and was "amazed" by how variable the results were.

She was initially under the impression the activity was going well though after a few days encountered some sessions that were very difficult. She writes

"...all the issues I had thought of were churning around in my head and every time I tried to bring myself back to my breathing and focus it would only last a second or two" (Client 1 | Liz 2012)

She reflected that the positive emotions experienced throughout the weeks had more to do with the environment and how her day was going than the actual meditation. Finds being outside and doing something physical increases her happiness.

## WEEK 2

Liz referred to her second week as “another rollercoaster”, and noted having doubts as to whether she was “any good” at meditating, claiming she is too influenced by what is going on around her. She was committed to her goal of improvement within four weeks however, and started meditating for two sessions a day.

Liz also recorded her suffering of anxious thoughts and headaches when waking up in the mornings. She had a very busy and stressful week at work, particularly evident in her relationships with others. She writes,

“I wasn’t able to get any comfort from meditating and found it a struggle rather than a relief”.

Concerned were voiced in Client 1’s report noting that though her husband was supporting her, it was a one-way support system and she did not want to lean too much on him.

As such decided to include another method of achieving mindfulness, by joining a lunch time yoga session at lunch times at work.

## WEEK 3

The third week is expressed by Liz as being a much happier week. She began the week in the right frame of mind with her Monday lunchtime yoga session and managed 2 meditation sessions

a day, one in the mornings and one in the evenings. She notes,

“I really felt like I was making progress at living in the moment and not letting external events impact on my feelings...”

## WEEK 4

By the end of the trial, Liz felt as though she was making consistent progress. The fourth week generated more success; she attended two yoga sessions, which she has decided to continue doing.

Client 1 noticed that mindfulness had begun to happen automatically; the difficulty was making the conscious effort in the first place. She is very content with the exercise, believes it worthwhile and sees clear results. This is a satisfactory result, because it is in accordance with the assumptions I made when choosing the client, and in particular, because she has decided to persist in a mindful routine.

## CLIENT 2 | JANE

### WEEKS 1 -3

Client 2 previously felt that exercising and “putting problems to the back” of her mind was the most effective way to deal with them.

Jane had difficulty concentrating on relaxing, and guessed that the reason for this was her preferred inclination to exercise, TV and reading as a form of

relaxation. She admits to falling asleep on a few occasions.

By the end of the second week, Jane was enjoying the 5 – 10 minutes to herself. She called it “just concentrating on concentrating”, which is an important objective while practicing mindfulness.

Jane found discusses the ‘real test’ as arriving in week 3, which she describes as a particularly ‘depressing week’, where she received some bad news about her health and very busy with university and work. She meditated every day for 10 minutes in addition to her usual routine. Client 2 believes the meditation helped her get through the week and due to her initial skepticism, was very surprised with the results.

The developments she noticed were more coherent and positive decision making an improvement in the way she dealt with people. Jane noted a clear connection between these advances and meditation. She also noticed that in week 3, she maintained a healthier diet, and had fewer cravings for sweet foods.

Client 2 felt it pertinent to mention though, that she continues to declare regular exercise and television important factors in the control of her anger.

#### WEEK 4

Jane insightfully comments that she was happier in week as a consequence of the week before, the benefits of which she did not recognise at first.

Jane remains under the impression that she may not have enough time to continue meditating but found the time to herself valuable, and hopes she will be able to revisit the activity at some point. She also claims that she would certainly recommend it to others, though advises that it takes time and effort to adjust to practicing mindfulness.

#### **Advantages**

Monitoring the clients only twice a week had several advantages. It allowed them to concentrate on the activity at hand rather than having to assess daily their successes and failures with meditation. It also meant that the happiness activity seemed less like a chore or a favour, so that they may immerse themselves and recognise the benefits more easily.

However, the biweekly emails were important because it gave the clients a chance to reflect and acknowledge differences in their daily routines and habits, which they could knowingly attribute to being mindful.

#### **Disadvantages**

One of the major disadvantages of the 4 week period the clients were given to undertake the activity was the lack of time I was left with to write the report and further research. However, because meditation generally takes 6 weeks to begin showing results, ceasing the activity at an earlier date would have been of detriment to the trial.



The biweekly emailing method may have been a setback in the case of monitoring Client 2's progress. Her report did not reveal as much depth and insight as Client 1', though I assert that this has more to do with her level of commitment to putting her efforts down on paper, rather than a poor reflection of her experience. In casual conversation, the depth and breadth of Jane's implementation were clear, and though these were not recorded, they proved beneficial in providing me a more cohesive idea of how she was fairing.

In hindsight, perhaps interviews may have provided more insight into the client's experience of the activity.

## Questionnaires & Quizzes

As mentioned, along with the emails, questionnaires and quizzes were used at the beginning and end of the 4 week period.

In the 'subjective happiness scale' (Lyubomirsky 2007, 33), which gives an estimated set happiness point. Liz received a score of 4.75, which is the same score I received when upon first taking the test. The average scores according to Lubomirsky (2007) are between 4.5 and 5.5 and the highest score that can be reached is 7. A score slightly below 5 fits the average for college students, though Liz is well above college age so this means her happiness score was lower than average. Following the four weeks of meditation, Liz scored a 5.25, which is a significant improvement.

Jane also received an initial score of 4.75, the average for an individual in her age group. She saw exceptional improvement after four weeks, leaving her with a score of 6, only one point from the optimum score.

The second scale used was the 'Oxford happiness questionnaire' (Lyubomirsky 2007, 84-85), which shows which helps to track an individual's progress with their happiness enhancing activities.

Liz's original score was 3.76, and increased to 4.38. With the lowest possible score being one, the highest 6 and the average at 4.3, this shows significant improvement for all the factors covered in the questionnaire, which includes questions about relationships, energy, commitment and involvement in life.

Jane's was 3.44, increasing to 3.93. Considering the hike of Jane's subjective happiness score, this is an interesting outcome. It suggests that Jane has noticed more of an improvement to her general well being than particular parts of her life when queried and given time to reflect.

The online Berkley University (Cardaciotto et al. 2008) test however, showed marked improvements for both clients.

Jane initially received a score of 59 out of 100, and Liz received a 53 (the same score I first received). Some of the shortcomings the website listed included having trouble with a moment-to-moment awareness of my thoughts, feelings and

environment as well as feeling judgmental towards oneself, defensive, anxious or sad (Cardaciotto et al. 2008).

In the final test, both clients had improved by at least 20 points (Jane with 79 points, Liz with 78), which according to the test is a considerable progression in just four weeks. The results concluded that each client had a strong tendency to practice mindfulness, and moment-to-moment awareness of thoughts, feelings and environments, as well as acceptance of these aspects in their lives (Cardaciotto et al. 2008). As a side note, my score has improved by a further 5 points since my last test on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April, boosting my score to 83.

## Academic Research

The results each client received are in accordance with academic material. Their experiences are reflected and given evidence for in much of the literature, which refers specifically to several of the positive developments the clients noticed in their everyday lives.

One of the chief concerns Liz has for her well being that is covered extensively in positive psychology is stress at work. According to Heydenfeldt et al (2011), a stressful environment at work endangers productivity, health and relationships, which is an issue that Liz recognised in her earliest report. According to Sauter et al. (2010 in Bauer-Wu 2010),

“Perhaps now more than ever before, job stress poses a threat to the health of workers” (1).

Most employees, including Liz, are under pressure to make intelligent decisions and manage relationships at work, and do not have the capacity or time to deal with stress. This is why there has been a considerable amount of academic research in this field, which has gathered mounting evidence that mindfulness practice enhance the way the brain processes information (Jha, Krompinger, & Baime, 2007; Siegel, 2007; Stanley & Jha, 2009; Tang et al., 2007 in Heydenfeldt et al 2011, 21).

Research in this area has inspired the advent of MBSRs (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) programs for high profile businesses on a global scale. The accountancy firm that employs Liz is one of them, implementing a yoga program for its employees in 2009, which she has found especially rewarding. Salmon et al (2009) acknowledges the benefits of Yoga for mindfulness as opposed to other physical activities, stating,

“The Yoga movement sequences have been formulated with the intention of encouraging mindful awareness: they are done slowly and gently and are not over physically taxing” (61).

More generally, the therapeutic significance of movement based activities that also include Tai Chi and others has been highlighted. Evidence has been produced supporting the theory that regulation of physical movement is a fundamental

priority of the nervous system, and there for a focal point for mindful attention, which is why it has been used for many individuals suffering from clinical conditions (Van Der Kolk 2006 in Salmon et al 2009).

Jane also experiences stress, which leads to other negative emotions such as anger, which is often unwarranted and leaves her feeling frustrated, overwhelmed and unable to control her self.

Mindfulness is particularly helpful in this field because it allows the individual to feel strong emotions and let them pass, rather than dwelling on them for an extended period of time. As Bauer-Wu (2010) explains,

“Mindfulness is essentially seeing and experiencing things as they are, using all senses while also being aware of thoughts, emotional tones, and reactions as they arise without judging them as good, bad, right or wrong” (47).

One study referenced by (Jagdish 1992) showed that meditation can improve trait anger, anger aroused through high-anger situations, unconstructive coping and anger measured through psychological systems. Meditation is successful in dealing with anger-fuelled instances because it produces a state of mental calmness. As (Jagdish 1992) notes, those in a meditative state show reduced cognitive activity, so naturally, given that anger is meditated by cognitions, meditation effectively reduces its symptoms.

Another heavily referenced advantage of mindfulness evident in Jane’s report is the increased capacity to manage multiple tasks, which is something she frequently struggles with. Empirical evidence demonstrates that mindfulness improves the ability to focus attention in addition to the ability to prioritise and manage tasks and goals (Jha et al. 2007 in Heydenfeldt et al 2011).

Many of the benefits advertised in mindfulness programs were apparent for both clients. One that is perhaps less expected to produce mindfulness when compared with meditation is physical exercise, which both clients felt obliged to mention as a noteworthy contributor to their happiness. Despite the popular belief that only slow and controlled physical movement such as Tai Chi and Yoga are capable of producing mindfulness, there is also evidence that more active pursuits are adept. This is as a result of the detachment individuals may feel while engaged in intense exercise, which allows them to focus on the present (Wilhelm 2011).

For both clients, MBSR proved effective in decreasing their perceptions of daily hassles and psychological stresses, which is one of its leading proclamations (Lawson 2011 ). Each client also experienced improved reactionary thinking, which mindfulness awareness achieves through changing the internal responses to challenges such as the rapid flow of new information and demands in the age of digital communications (Lawson 2011 & Heydenfeldt et al 2011).

As previously mentioned, Liz and Jane both noticed changes to their ingrained coping mechanisms. According to Lawson (2011),

“Different from a relaxation technique, mindfulness enhances awareness and helps us disengage from maladaptive patterns of thinking such as generalizing, worrying, and perseverating, which create deleterious reactions to stress. It promotes the use of coping responses that are healthier and more effective” (37).

This declaration is supported by neurological research that describes mindfulness as a type of mental training at the most fundamental level because of neuroplasticity, which literally means that neurons (brain cells) are malleable (Bauer-Wu 2010).

The final connection between the clients’ observations and the academic research that is pertinent to note is the effectiveness of meditation when it comes to dealing with pain. Both clients experienced less trouble with pain that was a by-product of stress because of the preventative outcomes of meditation. However, they were also able to use being mindful as a treatment method for dealing with the pain once it was already established. They did this through mindful techniques that allow attention to redirect attention away from pain (Perez De Albeniz 2000, Harvard 2011, Lawson 2011, & Wilhelm 2011).

As a short concluding note, it is important to recognise that in my own implementation of this

activity, I accomplished more substantial results because I have practiced for a longer period of time and participated in longer sessions each time. The research clearly reveals a specific relationship between the amount of formal meditation practice and the extent of positive effects (Bauer-Wu 2010). This is evident with frequency as well as length, often shown in studies that conclude the only multivariable predictor of higher mindfulness skills is the number of days spent meditating per week (Schoormans 2011).

## Benefits Of Meditation

The results experienced by both the clients and I are in accordance with academic material, which claim that mindfulness meditation reduces stress, promotes optimal health, improves attention control, mental agility, emotional intelligence and situational awareness.

These are important capabilities in an increasingly stressful society, particularly in the workplace, which is a major cause for many people’s dissatisfaction or unhappiness with their lives.

## Disadvantages Of Meditation

It is difficult to find a disadvantage for discussion in reference to meditation and being mindful. The only concern would be if an individual did not experience the effect they had anticipated, though research shows that meditation is a learned art, and sustained and maximum benefits occur with ongoing practice.

Any difficulties encountered by myself or my clients were resolved with practice and typical of individuals who are first entering into mindfulness meditation.

One concern however, is the lack of acknowledgement in the general public regarding the advantages of the integration of meditation into every day life. Many people, myself and client 2 included were/are skeptical about the idea of practicing mindfulness because of the popular writing on the subject, which does not seem legitimate and often focuses on the spiritual or 'loving oneself' strand of meditation. While there is a considerable amount of academic literature on the topic, it is rarely featured in the popular media.

to notice the changes in their mindfulness for at least 6 weeks of regular meditation. Once the habit is embedded, the flow of positive outcomes becomes more apparent, with mindfulness being practiced at regular intervals throughout a person's week.

## Recommendations

There is an overwhelming amount of attestation to the practice of mindfulness meditation and its benefits for an individual's wellbeing. Both of my clients and myself highly recommend the activity.

However, it is clear that as a beginner, meditation is a difficult activity to incorporate into a person's daily routine, particularly if they have a busy lifestyle.

It is important to overcome any issues through reading the research and taking classes if necessary, in order to become skilled enough at meditation to reap its benefits. Continued practice is essential, and anyone attempting this activity must remember that on average, people tend not

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