

# **Greta Fulder\***

## **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)

*Greta Fulder\**'s consultancy report starts on the next page.

\* “Greta Fulder” is a pseudonym.

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

## **Happiness Consultancy: *Committing to your goals***

The pursuit of happiness has become synonymous with the pursuit of material achievements. Individuals are striving to obtain 'superior' amounts and models of cars, homes, money and status (Dunleavy 2006). Such pursuits, however, do not guarantee happiness, and can actually promote a cycle of dissatisfaction that is potentially harmful to individual well-being (Dunleavy 2006). Instead, persuasive evidence indicates that pursuing innately *meaningful* goals is critical to attaining elevated levels of happiness. In accordance, this consultancy study seeks to examine how committing to an intrinsic goal affects an individual's well-being in opposition to the typically stressful nature of extrinsic pursuits. In particular, this analysis will explore the role of implementation intentions and the resulting upward spiral of progress within intrinsic goals.

The negative relationship between extrinsic or circumstantial pursuits and well-being is well established in areas of positive psychology. Although individuals are often concerned with social pressures and consumption of external rewards (such as social status, financial success or image), the resulting effects of these changes are merely transient (Lyubomirsky 2007, p.217). Indeed, individuals concerned with extrinsic aspirations often adapt to their 'improved' hedonic circumstances and struggle to fulfil needs of competence, self-esteem and long-term satisfaction (Lyubomirsky 2007, p.217).

In contrast, intrinsic goals are those pursuits which are inherently satisfying and meaningful to an individual (Lyubomirsky 2007, p.217). Brdar, Miljkovic & Rijavec suggest that intrinsic goals satisfy three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy (ownership over one's behaviour), competence (confidence in one's abilities) and

relatedness (the ability to meaningfully connect with other people) (Brdar, Miljkovic & Rijavec 2008 p.694). The authors propose that the accumulation of such positive experiences leads to an increase of positive and *sustainable* well-being, stating, “Intrinsic goals are said to lead to greater satisfaction because they give everyday activities a long-term perspective and encourage other activities in free time that are self-determined and enjoyable” (Brdar, Miljkovic & Rijavec 2008 p.696). Therefore, it is not only the end result of intrinsic goals that produces positive outcomes, but the goal in itself is inherently satisfying.

On the basis of these ideas, this consultancy study aims to determine the effects of intrinsic goal pursuit on an individual’s well-being. It was hypothesised that commitment to intrinsic goals would inspire a sense of motivation and purpose among clients, where elevated happiness acts as a positive by-product. In particular, clients were asked to pursue goals that required elements of creative thinking, such as learning an instrument, a new craft or creative writing.

Selecting ‘Committing to Intrinsic Goals’ as a consultancy activity was based on personal circumstances. As I am about to graduate from university and am required to consider my future career and goals, I was extremely interested in the concept of intrinsic and extrinsic goals. I have been struggling to rationalise the goals I need to achieve and what I actually want to achieve. As such, I hoped this activity would put my goals into perspective. In relation to the consultancy component, I felt that clients would feel inspired pursue an intrinsic activity. By selecting a meaningful, personal goal to pursue, clients would feel a connection to the activity, and therefore feel constantly motivated.

To ensure experiment results were as conclusive as possible, the recruitment process sought out individuals of similar demographics and circumstances. The necessary demographic of potential clients were similar to my personal position, including recent university graduates currently active in the work force, who are also involved in creative pursuits (such as music, arts etc.). This demographic was chosen out of convenience, but also because it was believed that such individuals would be most interested in pursuing intrinsic goals, where this stage of their life is often determined by extrinsic pressures of work and finance.

As my social circle involves many individuals of this description, recruitment was extremely convenient. It was merely a case of emailing individuals who fitted the stated criteria and enquiring if they could participate in a 4-week study on intrinsic goals. The final participants of the consultation activity included:

**Josh:** 22yr old I.T Consultant & Musician

**Jane:** 23yr old Graphic Designer/Admin

**Myself:** 21yr old Student and Graphic Designer

Upon agreeing to participate in the study, clients were sent a brief introducing them to their happiness activity. Using simplistic terms, this brief contained background information on the benefits of intrinsic goals and flow. Also present was a list of practical steps to help individuals select and pursue their creative goal. This checklist ensured participants would consider their intrinsic aspirations, the practicality of their elected goal, implementation strategies and any possible obstacles they could encounter on their

journey. Finally, clients were briefed on how they would be monitored throughout the activity. This included completing a questionnaire prior to commencing their goal (answering details about their current circumstances, view towards goals and their Happiness Score based on the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire), as well as recording their observations in a weekly journal, and a reflective questionnaire upon completion.

The method and proposal of this consultancy activity were based on a similar longitudinal study undertaken by Abad et al. of the University of California. Abad et al. claim that through the adoption of a new life activity (such as hobby, career or membership), individuals are able generate a continual stream of positive experiences. This, however, requires ‘both a will and a proper way’ (Abad et al. 2010, p.40) That is, a continued effort, and an appropriate approach to change are imperative to an individual’s success. Consequently, Abad et al. hypothesised that ongoing commitment to goals leads to, and is crucial to, sustained increases in well-being (Abad et al. 2010, p.41). Their hypothesis was tested through a 6-month longitudinal study where participants were randomly asked to pursue autonomy, competence or relatedness goals. A comparative study asked participants to change an aspect of their life circumstances. Throughout the study, participants were monitored through a series of questionnaires. As predicted, the results indicated that individuals must invest effort to reap the rewards of their goals and gain long-term benefits (Abad et al. 2010, pp. 46- 47). Of particular note is the instance that participants who failed to achieve their intrinsic goal rated lower in well-being against their ‘circumstance’ driven counterparts (Abad et al. 2010, p.47). This suggests that intrinsic goals amplify the consequences of goal pursuit, and failure can provoke strongly negative consequences on the participant’s state of mind (Abad et al. 2010, p.-

47).

As previously stated, the first stage of this consultancy activity involved clients completing a happiness survey/ questionnaire prior to committing to their intrinsic goal. Although all participants recorded an 'average' level of happiness (between 4-5) according to the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, clients expressed dissatisfaction and a sense of stress related to their work situation. Both clients noted that extra- curricular goals were important to their well-being, highlighting the differences between work goals and personal goals. This was perhaps most strongly demonstrated by Jane, who stated, "I do not enjoy work or the idea of work and like to think of it as separate to my actual life... my boss makes me feel stupid and sad and angry". In a similar manner, Josh contended, "Work isn't your life. Most of the goals that are work related tend to be set by someone else". Such statements align with research examining relationship between aspirations, stress and extrinsic goals, which found that adolescents with the higher motivation toward extrinsic goals had elevated levels of interpersonal stress and prospective depressive symptoms (Good Therapy 2011).

After reflecting on their aspirations and situation, participants of the study resolved on the following creative goals:

**Josh:** To commit to my musical endeavours more and make it more prominent in my every day activities.

**Jane:** To learn a new craft by learning the basics of knitting, aiming to create a simple item of clothing for myself (perhaps a scarf).

**Myself:** To contribute to my market stall and further my technical illustration skills by creating new card designs.

Clients were then left to pursue their goals, agreeing to record significant events and thoughts regarding their goals in a weekly journal entry.

Upon the conclusion of the 4-week consultancy activity, participants were asked to take a final happiness questionnaire. The results were somewhat surprising. While Josh and my own happiness scores had increased, Janes's score had significantly dropped to 3.5. In her comments, Jane credits this instance to 'having a particularly unpleasant time in the workplace' when the test was taken. Although the results of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire did not show significant quantitative improvements in the participants' happiness levels, clients revealed that commitment to their goal generated feelings of pride, productivity and generally enhanced their perceived well-being. Once again, a distinction was created between the pressures of work and the joy of intrinsic goals. As stated by Josh, "My goal gave me something to focus on other than work and showed me how important this activity is to what makes me happy". I believe the general success of commitment to intrinsic goals may be credited to two key factors, based on research provided academic literature. These factors include:

- a) The power of implementation intention
- b) Never undermining intrinsic motivation

In regards to the subject implementation intention, it has been noted that the achievement of goals is dependent on how goal content is framed in conjunction with how it is

regulated (Brandtstatter & Gollwitzer 1997, p.186). Brandtstatter & Gollwitzer contend, “Holding implementation intentions commits the individual to perform certain goal-directed behaviours when the critical situation is actually encountered” (1997, p.187). The authors maintain that outlining one’s goal is merely the first step of goal attainment, only to be followed by implementation obstacles which must be successfully solved. For instance, the pursuit of individual goals may involve regulation of motivation, warding off distractions, negotiation conflicts between goals or flexibility management (Brandtstatter & Gollwitzer 1997, p.186). As summarised by Brandtstatter & Gollwitzer, implementation intention takes the format, ‘I intend to do Y when situation Z is encountered’ (Brandtstatter & Gollwitzer 1997, p.187).

The observations made by Brandtstatter and Gollwitzer were demonstrated in this consultancy study. Prior to pursuing their goal, participants were asked to describe their goal in concrete terms, hence complying with the first step of goal attainment. For example, my personal goal was, “To contribute to my market stall and further my technical illustration skills by creating new card designs”, whereas Josh identified with “Committing to my musical endeavours by involving it in my every day activities”. Interestingly, Josh and myself both encountered obstacles throughout our goal commitment (Jane did not encounter any of her predicted obstacles). I was under pressure by time-constraints, and Josh was overseas for work, leaving him unable to actively engage in his goal for one week.

Participants were prepared for such problems. Once again, in the initial activity brief, clients were asked to write down possible challenges that could arise in their journey, and to consider how these challenges could be alleviated. For myself, this meant taking a



break from illustration and instead looking at visual inspiration, while for Josh (at the time on a business trip) it meant listening to a new album and editing band recordings on his laptop. Although our solutions required taking a step back from the actual goal activity (illustration and writing music), the implementation intentions allowed us to connect to our goals on a different level, and boosted motivation in times of busyness and stress.

In addition to implementation intentions, it is understood that the second reason clients reflected positively about their goal is because they were encouraged to never undermine intrinsic motivation. This was a difficult idea to instill within clients, for the very reason they were pursuing their goals was because of the external pressure of this study. With this in mind, the study was anchored around the concept of ‘achievement goals’, as opposed to performance goals (Elliot & Harackiewicz 1993). Similar to the principles of intrinsic goals, achievement goals are defined by the desire to develop or demonstrate competence in an activity (Elliot & Harackiewicz 1993 p.904). The efforts of achievement goals are marked by the avoidance of evaluative pressure (Elliot & Harackiewicz 1993 p.905). For this reason, clients were asked to pursue goals revolving around creativity, where they could develop or increase their skills within a particular area, without fear of judgement or measures of success.

The prediction that the promise of reward or evaluation would undermine intrinsic motivation is not only supported by numerous studies regarding intrinsic vs extrinsic motivation, but is also relevant to the role of motivation in creative pursuits (Lee 2010, p. 264). Stanford researcher, Teresa Amabile enforces the notion that intrinsic motivation is conducive to creativity, whereas extrinsic is harmful (Mehren 1985). Amabile likens the

creative process to a maze, suggesting, “If you are intrinsically motivated, by definition you enjoy being in the maze. You do want to get out, but you enjoy the process of finding a way out” (Mehren 1985). Conversely, the extrinsically motivated individual simply wants to escape the maze as easily and quickly as possible (Mehren 1985). For example, while pursuing my own goal of improving my illustration skills, I challenged myself to design in a new aesthetic ‘style’. My previous designs had been made for the purpose of selling, but when I had the time I decided to design for *myself*. While I initially struggled with this challenge, I felt proud that I gave myself a new task and pushed myself to complete it.

Unsurprisingly, the persistence demonstrated in my personal experience is integral to successful goal commitment. In the article *How to Decrease Procrastination and Increase Happiness* (2008), Timothy Pychyl proposes that by making progress in one’s goals, the increase in individual well-being acts as a catalyst for further goal progression. Pychyl argues, “Give a job to a busy person and it will get done. Why? Busy people are in motion. They’re making progress, feeling competent and able, so they move forward buoyed by their success” (Pychyl 2008). This instance was particularly relevant to Jane, who was developing the new skill of knitting. When asked about her motivation throughout her goal, Jane confirmed “I was excited and motivated the whole time as I was constantly thinking of the end product...I loved seeing my scarf slowly take shape as my skills improved”. This notion is not uncommon. A study carried out by Sheldon and Marko indicated that individuals are able to promote an ‘upward’ spiral’ of positive outcomes that increases momentum of progression (Houser- Marko, Sheldon 2001 p.152). This was demonstrated in Josh’s goal experience, where he aptly commented,

“The more effort I put into it (my goal) the more positives I got out of it”. Rather than becoming accustomed to a new level of being, it is proposed that individuals become participants of a ‘self- fulfilling’ prophecy, whereby a person anticipates further success in their goal, and therefore takes action to achieve it (Houser- Marko, Sheldon 2001 p.163).

Despite the positive outcomes of this study, the consultancy activity did have several limitations, the strongest inhibitor being time constraints. The duration of the study was contained within 4 weeks, which hindered the possibility of achieving thorough and conclusive data. For instance, individuals did not have the appropriate amount of time to feel like they had achieved their goal. Although goal achievement was not the objective of this study, participants expressed the feeling that they were only settling into their goal by the time the study was concluded. Likewise, the 4 weeks did not provide enough time for participants to encounter and overcome substantial obstacles, which would have generated a more comprehensive examination of the power of intrinsic goals. Monitoring the effects of goal commitment is an activity better suited to longitudinal studies. In future studies, it is recommended the duration expand to at least 2 months. Further, it is recommended to recruit more than 3 participants to accurately compare and contrast data.

The results of this study suggest that pursuing one’s intrinsic goals is certainly a beneficial strategy in increasing happiness levels. Indeed, throughout their journey all three participants indicated a sense of ownership of the fundamental psychological needs of autonomy and competence. The intention to pursue a goal, however, is not nearly enough to maintain satisfaction. Individuals must wholly commit to the intrinsic nature of their goal, and apply appropriate implementation intention strategies to ensure sustained

levels of motivation and goal productivity. As evidenced by the subjective experiences of Josh, Jane and myself, the commitment to creative, intrinsic goals provided a welcome distraction and contrast to the extrinsic pressures of life, thus putting into perspective the innate passions and aspirations of each individual's life.

## References

- Abad, N, Ferguson, Y, Gunz, A, Houser-Marko, L, Lyubomirsky, S, Nichols, C et al. 2010 'Persistent Pursuit of Need- Satisfying Goals Leads to Increased Happiness: A 6-month Experimental Longitudinal Study', *Motivation and Emotion*, Vol.34, No. 1, pp. 39- 48
- Brdar, I, Miljkovic, D, Rijavec, M 2008, 'Aspirations and Well-Being: Extrinsic Vs. Intrinsic Life Goals' *Drustvena Istrazivanja*, Vol. 20, No.3 pp. 693- 710
- Brandstatter, V, Gollwitzer P 2007 'Implementation Intentions and Effective Goal Pursuit', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol.73, No.1, pp. 186-199
- Dunleavy, M.P 2008, 'Finding Happiness in the Pursuit', *New York Times*, accessed 26 May 2013 <[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/08/business/09instincts.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/08/business/09instincts.html?_r=0)>
- Elliot, A.J, Harackiewicz, J 1993, 'Achievement Goals and Intrinsic Motivation', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 65, No. 5, pp. 904-915
- Good Therapy 2011, 'The Pursuit of Happiness: Internal or External?', *Good Therapy*, accessed 28 May 2013, < <http://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/the-pursuit-of-happiness-internal-or-external-1101114/>>
- Houser-Marko, L, Sheldon, K 2001 'Self Concordance, Goal Attainment, and the Pursuit of Happiness: Can there be an Upward Spiral?', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 80, No. 1, pp. 152- 165
- Lee, J, Liem, G, McInerney, D, Ortega, Y 2010, 'The Relationship between Future Goals and Achievement Orientations: An Intrinsic Motivation Perspective', *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, Vol. 35, pp. 264- 279
- Lyubomirsky, S 2007 'Committing to Your Goals' in *The How of Happiness: The Practical Guide to Getting the Life You Want*, Piaktus Books, London, pp. 213- 235

Mehren, E 1984, 'Intrinsic Motivation Lost Creativity Turns into Psychologist's Life Study', *Los Angeles Times*, accessed 26 May 2013, [http://articles.latimes.com/1985-07-31/news/vw-5471\\_1\\_intrinsic-motivation](http://articles.latimes.com/1985-07-31/news/vw-5471_1_intrinsic-motivation)

Pychal, T 2008, 'Goal Progress and Happiness: How to Decrease Procrastination and Increase Happiness', *Psychology Today*, accessed 25 May 2013, <<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/dont-delay/200806/goal-progress-and-happiness>>