

European Science Foundation
Standing Committee for the Social Sciences (SCSS)

ESF SCSS EXPLORATORY WORKSHOP

**Positive Approaches to
Development**



The British Psychological Society
London, United Kingdom, 5-6 November 2004

Convened by:
Jane A. Henry^① and Antonella Delle Fave^②

^① Experiential Research Group, The Open University

^② Dipartimento di Scienze Precliniche LITA Vialba, Università degli Studi di
Milano



ESF Report Positive Approaches to Development

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1 Executive Summary

The ESF seminar on Positive Approaches to Development was held in London over two days in November 2004. It brought together leading European Researchers together with promising younger researchers from widely dispersed European countries. The participants' disciplines ranged from biology and medicine through psychology and education to management and counselling. Their research expertise included qualitative methods, quantitative research, epidemiological and cross-cultural studies. More particularly the meeting brought together researchers with cross-cultural expertise in positive psychology and optimal experience drawn largely from qualitative studies, neuropsychological, measurement and epidemiological researchers with expertise in well-being relying more on biological and large scale quantitative studies and those concerned with the application of positive approaches in health, organisational and educational settings.

Positive development is concerned with investigating what is functioning well and success rather than focusing on failure and deficiency. It represents something of a sea change for professional approaches to development which have tended to concentrate on addressing weakness and deficiency (such as solving problems, learning missing social skills, and dealing with stress) rather than focus on building from positive experience and strength. There is a burgeoning interest in more positive approaches to development focused



round capitalising on strengths, positive emotions and serving others, especially among those concerned with interventions in applied areas.

The workshop offered sessions on adult development, positive experience, ways of measuring positive experience and possible applications of this approach. The first day focused on presentations of positive approaches to adult development and *positive experiences* in different countries. This was followed by a session on *measurement* that began by looking at the large-scale studies and the models derived from them, the problems with this kind of approach and in interpretation of the resultant data. Then the need for and benefits of in-depth qualitative approaches were discussed together with an assessment of the experience sampling method in practice - a way of measuring mood and its correlates as they happen. The second day focused on *applications*, beginning with an overview of key European theory and research on work in wellbeing in organisations, and a more in-depth treatment of a new German approach. This was followed by sessions on the effectiveness of different individual development strategies and an example of a wide-ranging application used in education and counselling. These sessions highlighted the importance of individualised development strategies that are somewhat at odds with the standard manual-based intervention approach. The final afternoon was devoted to a *discussion* on the European contribution to this area and possibilities for collaborative cross-national, longitudinal, qualitative and experience-based European research.

The event aimed to bring together dispersed researchers. It succeeded in facilitating collaboration as a number of the participants have gone on to undertake *joint research* and other projects. Joar Vitterso and Felicia Huppert are engaged in various joint projects, including attempts to feature wellbeing measures in pan-European surveys. Antonella Delle Fave, Marta Bassi and Teresa Friere have gone on to undertake complimentary cross-cultural research comparing positive experiences in different countries. Ilona Boniwell



and Nash Popovic are developing a new measure of wellbeing that differentiates eudaimonic and hedonic elements. Jane Henry has gone on to work with John Haworth on the individual and social development of wellbeing at work and in everyday life.

The event provided a key *networking* opportunity. It brought together key European players in the field of applied positive psychology and positive adult development. All but one of those present have gone on to present at research meetings and conference symposia with colleagues from the workshop. A number have gone on to achieve considerable *prominence* in the burgeoning field of positive adult development. Four of those present have joined the Board of the International Positive Psychology Association and three the Board of the European Network for Positive Psychology.

2 Scientific Content

The balance of presentations versus discussion was agreed after consultation. The majority feeling a substantive amount of time for presentations was necessary in this mixed group. To provide amplification various papers were circulated and made available to delegates in addition to the presentations. These included:

Antonella Delle Fave - The cross-cultural investigation of optimal experience

Antonella Delle Fave - Subjective experience and quality of life: Individual and community implications

Marta Bassi - The measurement of well-being in daily life: the experience sampling methods

Marta Bassi - Adolescence and the changing context of optimal experience in time: Italy 1986-2000

Ciaran O'Boyle, S. Hofer and L Ring - Interpreting individualized quality of life



George Burns – The role of the environment in wellbeing

Dario Galati and Igor Sotgiu and L Ring - Happiness and positive emotions

John Haworth - Wellbeing social and individual determinants

John Haworth et al - Positive psychological states in the daily life of working woman

Jo Bryce and John Haworth -Psychological well being in a sample of male and female office workers

Jane Henry - Embracing developmental diversity in adults

Gerard Huhn - Motivation not manipulation: integration of intrinsic motivation in enhanced concepts of management, leadership and teaching

Felicia Huppert – Positive mental health in individuals and populations

Felicia Huppert – The development of wellbeing

Di Kuh - A life course approach to well-being

Nic Marks - A well-being manifesto for a flourishing society

Teresa Freire – Daily experiences of Portuguese adolescents

Willibald Ruch - Humour research

The workshop took place over two days. It began with an introduction to the area of *positive adult development* raising questions about the nature of the distinctive European contribution to this field. This was followed by an overview of approaches to positive adult development presented by Felicia Huppert from Cambridge University distinguishing hedonic and eudaimonic approaches. The next session focused on positive experience. Antonella Delle Fave of the University of Milan gave an overview of the individual and community implications of research on subjective experience and quality of life based on cross-national research on optimal experience and Teresa Freire from the University of Minho gave a paper on flow and optimal experience in



Portuguese adolescents emphasising the need to develop coping ability. One problem raised here was finding suitable concepts with similar cross-cultural associations, for example the idea of challenge has very different associations in the US and certain European countries. The final session comprised three presentations on the measurement of wellbeing and optimal experience. Amongst other things Joar Vitterso from the University of Tromsø discussed various large-scale comparative attempts to measure wellbeing offering a critique of current measures and certain interpretations commonly made from them. Ilona Boniwell from the Open University offered a critique of current operationalisations in key instruments aiming to assess subjective wellbeing and happiness, arguing for the need for a more sophisticated measures of wellbeing and more qualitative research into people's different understandings of their own wellbeing. Marti Bassi from the University of Milan discussed the use of experience sampling and flow questionnaires as a means of assessing optimal experience in different countries, raising some of the advantages and difficulties of this method.

Day two focused initially on *applications* at work, a field where positive approaches to development is generating a lot of interest. John Haworth from Manchester Metropolitan introduced US and European ideas on flow in work and leisure, noting some differences in findings and highlighting the merits of European theories. Gerard Huhn outlined one way of applying positive approaches to development in organisations. Jane Henry and Nash Popovic went on to discuss approaches to personal development. Jane drew on her own research to highlight the diversity of effective routes to development for different people and the centrality of non-cognitive routes to development, that she felt were underrepresented in conventional and positive approaches to development. Nash Popovic raised certain philosophical issues underlying therapeutically oriented interventions in education and counselling.



The afternoon was devoted to a discussion of the European contribution to positive psychology and ways of furthering the research agenda. The European contribution to positive development was felt to have a different character to American work in this field in being more interdisciplinary, cultural embedded and more applied in orientation. There was a sense that European perspective had a lot to offer the field and a consensus on the need for better measurement. Dissatisfaction was expressed with certain existing instruments either because they were felt to be conceptually lacking, had failed to replicate satisfactorily in Europe, or there was a problematic cultural bias. There was interest in collaborative measurement research. Various qualitative, cross-national, ESM, longitudinal and interventional collaborations were discussed with subgroups favouring different approaches. It was hoped future studies would improve on the perceived inadequacies of and difficulties in applying certain existing instruments. Views differed on the best ways of researching positive development.

3 Assessment of Results

The workshop offered a chance to explore cross-national perspectives and research on positive adult development. It brought together leading researchers and promising younger researchers with a view to co-ordinating and developing the rather isolated European initiatives in this area. Three key areas in positive development centre round attempts to explore the nature of positive experience, for example work on optimal experience; attempts to measure positive qualities, and change interventions drawing on principles from positive development, for example positive approaches to coaching. The workshop focused on exploring positive approaches to adult development, including cross-national work on optimal experience, positive approaches to the measurement of wellbeing, and innovative intervention strategies. The participants also addressed the question of culturally acceptable variants of key concepts like wellbeing.



The meeting offered participants a chance to discuss promising new lines of research and the questions and possibilities it raised for positive development policy and applications, help articulate the European positive psychology identity and take forward the positive approaches research agenda from a European perspective. Ample time was left for discussion and networking in the hope of leaving the program open enough to make it possible for new frameworks and research directions to emerge.

The sessions concerned long-term studies of adult development, cross-cultural studies of positive experience, questions of measurement, and various aspects of applied positive psychology relevant to adult positive development; together with thoughts and plans for the most constructive way forward for future European research in this area, including collaborative ventures.

Those present felt there was a distinctive European perspective on Positive Psychology that was more interdisciplinary, applied and culturally embedded than its American counterpart and that this European perspective added considerable value to the field. There was near consensus that the experience sampling studies of positive experiences offered an important methodological development in attempts to capture experience despite an appreciation of coding difficulties. Henry saw potential for using similar methodologies to investigate positive low arousal states such as contentment. As regards the measurement of wellbeing and related concepts, despite the work that has been most present felt there was a need for more research in various areas. Huppert warned that certain key instruments were not being replicated satisfactorily in European studies, Vitterso warned of the need for careful interpretation of existing data, Boniwell argued for more qualitative in-depth work into the nature of wellbeing. Applications in the field of adult development are proving very popular in Europe. Haworth pointed out some differences in US and European findings as regards work on the flow



experience, Henry argued that individualised interventions were better able to meet the variety of development needs, Huhn discussed the application of an approach combining new ideas with existing concepts. All present agreed that the policy implications were strong and interesting. Some new work in this area was discussed. There was a felt need for more qualitative work, cross national studies, ESM like studies, and longitudinal studies and debates about how best to further these.

One of the goals of the workshop had been to bring together experts to inform isolated researchers of key developments in the emerging field of positive development who were addressing the same area from different perspectives with a view to strengthening links, enhancing collaboration, facilitating intergroup research and co-ordinating future European research. The workshop provided a valuable networking opportunity helping to consolidate relationships that participants have subsequently build on in terms of joint research efforts, joint symposia at various European conferences and other joint enterprises. The collaborations include pan European measurement, comparative cross-national investigations of positive experience and various teaching, dissemination and policy initiatives.

In addition since the event the fields of positive adult development, applied positive psychology and positive organisational scholarship have burgeoned. A number of those present are very prominent in the European and International organising bodies that have emerged with respect to positive psychology for example leading and being on the board of the IPP and ENPP. Certain of the participants were also among the first to offer accredited undergraduate and Masters teaching in this field. Others are linking with industry and educational institutions through research based consultancy and training. This meeting was one of a number that have been critical in facilitating the rapid development of research-based positive adult development across Europe.



4 Final Programme

DAY 1

10.30-11.00 *Coffee*

11.00 **Introduction**

Jane Henry (Milton Keynes, UK), **Antonella Delle Fave** (Milano, Italy)

Presentation of the European Science Foundation (ESF)

Jane Henry for Raija-Leena Punamäki (Standing Com for the Social Sciences)

11.30 **Positive approaches to adult development**

Felicia Huppert (Cambridge, UK) The development of well-being

12.30 *Lunch*

14.00 **The influence of positive experience**

Antonella Delle Fave (Milano, Italy) Subjective experience and quality of life: Individual and community implications

Teresa Freire (Minho, Portugal) Daily experiences of Portuguese adolescents

15.30 *Tea*

16.00 **Measurement and modelling in positive psychology and well-being**

Joar Vitterso (Tromsø, Norway) Critique of current measures in positive psychology

Ilona Boniwell (Latvia and UK) Problems with current approaches to defining and measuring well-being

Marta Bassi (Milano, Italy) Measurement of well-being in daily life: The Experience Sampling Method



18.00 Break

19.30/20.00 *Drink and Dinner off-site*

DAY 2

09.30 **Applications at work**

John Haworth (Manchester, UK) Well-being in organisations

Gerhard Huhn (Berlin, Germany) Motivation -not manipulation; a positive psychology approach to self-motivated learning

11.00 *Tea*

11.15 **Positive personal development**

Jane Henry (Milton Keynes, UK) Embracing diversity

Nash Popovic (Serbia and UK) Methodology for personal development in education and counselling

12.45 *Lunch*

14.00 **European Positive Psychology Discussion**

15.15 *Tea*

15.30 **Research Implications**

17.00 **Close**



5 Final List of Participants

Dr Marta Bassi - Dipartimento di Scienze Precliniche, University of Milan,
'LITA Vialba' via G.B.Grassi, 74, 20157 Milan, Italy. E: marta.bassi@unimi.it
T: 39 02503 19709 F: +39 02503 19705

Dr Ilona Boniwell - School of Health and Social Welfare, Open University,
Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK76AA, UK. E: ib869@openmail.open.ac.uk/
i.boniwell@uel.ac.uk T: +44 1908 274066/ +44 208 223 4384

Prof Antonella Delle Fave - University of Milan, Dipartimento di Scienze
Precliniche 'LITA Vialba' via G.B.Grassi, 74, 20157 Milan, Italy. E:
anronella.dellefave@unimi.it T: +39 02503 19704. F: +39 02503 19705

Dr Teresa Friere - Instituto de Educação e Psicologia. Departamento de
Psicologia. Universidade do Minho, Campus de Gualtar. 4710-057 Braga.
Portugal. E: tfreire@iep.unimho.pt F: +351 253 678 987

Dr John Haworth - Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK. E:
haworthjt@yahoo.com T: +44 1254 51678

Dr Jane Henry - School of Management, Open University, Walton Hall,
Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, UK. E: j.a.henry@open.ac.uk T/F: +44 1908 587052

Dr Gerard Huhn - Institute for Media Psychology, Free University Berlin,
Habelschwerdter Allee 45, 14195 Berlin, Germany. E: gerhuhn@snafu.de T:
+49 172 310 84 77

Dr Felicia Huppert - University of Cambridge, Department of Psychiatry, Box
189 Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge CB2 2QQ, UK. E: fah2@cam.ac.uk
T: +44 1223 336970 F: +44 1223 336968

Dr Di Kuh - National Survey Health and Development, Royal Free and
University College Medical School, Public Health and Epidemiology,
University College London, Gower St Campus, 1-9 Torrington Place,
London WC1E 6BT. E: d.kuh@nshrd.mrc.ac.uk/d.kuh@ucl.ac.uk



Dr Nash Popovic - Personal Synthesis, 28 Hans Place, London, SW1X 0JY, UK.

E: n.popovic@uel.ac.uk T: +44 7941 053936

Professor Joar Vitterso - Department of Psychology, University of Tromso, N-

9037 Tromso, Norway. E: joarv@psyk.uit.no T: +77 64 63 69 F: +77 64 52 91

Professor Ursula Staudinger from the University of Bremen in Germany

(sekstaudiner@iu-bremen.de) and Professor Willibald Ruch from the

University of Zurich in Switzerland (willibald.ruch@bluewin.ch) had been

expected but in the event were unable to attend but sent a paper. Nic Marks

from the New Economics Foundation in the UK (nic.marks@neweconomics

.org) was unable to attend but sent papers.

6 Statistical Information

Country representation

UK	4	Latvia	1
Norway	1	Bosnia	1
Italy	2	Portugal	1
Germany	1		

Age distribution

21-30	2	51-60	2
31-40	3	41-50	3
61-70	1		



Discipline

Applied psychology 1
Occupational psychology 1
Clinical neuropsychology 1
Positive psychology 1
Medical psychology 1
Qualitative methods in psychology 1
Quantitative measurement in psychology 1
Educational development and counselling 1
Management consultant 1
Leisure studies 1
Life course epidemiology 1

Specialisms

Positive psychology	Leisure
Experience sampling	Positive ageing
Personal and situational determinants of wellbeing	Adult development
Measurement of wellbeing	Youth development
Life course development	Positive coaching
Optimal experience	Management development