

The Truth about Future Society and Well-being (2)

Era of Psychological Capital

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We are Responsible for Our Relationships with Those Around Us

A problem came up at my work recently. Four people were involved, all of whom I trusted. When I spoke to the first person, the person suggested the problem was caused by another person's misunderstanding. On speaking to that other person, the person told me that this was not the case and that holding such doubts was vexatious. The remaining two people also told different versions of the situation. It was only after speaking to all four that I understood. The truth was that all of them were wrong. It was a situation worthy of an Agatha Christie novel.

All four of the people answered my questions honestly. On close questioning, however, it became apparent that each was in possession of only some of the facts and had filled in the gaps with their own conjectures. It was these conjectures that, in effect, were all wrong. Each feeling confident in his or her own position, none believed themselves to be the source of the problem. In other words, the problem must lie in other people.

This itself is a reason why communication is essential. Using experiment to investigate unknown possibilities inevitably requires a stream of judgements that are too complex to be decided with each one's limited information. This is the reason why filling in the gaps among members with regard to

information and knowledge is always required.

What should be done when one is confronted by such information and knowledge gaps? There are two ways of approaching this: to take responsibility for filling in the gaps or to hand off the responsibility to other people.

I call this first approach "co-creation." The second approach, on the other hand, comes in two forms: one can either be a "follower" who accepts the other person's views unconditionally, or one can be a "skeptic" who assumes that the other person is responsible when things do not go well. What these two alternatives have in common is that they put the responsibility on other people.

What is needed is always "co-creation." This means that you take responsibility for relationships with the people around you. The other alternatives of being a follower or a skeptic are both pathologies that are inimical to the organization and wider society.

Unfortunately, as living creatures, human beings unknowingly fall victim to credulity and skepticism, being prone to pushing off responsibility onto others. Can we not find some way to resist this temptation and accept responsibility for ourselves?

The key to doing so is to use a quantitative and scientific approach to make this planet a better place for us, even when the problem to be solved is broad and abstract. Having collected large amounts of data on human behavior in many different situations over the past 13 years, what we have found is that the good condition of a group of people is characterized by factors that are evident in people's physical actions and that can be quantified using sensors. What characterizes these good conditions of people is what has been called "happiness" for years. We have discovered that it is possible through technology to quantify "happiness" using sensors.

Another important truth uncovered by this data is that we cannot achieve happiness on our own. We found that happiness comes about through interaction with those around us. Happiness is determined by our ability to build good relationships with the people we deal with, and building such relationships is the best way to enhance our happiness. This is an example of co-creation. In this sense, everyone needs to contribute to the co-creation activity of generating happiness among the people we deal with (customers, colleagues, superiors, collaborators, and others), and the responsibility to do so falls on each of us. We are responsible for building good relationships with the people around us. This is something that

lies at the heart of economic prosperity and the happiness of society at large.

Thinking about Co-creation in Terms of Psychological Capital

However, given that co-creation is a deliberate and proactive activity, co-creation takes energy of mind. One could not describe it as easy. What matters is that sustainable happiness is maintained through this deliberate and proactive co-creation, which also achieves high productivity. In other words, sustainable happiness is completely different from transitory pleasure and could even be described as its exact opposite. It is by taking the initiative and constructively choosing to follow a more difficult path that we achieve sustainable happiness.

The common factors behind this sustainable happiness have been studied in terms of psychology. This is the concept of "psychological capital," a quantitative scale that was proposed by Professor Fred Luthans and which has been backed by numerous scientific studies. What makes this "psychological capital" significant for us is that it drives sustainable happiness, whereas it is a set of skills that can be enhanced through practice and learning. It focuses on those things that we can consciously change. An extensive review of the literature in psychology and management theory concluded that psychological capital is made up of four skills. The first is *hope*, meaning that we will find our own way forward. The second is *efficacy*, meaning that we embark on activities with confidence. The third is the *resilience* to confront difficulties. The fourth is *optimism*, meaning the ability to tell a positive story about complex situations. Together abbreviated as "HERO," these four skills provide the most effective underpinnings of sustainable happiness and performance.

Having psychological capital gives us the ability to take on the difficult task of building good relationships with people around us and taking responsibility for doing so. It is impossible in principle to know what people are thinking or what experiences they bring with them. We only ever have access to incomplete information. What is needed is to find one's own way and to make progress under these conditions while also not being daunted by differences and misunderstandings with other people, drawing on our own will to tell ourselves a positive story when we confront complex situations. Those people and organizations that are able to do this enjoy both happiness and high productivity. Moreover, this psychological

capital is something that we can learn and that we can enhance by training and with the accumulation of experience. What we need to do, then, is to build mechanisms into society that are explicitly intended to enhance psychological capital.

When I experienced difficulty when I was a child, my mother always told me "Where there is a will, there is a way." My wife tells a similar story. I suppose that many parents gave their children this advice during the 1960s and 70s when we were growing up. This idea that you can only succeed if you first make an effort has much in common with the HERO concept of psychological capital described above. While my childhood was a time of considerably less material wealth by today's standards, it may well have been a time that was rich in psychological capital, with many "*heroes*." As we have gotten richer, this attitude has become rapidly diluted, being dismissed as mere mind games or doggedness. We need to clearly distinguish this idea of psychological capital from such simplistic interpretations. Moreover, the accumulation of psychological capital will likely become more necessary than ever as social change continues to accelerate.

What is important for the future of society is that we all become "*explorers*" who actively engage in experiment and learning. This means all of us becoming "*heroes*." By doing so we should be able to overcome our greatest societal challenge, i.e. the class conflict between knowledge workers and service workers. Perhaps now is the time to remember again the idea that has fallen by the wayside these past 40 years: where there is a will, there is a way.