

Happiness at work and in life

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Predicting the future

Imagine it is the last day of spring quarter, and summer is right around the corner. How great do you think you will be feeling??

Happiness mistakes

- We do the wrong things: many behaviors don't actually make us happier
 - Mispredicting future emotions
 - We buy stuff when we should be buying time and experiences
 - We engage in low-quality forms of social connection
- We don't do the right things: behaviors that *will* make us happier
 - Meaningful social connection
 - Flow and deep work

What doesn't make us happy?

Affective Forecasting

- Affective forecasting is a prediction of one's future emotions
- We are not very good at predicting emotion intensity and duration
- Example: Wilson et al. (2000) found that sports fans overestimated how happy they will be after their team won and how long this happiness will last

Mispredicting Happiness: Consumerism

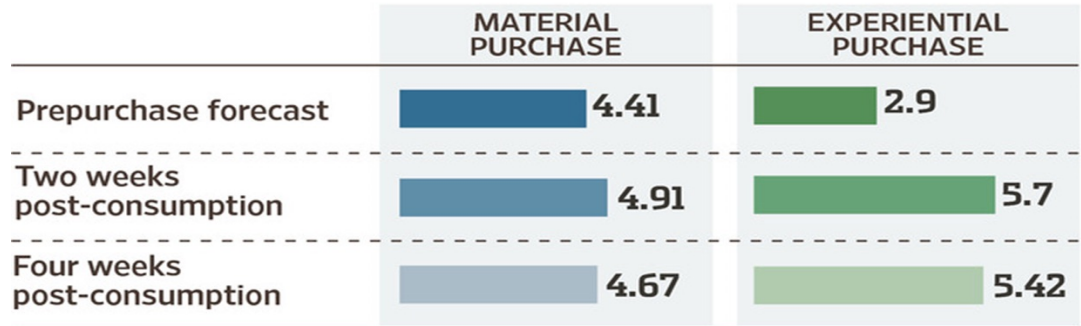
Retail therapy

Lasting Effect

People often fail to accurately predict the economic benefits of experiential purchases compared with material ones, according to one study.

Did you feel your money will be/was well spent?

(1 = not at all; 7 = very much)



Source: The Journal of Positive Psychology

The Wall Street Journal

Spending Money on Material Purchases

- Spending money on experiences leads to more happiness than spending money on material goods
- Why?
 - Happiness over material items does not last – hedonic adaptation
 - Material goods do not contribute to social relationships
 - Buying stuff fosters materialism
 - Things age, but memories are more long lasting



Don't click "Like"

We crave rich and meaningful interactions with others
Digital communication tools are a social fast food

- Low-quality forms of interaction
- Don't satisfy our social needs
- Make us less likely to engage in more meaningful actions

Online interactions are easier but less fulfilling

“Substituting conversation for mere connection” (Turkle, 2011, *Alone Together*)

What makes us happy?

What makes us happy?

- Meaningful social connections
- Flow and deep work

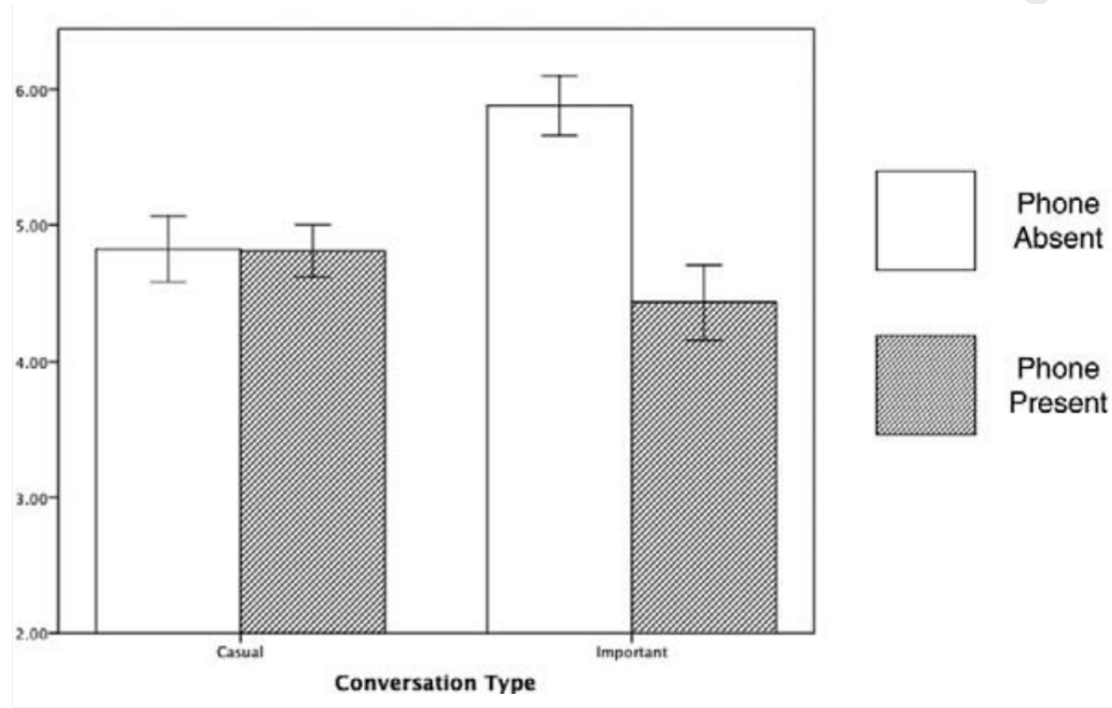


Phone presence decreases enjoyment of face-to-face interaction with friends & family

- Participants randomly assigned to share a meal with friends & family with phones on the table or put away
- Results: when phones were present (vs. absent), participants felt more distracted, which reduced how much they enjoyed spending time with their friends/family
- Implication: while phones can connect us to others that are far away, they make us less connected to others that are close by

Dwyer, Kushlev, & Dunn, 2018

Mere presence of phone influences conversation quality



Why don't we talk to strangers?



We think it would be unpleasant

Participants: Chicago commuters

Study 1: “Imagine talking to a stranger. Would it be pleasant?”

Most people said NO.

Guessed that <50% of strangers would want to talk.

...But that's where we're wrong

Study 2: Actually go talk to a stranger.

- People had a more pleasant time when they talked to a stranger than when they were silent.
- Conversation partners welcomed the connection, too.

Study 3: Participants in a waiting room

- Tested happiness of both people: the conversation starter + target
- Everyone was happier after chatting
- Reported that the wait seemed shorter

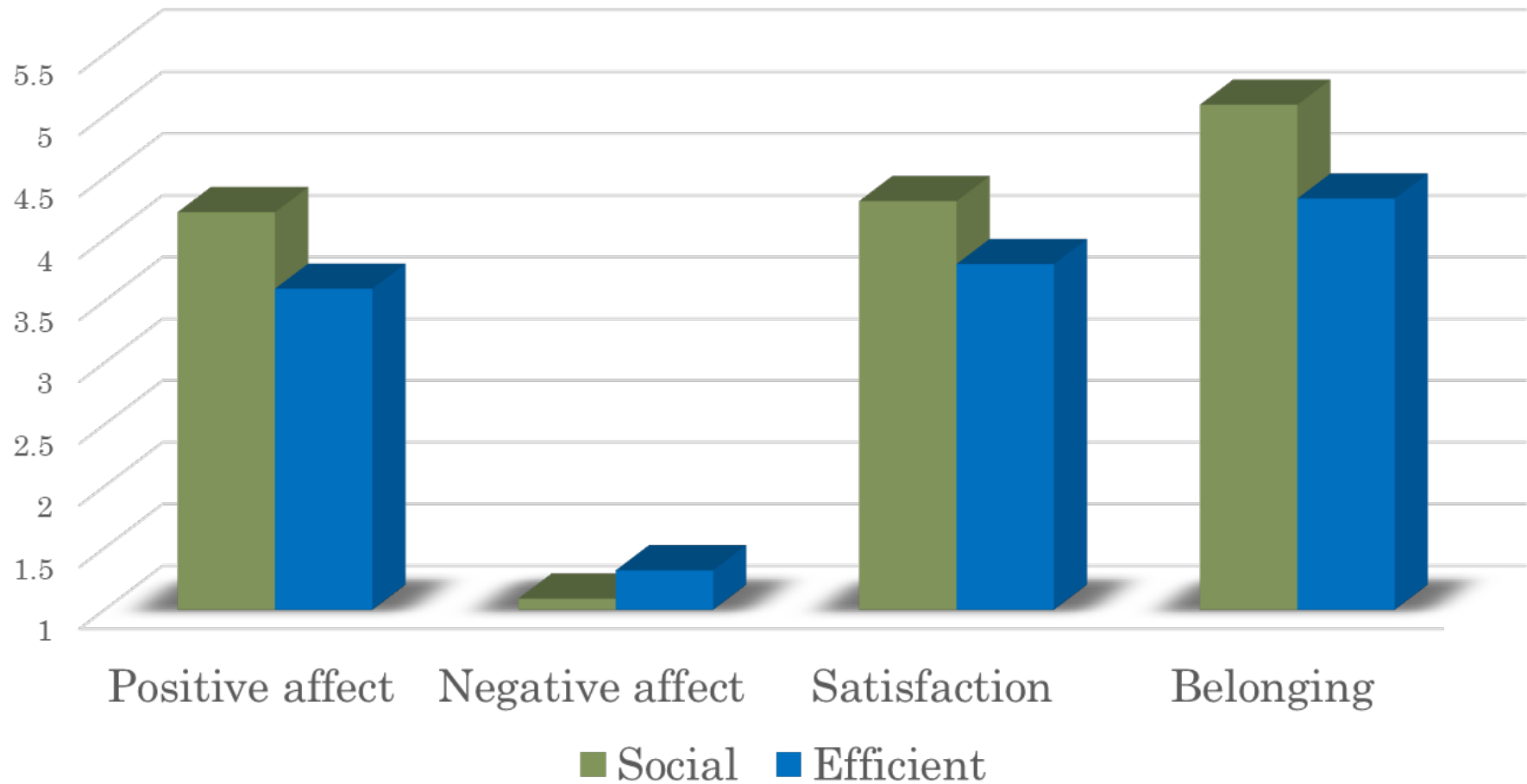
More Evidence

Another study was interested in seeing if treating a stranger like an acquaintance will be good for people's happiness

2 conditions:

- Social: “Have a genuine interaction with the cashier—smile, make eye contact to establish a connection, and have a brief conversation.”
- Efficient: “make your interaction with the cashier as efficient as possible—have your money ready, and avoid unnecessary conversation.”



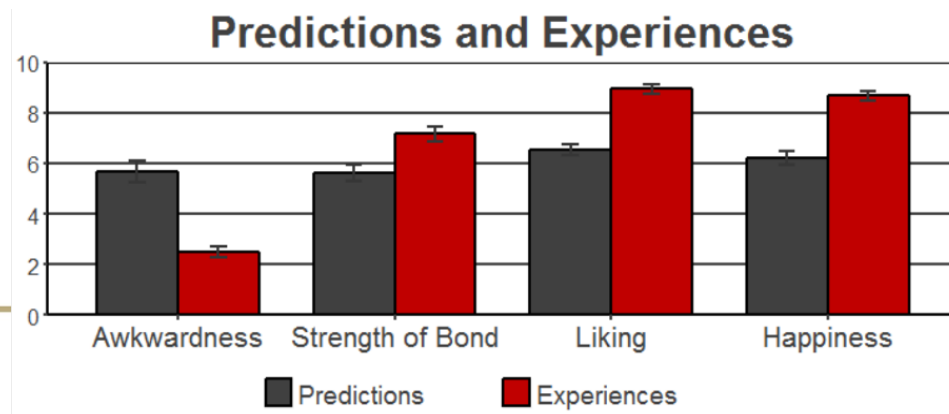


(Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014)

Meaningful conversations are also surprisingly pleasant

People who discussed deep questions overestimated how awkward they would feel and underestimated connectedness and happiness

This happened because people underestimated how much their conversation partner would care about what they said



Kardas, Kumar, & Epley, 2018

Let's Talk to Strangers!

Find a person who you haven't talked to before and chat with them for a bit

Flow and deep work

- We feel *flow* when we are deeply engaged and absorbed in a task that is just challenging enough for our current ability level (Czikszentmihalyi, 1999)
- Working in a flow state helps us achieve *deep work*: professional activity performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that pushes your cognitive capabilities to their limit. (Newport, 2016)
 - These efforts create new value, improve your skill, and are hard to replicate.
 - Compare with *shallow work*: non-cognitively demanding, logistical-style tasks, often performed while distracted

Characteristics of flow

Suspension of time

Focused attention

Complete absorption in activity

Merging of action and awareness

Decreased focus on the self

Person reaches their full physical/cognitive potential



Suggestions for increasing your capacity for deep work

- Give yourself long periods of time for uninterrupted focus
- Develop a *scarcity mindset* about your time and attention
- Time-blocking: Schedule blocks of time in your day to work on specific tasks
- Buy yourself more time

Buying Time

- Participants from the U.S., Canada, and Denmark
- Asked "how much money they spent each month to increase their free time by paying someone else to complete unenjoyable daily tasks"
- Found a positive correlation between the amount spent and life satisfaction
- Also had a sample of millionaires from the Netherlands
- Found the same results!

(Whillans et al., 2017)



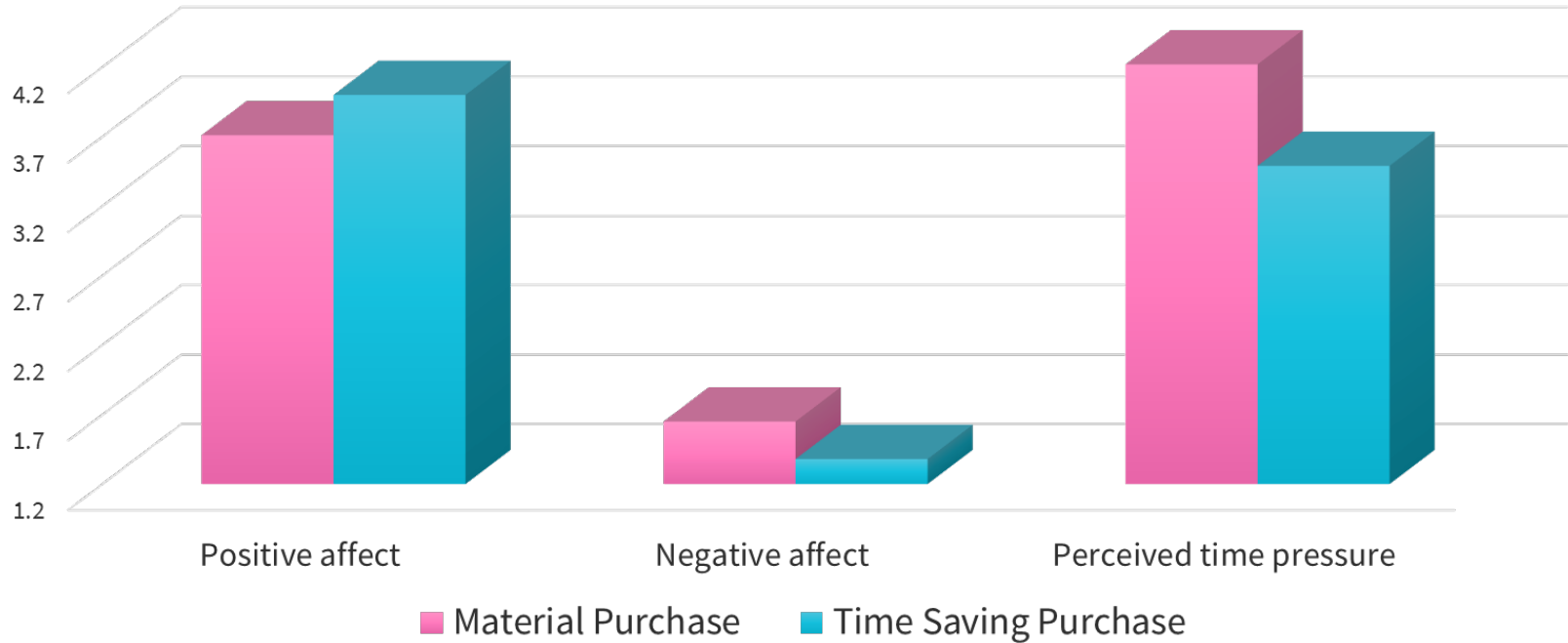
Buying Time



- Recruited a sample of Canadians
- Two payments of \$40 to spend on two weekends
- Purchase that would save time
- Material purchase
- Measured positive and negative affect, and perceived time pressure

(Whillans et al., 2017)

Buying Time Study Results



(Whillans et al., 2017)

Takeaways: Applying happiness lessons to work

Lean in to opportunities to **connect** with your coworkers and **build community** at work

Also carve out longer blocks of time for uninterrupted, focused, **deep work**

Hybrid work schedules may allow for the best of both worlds by making space for both

Thank You!