DESIGNING FOR PERSONAL-HAPPINESS: AN EMPIRICAL CASE STUDY

Aija FREIMANE
School of Art and Design, TU Dublin, Ireland

ABSTRACT
'Put on your own oxygen mask first before assisting others' the flight attendant reminds passengers just before take-off on a flight. When serving others, designers tend to feel overwhelmed, stressed and often without support. An overload of work, external emergencies and conditional situations may cause physical and mental health problems, such as anxiety, panic, or imposter syndrome. Before serving businesses and society, designers should learn to help themselves.

To equip young designers for professional life under uncertain, time-bound, and specific external conditions and to practice mindfulness and happiness in designers' everyday life. An assignment and methodology for designing a solution for long-lasting personal happiness was created in 2015. A subjective theory of value, happiness, and personal satisfaction analysis in line with user experience methods were combined and applied to reveal an empirical study of personal happiness memorabilia, and values, experiences, identifying the potential for design solutions sustaining self-happiness. Identified solutions were prototyped, tested, and examined to reflect a paradigm of personal happiness and contentment.

Master's design students reflected that the design brief of designing for personal long-lasting happiness was the most confusing assignment during their study years but at the same time it was the most meaningful. It allowed them to understand the pros and cons of personal happiness as human beings and professionals. This empirical case study analysis reveals that more than 70% of designed solutions indicate professional procrastination and anxiety. Individually designed time management solutions help to address personal happiness and satisfaction as an everyday routine. Designing for personal happiness is the first assignment that young designers reflected on their own emotional needs. It helped to equip students to be agents of their own self regeneration.

Keywords: Design for personal happiness, design for mindfulness

1 INTRODUCTION

Design is a method of identifying a real need and provides solutions that results in contentment. Happy and satisfied societies and customers should be the purpose of design actions and their end results [1]. In the material world our sense of happiness and satisfaction is the result of a feeling or experience created by positive emotions and memories when products and services and systems are used in line with a social interaction. Happiness is all that matters at the end and a pleasure-purpose principle leads towards happiness [2].

Design among other creative activities is acknowledged as the key value to individual and collective wellbeing [3]. By not thinking of themselves, may lead designers to be overwhelmed, stressed, and often without external support. To create products and services that create a better society and world, designers should empirically understand the concept of happiness and wellbeing by addressing in themselves first. Happiness as a relative concept for every individual is different. It is difficult to express any satisfaction as happiness being a continuous process. To measure happiness as satisfaction and wellbeing, a 'good' or 'bad' measure is used, expressed on a scale of 'very bad' to 'very good'[4]. Assessing life satisfaction on this scale does not include the meaning and significance of human life, nor the connection with the people we love, nor emotional intelligence.

'Any kind of reflexion on the development progress and transformative chances of today's societies must start with empirically proven values and attitudes' [5] rather than by stating business objectives. An individual's happiness or satisfaction does not arise as an external stimulus but rather as purposefully favoured experience and a sense of interpretation. Subjective well-being is closely linked to personal

and social well-being, hence individual reflection of self-emotional intelligence and memorabilia as happiness. Happiness can be expressed as joy, satisfaction with life, positive emotions, meaning of life and overall feeling of contentment [6] that according to Seligman is well-being [7] and is also linked with genetics, relationships with family, belonging, social security and appropriate health care [8]. 'It is not easy to practice love, friendship, generosity; understanding, or solidarity within a system whose rules, goals, and information streams are geared for lesser human qualities'[9]. To design for happy a society, designers had never been asked to design for themselves, to understand their own experiences and to create a solution that would help themselves to be happier. Some research indicates that one can learn about appropriate behaviour by observing and experiencing situations [10] and to improve our lives, we need to improve our quality of experiences [11].

People's cognitive and affective evaluations of their lives and overall emotional wellbeing are central to our quality of life as individuals [12], where cognitive appraisal describes how we consider our overall life satisfaction and our satisfaction with family life, career, but affective appraisal concerns our emotional experience [13]. The optimal experience when people spend their time on activities that give them the most satisfaction and when nothing else is as important, created the concept of flow as the basis of happiness, satisfaction and true motivation, collective resilience, and rituals [14]. Emotions' may shape actions and thoughts and are conscious in certain circumstances. Understanding self-emotional intelligence is key to designing personal long-lasting happiness. Emotional intelligence is defined as an ability which focuses on the perception and expression of emotion accurately and adaptively; along with the ability to understand emotional knowledge, use feelings to facilitate thought, and to regulate emotions, in not only oneself, but also others [15]. Self-emotional intelligence has been linked to various positive outcomes such as leadership, moderating workplace stress, positive work attitudes, team cohesiveness, performance, and work outcomes [16]. To express emotions an object is bound with personal moral and ethical values [17]. Things remind people who they belong to and reveal their personality and symbolic common ties between people [18].

I was wondering why, in design education assignments and design briefs were not questioning empirical and personal wellbeing before training students to solve problems for others or addressing challenges and external complexities. The paper analysis is an assignment to create a solution for long-lasting personal happiness as critical analysis of happiness/satisfaction, value, mindfulness theories in personal life given to master's students of Design Faculty from 2016-2020.

2 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS: DESIGNING FOR PERSONAL HAPPINESS

To equip young designers for professional life under uncertain, time-bound, and specific external conditions and to practice mindfulness and happiness in designers' everyday life, I created an assignment and methodology to design a solution for long-lasting personal happiness.

A subjective theory of value, happiness, and personal satisfaction analysis in line with user experience methods were combined and applied to reveal an empirical study of personal happiness memorabilia, and values, experiences, identifying the potential for design solutions sustaining self-happiness. Designers by analysing and designing for themselves individually and anonymously, reflected and tested solutions that help them recognise happiness in everyday life, thus better function as individuals as well as professional teammates. Designing for personal happiness reveals hedonic goodness and allows empirically to establish an instrumental and technical virtues.

Measures to assess happiness and emotional intelligence involved interpretation of specific compelling forces to which people are exposed in their empirically observable life's, namely what happens when the 'subject', a solitary individual, thinks, perceives, and performs [19]. Subjective well-being is strongly influenced by expectations, personality, circumstances, aspirations, and interpersonal comparisons [20]. As there is no single definition of well-being, I left it to the respondents (design students themselves) to decide what the state of satisfaction and well-being would be for each of them thus focussing on subjective well-being as people's evaluation of their personal life [21]. Self-emotional appraisal tied to others' emotional appraisal and relationship to things, brought subjective outcomes as design solutions for long-lasting personal happiness.

2.1 Methodology and methods

The triple design process [22] was applied to design for long-lasting personal happiness. In define phase an empirical study of personal values, happiness memorabilia and 'pain' points as experiences were

identified by applying combined user experience methods such as empathy, user journey and service blueprint maps (Figure 1). Chosen methodology corresponds to the process of allocation one's attention and as consideration how can you make and facilitate better decisions about what to pay attention to, and in what ways. It reflects inputs as various stimuli, the production process as allocation of attention, and outputs as happiness [23]. Methodology and methods urged to apply empathy and experience analysis to themselves and perceive oneself as 'the other' person. Understanding personal values and needs students acknowledged significance of emotional intelligence. As no one ever before had asked of students as young designers to reflect personal values, emotions, happy and not so happy moments, the assignment, its methods and methodology initially was perceived as confusing.

My experience back-casting map

					What happened at that moment?	What happened after?
Call back happy feeling (moment) / unhappy feeling (moment)						
	What happened before?					
	What was I thinking, feeling, doing? What were touchpoints?					
I was expecting something?						
What was I missing?						
Was I wasting too much time?						
What were my priorities?						
What were the biggest pain points?						
What was happiness evoker?						
What should I do to minimize the pain points?						

Figure 1. Template worksheets of design for personal happiness assignment, Aija Freimane, 2018

Happy and unhappy experiences were defined in a back-casting method, calling back the moment as memorabilia, identifying an action, emotions, expectations, touchpoints, thinking, feeling and the time before and after the happy/unhappy moments. Maps helped to identify a goal of the action, experienced emotional journey and reflect self-emotional intelligence. Positive experience in line with pain points or any negative experience were identified as cause and effects of taken activities, social communication, and pinpointed possible interactions to improve personal experience.

Empathy-experience maps (Figure 2) helped to define and to understand multiple pathways and complexities of personal experiences, to empathise, uncover and prioritize values as causes for experiences, wants, needs, thoughts as causes of personal actions, attitudes, and behaviour.

Figure 2. Identified experiences to design for personal happiness, Anonymous students, 2016-2020

Chosen methodology helped to recognize visually activities such as a storytelling experiences and emotions of the journey behind every day professional and personal routine. As a result of personal life satisfaction/happiness analysis students acknowledged personal positive and negative experiences. Further on young designers identified touchpoints and possible interventions for solutions towards long-lasting personal happiness. Following identified high-end experiences, activities and touchpoints that resulted in contentment or personal happiness memorabilia were prototyped and tested to minimize traits by sad and unhappy emotions. Consciousness as mindful actions and touchpoints with material objects were identified and created as memorabilia.

2.2 Designing for personal happiness. Case study analysis

Samples that are portrayed in this paper reflect designed solutions for long-lasting personal happiness in a master's degree module 'Design for sustainability and society' later renamed as 'Designed mindfulness' over a period of five years. The paper reveals that more than 70% of designed solutions indicated a need for individual time management that helped to address meaningful relationships with self and others, and to cope with professional procrastination and anxiety.

Analysis of various situations where people, things and services were involved, respondents acknowledged that to feel and to experience happiness it is important to achieve professional and personal goals. However, in order to achieve goals, to have time for self, time management and structure as routine is important. Respondents also noticed that happiness is when moments and time is shared with loved one. It is very important to write goals and tasks every day and to see them being achieved. Respondents revealed that by notifying emotions linked with activities, particularly hedonic ones, helped to understand the critical points and to mind everyday happiness, that goes hand in hand with personal awareness and the process of achieving goals. Respondents acknowledged that time to self or solitude, as time management is important. Ignorance of self-needs as physical and mental body can deprive the opportunity to experience happiness. An established daily routine with visible tasks, goals, able to visualize them being performed, capture emotions, and to plan time for self, bring respondents to experience long-lasting personal happiness. Personally designed tables are visual reminders (Figure 3) and demonstrates that we as humans are individuals and there are multi-visual perceptions. Students agreed that it is important to understand self in order to find the individual pattern for sustaining long-lasting personal happiness. It was acknowledged that it takes time to change behaviour and habit.
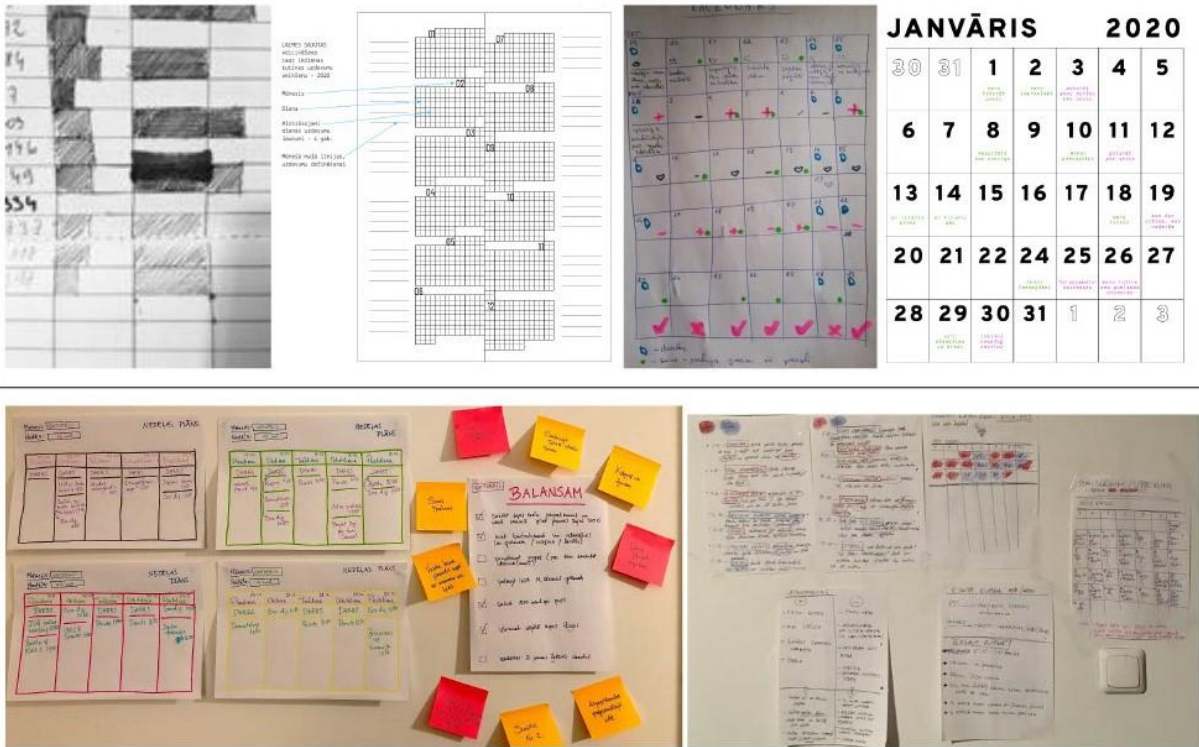

Figure 3. Tested and designed solutions for personal happiness (time management),
Anonymous students, 2016-2020

It is possible to categorize prototyped and tested timetables over five years that features daily, weekly monthly job priorities, challenges, sharing and gratitude, personal time, and rest, as well as emotions and experiences.

For about 20% of respondents as a source of their personal long-lasting happiness named family and friends. To sustain long-lasting happiness respondents questioned - what are the aspects that trigger happiness? As a key source for these cases a presence on dedicated time or being present in time was defined. It has become even more topical as in the last years we have been working from home, and even on weekends. The boundaries between work, home and personal life have become blurred. There is no clear line between office and home business, 'we don't clock off when we are off the clock'. The tool to witness personal happiness acts as a reminder to stay focused, to recall personal values and to remind oneself of a slow life in every moment. A wristwatch with no time indicators, but with a second tick, is a symbol that arose from feeling happiness in close talks and activities with loved ones. Being kind and saying something good in our daily lives to the people around cheers not only their emotional state, but also self-happiness. To prototype design mindfulness initially smartphone as reminders were used, but later developed to wristwatches that reminds of personal happiness reminders (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Tested and designed solutions for personal happiness (relationship), Anonymous students, 2016-2020

Attention is the glue that holds life together. Our happiness is determined by what we pay attention to. And what we pay attention to determines how we act, and it determines how happy we will be.

In the five years since this assignment has been undertaken, students reflected that it was the most confusing assignment during their studies but at the same time it was the most meaningful. It allowed them to understand pros and cons of personal happiness both as human beings and professionals.

3 CONCLUSIONS

Students revealed that during the assignment process they often found themselves in situations of anger, confusion, embarrassment and questioning: is it necessary to analyse happiness? After constant arguments with themselves and discussions in their minds, they reflected - yes, that analysis was needed. Students revealed that design brief, methodology and methods helped to better understand themselves, they found experiencing moments of happiness more often and consciously, as well as been aware of experience, actions, habits, and behaviours. Students responded that no one ever before asked of them to reflect their personal values, emotions and happiness, nor to link it with professional practice.

Some reflections on the assignments revealed: 'When I heard the design brief, I thought to myself, this task will not help me. But with each next day working on the assignment, I understood how important it is to me to find myself and to find how to make myself happy.' The other student: 'Explored methodology and methods helped to understand what makes me happy and that big moments of joy in my life are in full of swing. Focusing on the lower points for a better understanding of the self-happiness scale, which helped to understand my strengths and values, and incorporate them into my design solution.'

It is much easier to apply design methods to design service or products as solutions to external problems than to mirror them to self. Designers had to accept that this time they will analyse themselves as users.

This empirical case study analysis reveals that more than 70% of designed solutions indicate professional procrastination and anxiety. Individually designed solutions for long-lasting personal happiness and satisfaction reflected students as young designers own emotional needs and helped to equip students to be agents of self-regeneration when working under uncertain, time-bound, and specific external conditions.

Wellbeing as prosperity has not only an economic - rationally quantitative explanation, but also a more important –personal satisfaction, happiness, and social aspect.

REFERENCES

[1] Freimane A. (2020) *Perceived Design value. The Socio-economic impact of Design.* Rīga: Latvijas Mākslas akadēmija.

[2] Dolan P. (2014). *Happiness by Design. Finding pleasure and purpose in everyday life.* Great Britain: Penguin Books.

[3] The Department of Culture, H. a. (2020). *A National Cultural Policy Framework to 2025. Culture 2025.* Dublin: Government of Ireland.

[4] Van Praag B. and Ferrer-i-Carbonell A. (2008). *Happiness Quantified. A satisfaction calculus Approach.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[5] German Advisory Council on Global Change. (2011). *World in Transition. A Social contract for Sustainability. Flagship Report.* Berlin: WBGU. p. 67

[6] Diener E. (2009). *Assesing Well-Being, Social indicators reserach series vol 39.* London: Springer.

[7] Seligman M. (2011). *Flourish.* London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

[8] Common M. and Stagl S. (2005). *Ecological Economics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[9] Meadows D., Randers J. and Meadows D. (2010). *Limits to Growth. The 30-years update.* Oxon: Earthscan. p. 282

[10] Phillion J. (2002). Narrative multiculturalism. *Journal of Curriculum Studies 34(3)*, 265–7

[11] Csikszentmihalyi M. (2002). *Flow. The classic work on how to achieve happiness.* London: Rider.

[12] Skevington S. M. and Böhnke J. R. How is subjective well-being related to quality of life? Do we need two concepts and both measures? Soc Sci Med. 2018 June 206:22-30.

[13] Diener E. (2000). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and a proposal for a national index. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 34–43.

[14] Csikszentmihalyi M. (2002). *Flow. The classic work on how to achieve happiness.* London: Rider.

[15] Salovey P., Mayer J. D. and Lopes P. N. (2003). Measuring emotional intelligence as a set of abilities with the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test. In S. J. Lopez, & C. R. Snyder, *Positive psychological assessment: A handbook of models and measures* (pp. 251-265). American Psychological Association.

[16] Crowne K. A. (2013). Cultural exposure, emotional intelligence, and cultural intelligence: An exploratory study. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management (1)*, 5-22.

[17] Jasper J. M. (2003). The Emotions of Protest. In J. Goodwin, & J. M. Jasper, *The Social Movements Reader. Cases and Concepts.* (pp. 153-162). Oxford: Blackwell.

[18] Csikszentmihalyi M. (1993). Why we need things. In S. Lubar, & D. W. Kingery, *History from things: essays on material culture* (pp. 20-29). London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

[19] Elias N. (1978). *what is Sociology?* New York: Columbia University Press

[20] Warr P. (1999). Well-being in the workplace. D. Kahneman, E. Diener and N. Schwarz, *well-being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology* (lpp. 392-412). New York: Russell Sage Foundatio

[21] Freimane A. (2020). *Postdoctoral study 'Identification system of design's socioeconomic impact towards transformation to a knowledge-intensive economy in Latvia'.* Riga: Latvijas Makslas akademija. Retrieved from https://www.aijafreimane.com/_files/ugd/ed7c53_09da1ba5702449b2adc3fabfe02a3e21.pdf

[22] Freimane A. (2020). *Postdoctoral study 'Identification system of design's socioeconomic impact towards transformation to a knowledge-intensive economy in Latvia'.* Riga: Latvijas Makslas akademija. Retrieved from https://www.aijafreimane.com/_files/ugd/ed7c53_09da1ba5702449b2adc3fabfe02a3e21.pdf

[23] Dolan P. (2014). *Happiness by Design. Finding pleasure and purpose in everyday life.* Great Britain: Penguin Books.