

A Journey from Optimism to Hope

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Abstract: *A journey from optimism to hope documents how the optimism/pessimism dichotomy can be overturned to a concept laden with agency. Hope Theory has great applicability to engagement with the future. This piece clarifies the concept of optimism and illustrates why it is not useful in a futures context; it then investigates Hope Theory as a possible successor.*

Introduction

Optimism is a concept which is often compared to being pessimistic. Optimism is usually described as 'helpful' while pessimism is usually dismissed as 'getting in the way'. This dichotomy is interesting, especially in times such as these. The future for many people is not optimistic. There are societal and environmental challenges heading our way in the 21st century. Those who try and warn us about these are usually labelled as 'pessimistic' while those who tell us not to worry, that we will be saved are regarded as 'optimists'.

This dichotomy leaves one feeling rather ambivalent. Surely both perspectives have something useful to contribute and also have their dangers. Too much optimism can leave us in no state to prepare for the challenges ahead, while too much pessimism can leave us with a feeling of hopelessness.

So some questions start to emerge when looking at optimism, pessimism, and the future. What is optimism and how does it inform our view of the future? The follow up question then, is optimism important? Is pessimism more important? What role does hope play in all this?

There are large amounts of psychological research given to the concept of optimism. Martin Seligman is a front runner in this subject and has written many books on how having an optimistic outlook can change one's life. Having read much of his work, it became clear that optimism by itself was not explaining enough about what encourages action in individuals when they are faced with dilemmas and goals – where is the agency? Although optimism is able to be learned¹, there is a nagging doubt that changing one's disposition to events or altering one's explanatory mindset was going to result in action.

Hope theory was been mentioned in one of the literature reviews on optimism. A follow up email to the pre-eminent researcher in the field – Prof. C.R Snyder, at the University of Kansas resulted in a Fedex envelope of resources being delivered.²

Having read these and a number of pieces on images of the future, the conclusion has been reached that hope is a powerful concept to utilise when exploring the future. The theory of Hope conceptualizes it as 'learned thinking pattern...(with) manifestations in overt behaviour that can be objectively observed...Hope is one's belief in the ability to pursue goals.'³

Hope is used as a concept in Futures Studies and it is the author's belief that we should be more aware of the psychological basis on which this concept rests. Hope can be used as a typology – high and low hope types. It can also be used as a way to influence behaviour and is instrumental in enacting preferred futures. Hope has a future-orientation as 'a positive future is made more likely by goal-directed thoughts and actions occurring in the present moment'.⁴ 30 years worth of studies on Hope have shown that hopeful belief is directly linked to hopeful behaviours which in turn strengthen hopeful thoughts.⁵

The interest for the futurist is that hope can be identified as one of the motivating factors in human history and as such has momentous agentic qualities. If we deal in the creation of preferred futures, then identifying methods through which we can assist the individual's movement towards action on these futures will be of value to the outcome of our projects. The

ability to identify high and low hope types in an organisation or group will potentially add depth to any backcasting exercise. Also the propensity for high hope people to enjoy the *process* of achieving goals (pathway setting and motivation) is a powerful hook on which to hang many futures tools and concepts.

The premise of this piece is that being a futurist is about developing preferred futures. I will not be discussing hope in terms of the extrapolation of what we already have, I am specifically interested in the interaction between hope and the future we wish to create. I think this interaction will be useful to both the organisational or consultant futurist and those working on a larger scale to create social foresight.

Preferred futures

Wendell Bell identified three assumptions that underlie Futures Studies:

1. humans by their behaviour constantly shape their natural and social environments and, in doing so, shape their own future, although not always in ways they intend or understand
2. disciplined and valid prospective thinking can help people shape their environments and their futures effectively and responsibly
3. explicit and objective moral analysis can help people responsibly create desirable futures⁶

In addition to these the Integral perspective investigates the future through a framework in which the following are viewed:

1. the specific ways that stakeholders construct meaning and significance
2. culturally derived perspectives, rules and systems of meaning
3. the social infrastructure, including people's concrete skills, behaviour and actions
4. the nature and dynamics of the relevant societal structures and systems⁷

With these guidelines in mind, we can step out and develop scenarios, run visioning processes or use other methods through which individuals can envision their desired or preferred futures. The point at which we can sometimes come adrift is at the point of action...what are the steps required in the present to generate the futures which are envisaged. How do we develop momentum within the organisation or individual to want to take those steps and to keep the end point in mind when challenges appear (which they surely will) and to make the appropriate changes to the path when required? I believe that the development of hopeful futures, those which take account of the psychological processes that surround hope, take us a step closer to this goal.

Developing images of the future

The point of developing images of possible futures is to 'move away from a passive or fatalistic acceptance of what may happen to an active and confident participation in creating positively desired futures'.⁸ Rubin argues that images of the future held by individuals can be studied to reveal how they perceive their present reality.

Each individual's idea of the future, together with the prevailing social facts and commonly shared ideas and expectations, had a contributory influence on the general direction of human decision-making and actions in the present day.⁹

Images of the future are used by humans to orient themselves by holding their future hopes and dreams and behaving in accordance with them. Ingvar states that people 'instinctively and constantly develop plans for the future.'¹⁰ This scenario planning provides templates for processing information and 'provides contextual frameworks to organize ... observations of past and present, and the future implications that they conjecture.'¹¹ This natural ability to think in scenarios and hold future goals as a guide for present behaviour is central to the activities which surround Futures Studies. Further, the ability of the futurist to tap into these innate qualities of human cognition will be enhanced by understanding the way in which people hold these goals.

Burt and van Heijden refer to scenarios as a philosophy of thinking about the future. In a study of futures projects in small and medium enterprises they came to the conclusion that:

Managers need to stay with developments and continue to make timely adaptations and adjustments in light of unexpected events as required.¹²

This comment, illustrates that it is not only the goals developed through these scenarios that are important, it is also crucial that the pathways to achieving the goals are identified and flexible enough to encompass uncertainty. This is common theme in futures projects, once the preferred future has been envisaged and a direction agreed upon, what mechanisms can be put into place to keep the organisation on track to achieve them? How can the cognitive capacities of the individuals within the organisation be utilised to deliver flexibility to make changes to the path in order to deal with challenges, whilst still keeping the goal in mind?

One way could be through utilising the human need to be positive. It is commonly believed that people will work towards optimistic future goals, not towards pessimistic ones, and it is this movement to action which is of interest here.

Optimism

To develop a view on what optimism is, the first port of call was the dictionary – a definition was found as follows:

Optimism: 1. disposition to hope for the best; tendency to look on the bright side of things. 2. belief that good ultimately triumphs over evil. 3. the doctrine that the existing world is the best of all possible worlds. 4. the belief that goodness pervades reality.¹³

The important points in this definition are that optimists believe that the existing world is the best of all possible worlds; hence any optimistic futures will be an extrapolation of that which has gone before. Also the tendency to look on the bright side, the attitude that 'things will be right, mate' comes into play here. Having investigated the common usage definition, the next step was the psychological literature for a cognitive, emotional and behavioural definition.

Optimism as a psychological state

Optimism has many facets which have been investigated through psychological research; however critics suggest that many of the lines of enquiry have been 'surprisingly uniform, so much so that an optimism bandwagon has been created, within psychology as well as the general public'.¹⁴ The definition of optimism which has been suggested by psychologists is:

a mood or attitude associated with an expectation about the social or material future - one which the evaluator regards as socially desirable, to his or her advantage, or for his or her pleasure¹⁵

Hence there is no objective optimism as each individual will develop expectation about what is desirable *for them* and these may be similar to others or in direct conflict. Optimism has a high emotional content which means it can motivate action and as such is seen, especially by the self help movement, to be a desirable state of existence, however many of the negative aspects of such optimistic action are rarely studied and research into resource dilemmas has illuminated some drawbacks to having an optimistic view point.

Resource dilemmas research has found that as uncertainty over the optimal collective harvest size of a resource increased, optimistic views and behaviour resulted in over-harvesting as people fell back onto the 'it'll be right mate' and made harvesting choices with very little information. People can even ignore information if they are optimistic if it does not accord with what they believe, i.e. fishermen with a number of good catches will believe that these are set to continue even in the face of scientific evidence to the contrary.¹⁶ Taylor and Brown found that the future-oriented aspects of optimism are likely to support relatively high, even potentially unrealistic, aspirations.¹⁷

Optimism as Human Nature

The development of optimism as a psychological field of study began as the view that optimism was part of human nature. It was seen as illusory, negative and prolonging human suffering; the argument being that it was better to face reality.¹⁸ Psychological health was measured by one's ability to *accurately perceive* reality.¹⁹ During the 1970's, cognitive psychologists began to challenge some of these theories and found that optimism was used to maintain one's ego in the most flattering way possible by recasting the oneself as central to all events, taking credit for good events and blaming external factors for those which are bad.²⁰

There was another theorist who posited that optimism was what drove human evolution. In 1979, Tiger speculated that because optimism has future component, once humans began to be able to think about what was to come (i.e. death) those who were able to cast this in an optimistic light prospered, while those who did not, perished. Hence those who survived this, and their descendants, process found that optimism was 'easy to think, easy to learn and pleasing'.²¹

Optimism as individual difference

At the same time as Tiger was writing there was a focus on optimism by theorists who were interested in what drove individual differences. This generated three major groups of theory; explanatory style, dispositional optimism and realistic optimism.

Explanatory style

Explanatory style is the habitual way in which an individual explains bad events.²² Optimism is measured through a self-administered questionnaire, and an optimistic people will 'attribute unexpected bad outcomes to external, unstable and specific factors but tend to attribute unexpected good outcomes to internal, stable and global factors'.²³ The more optimistic a person is, the better their outcomes in terms of health and achievement. Interestingly, critics of this approach point out that this could become a recipe for chronic blaming and,

indeed, some of the most identifying features of the criminal personality include an unwillingness to take responsibility for self-initiated behaviours and a steadfast tendency to blame circumstances and other for negative outcomes related to their own transgressions'.²⁴

Explanatory style is exemplified by the work of Martin Seligman, author of *Learned Optimism*. Seligman began studying learned helplessness, the theory that in the face of recurring bad events, people and animals become helpless, having learned that there is no relationship between action and good outcomes. He believed that instead of studying the negative, psychologists should study the positive and so he turned the learned helplessness theory on its head to arrive at learned optimism. Seligman argues that pessimistic habitual thoughts can be changed through utilising cognitive skills. The benefits that this will deliver include the ability to stick at tasks, to treat misfortune as a challenge and to be healthier. 'Pessimistic explanatory style is a misery'.²⁵ In recognition of the danger of unchecked optimism, Seligman uses a concept called 'flexible optimism' which gives the individual a choice as to when to use optimism or pessimism.²⁶

Dispositional Optimism

Dispositional optimism is described as a personality variable which drives the way in which people will pursue goals (this goal pursuit is the basis of all behavioural activity), optimistic people will continue to try and attain the goal they have set, while pessimistic people will give up.²⁷ This type of optimism has also been linked to positive health outcomes.

Realistic Optimism

Both of the above theoretical standpoints have, at their basis, the belief that people can view the world accurately. Realistic optimism brings optimism and uncertainty together to try to reflect the nature of reality. Schneider argues that the previous theories on optimism ignore that reality is fuzzy and constantly changing.

Often those studying accuracy seem to overlook the possibility that one specific, objectively verifiable state of affairs may not exist...truth is imprecise in a social world in which meaning is created through agreed-upon symbol systems.²⁸

Being realistic is being able to deal with the fuzzy nature of reality, realistic optimism 'includes all the optimistic processes that can be shown to operate within the constraints of fuzzy reality'.²⁹ Realistic optimism incorporates goal orientation as a motivator of behaviour, 'realistic positive thinking creates an overriding perspective on goal-striving or problem solving that depicts the situation as a challenge or an opportunity rather than a chore or a problem'³⁰, this become important when looking at the future as envisioning details of goal striving processes promotes plan creation which is, in turn, linked to higher rates of goal attainment.³¹ Realistic optimism also allows for leniency in goal attainment, the idea that one

strives for the top, but is happy to reach second place; and appreciation for the current state of one's present.

Big vs little optimism

Studies have been done to measure optimism at the individual level and at the societal/global level, this can be referred to little and big optimism dependent upon the scale of what is being perceived. Research into this issue has found that there is only a weak association between dispositional optimism on an individual scale and that on a global scale. Wenglert and Rosen found that 'optimism was significantly more pronounced for one's personal future than for the world in general'.³² This suggests that the level of optimism can change as the level of abstraction changes.

Cultural aspect of optimism

Research has found a 'considerable variation across cultures in the content of optimism',³³ hence the individual has a personal view of what is desirable for them, as does the society at large. Culturally bound concepts of optimism will not readily be shared across cultures. As Peterson comments about the United States;

Americans are greatly occupied with what they can and cannot accomplish...in particular with what they can acquire...People's acquisition of material goods...represent a socially sanctioned way of satisfying the optimistic force that organizes the entire culture.³⁴

This is what he refers to as big optimism - 'a biologically given tendency filled in by culture with a socially acceptable content...it produces a general state of vigor and resilience.'³⁵ This can also be linked to the resurgence of positive thinking in that country, where the answers to all challenges can be found *within* the individual. 'If they could learn to manage their own consciousness...the world outside would be positive in its response'.³⁶

Optimism and the future

The concept of optimism and the future have been linked throughout futures literature. The dichotomy between optimistic and pessimistic futures is one which is of little use. It denies the existence of a wide range of possible futures which may invoke both optimistic and pessimistic view points. Slaughter describes this dichotomy as a 'default frame' between a 'technophilic and naively optimistic view' and 'a bleak future in which dreams of progress and economic development fall back into a chasm of entropy, violence and despair'.³⁷

Optimism obviously has some explanatory value in illuminating the mental models held by individuals. Given the definitions of optimism presented above, a number of drawbacks can be suggested when looking at the intersection of optimism and the future:

1. Naïve optimism will result in little action as the current course of society is seen as the best of all possible courses. The belief that everything will take care of itself or that the nature of humans is to resolve problems, therefore the individual is relieved of the need to move to action, arises here.
2. Dispositional optimism has been shown to be linked to the image of an individual's future and is not correlated with an optimistic view of global futures and so is of little use to the futurist working at greater levels of abstraction.

3. Realistic optimism delivers an individual need to evaluate the possible coming future, and identifies goals to attain, but does not deliver enough flexibility to change the path which is followed, through the lack of the perceived means to change the extrapolated present.
4. Optimism breaks down in the face of rising uncertainty and can result in negative outcomes, such as the over-harvesting of resources.

Similarly, Harden Tibbs makes the observation that when thinking about the future and trying to contribute to an optimistic outcome, one can run into a major issue, that:

(T)he definition of an optimistic outcome depends on the set of framing assumptions we make. We must decide who is choosing, and what they value. This could easily become an elaborate exercise, subject to criticism that the diversity of perspectives in the country, let alone the world, is so great that no such effort could ever come to a satisfactory conclusion.³⁸

The continuum between optimism and pessimism can be used to typify people's reactions to life and is not a motivator to action. Simply having an optimistic or pessimistic view of a preferred future will not necessarily result in action or movement towards that future. The ability to identify pathways through which to achieve goals is of prime importance.

The clue to another option lay in references to Hope theory in the optimism literature. Hope theory is highly correlated with optimism; both have goals and agency, however only Hope theory includes pathways to achievement, the belief that one can generate successful plans to achieve one's goals.

Hope theory

What drives human history is the human ambition to alter one's condition to match one's hopes.³⁹

Hope is a powerful concept. Many studies and anecdotal stories outlining amazing deeds and achievements have hope at their core. Only recently has it been researched as a psychological state. Since 1991, Snyder and colleagues have been studying hope as part of the movement towards positive psychology. The following is their definition of hope:

Hope reflects individuals' perceptions regarding their capacities to (1) clearly conceptualize goals, (2) develop specific strategies to reach those goals (pathways thinking) and (3) initiate and sustain the motivation for using those strategies. The pathways and agency components are both necessary, but neither is sufficient to sustain successful goal pursuit. As such, pathways and agency thoughts are additive, reciprocal and positively related, but they are not synonymous.⁴⁰

Hope is a way of thinking rather than an emotion. There is an emotional component, but it plays a contributory role as to whether a person will be a high or low hope type. The benefits of being a high hope type are many, as compared to the average to low hope type, the high hope type:

- is more likely to have a consistent pattern of high hope thinking through time
- probably has had a major role model during childhood

- is certain of their goals and challenged by them
- is likely to consider relevant external standards, but attends primarily to their own standards in setting goals
- values the process of goal pursuit as much as the goal itself
- easily establishes friendships
- enjoys interacting with and listening to the perspectives of others
- has win-win relationships
- is more likely to have higher levels of academic achievement
- is less anxious
- is higher in well being, self worth, self esteem and confidence
- exhibits better recovery from physical injuries
- is less likely to have thought about suicide.⁴¹

Emotions come into play as goal pursuit perceptions drive emotions. Those who perceive that they have successfully pursued goals experience positive emotions; those who are blocked and perceive that they have not been successful experience negative emotions.⁴² Hence, the emotional reaction follows the perception of the success or not of the goal pursuit. This reaction will then feed into the next goal pursuit process, with those who have experienced success previously having higher hope than those who experienced failure. This will then follow through to the motivation involved in the pursuit; high hope will result in active pursuit, while low hope results in lethargy. However these emotions, because they follow the pursuit, can be realigned through goal directed thinking and hence, the emotional reaction will also be realigned.

Goals

Goals in hope theory can be at any level of abstraction, differing temporal aspects, and they can also have differing levels of perceived attainability. It is the clarity of the goal which is important, as ‘vague goals may actually lessen hope.’⁴³ Goals must be of importance and value to the individual pursuing them.

All goals have societal implications, and goals in themselves are not value free. The goals which are deemed acceptable for a society are those with which children are raised to crave, and the majority of high hope people will pursue socially positive goals. However, individuals can pursue goals which are not socially acceptable and will go through the same stages of goal pursuit.⁴⁴

Pathways thinking

As seen previously, when individuals hold images of the future they impact their behaviour in the present, similarly past experiences will influence the view of the future that is held. Snyder refers to this as ‘reciprocal temporal thinking’⁴⁵ and it forms the basis of pathways thinking, elsewhere referred to as scenario thinking or planning. This is the idea that the pursuit of a goal will generate the identification of a plausible route through which to attain it. Such thinking will become more precise and refined as goal pursuit becomes goal attainment.

Agency

Agency thought is defined as ‘the perceived capacity to use one’s pathways to reach desired goals’⁴⁶ and forms the motivation to act within the theory of hope. To have hopeful thinking,

one must possess pathways and agency thinking, they are 'iterative as well as additive over a given goal pursuit process'.⁴⁷

High and Low Hope

The effect of the differing states of high and low hope is to alter the strength of the pathways and agentic thought. The full high hope type will have an 'iterative pathway and agency which is fluid and fast throughout the goal sequence.'⁴⁸ The low hope state will have 'pathway and agentic thought that is halting and slow (if at all operative)'.⁴⁹ A mixture of the two can result in lack of action but thoughts of many possible routes (high pathways, low agency) and in high available motivation but with no idea as to how to channel it (low pathways, high agency).

How does hope thinking work?

Hopeful thinking as illustrated by Figure One starts with a backdrop of dispositional hope thoughts that have been developed in childhood. High hope types will have been taught to think in this manner since childhood through their interactions with caregivers or mentors, whilst low hope types will either have not been taught or may have this type of thinking destroyed.

This disposition is then fed through to situational emotion set held by the person about their ability to pursue goals and their success in doing so. These emotions are directly related to previous experiences. Again at this point, there will be differences in the emotion set of a high hope to a low hope type. In addition, high hope types will at this point set many more goals than those who are low hope; they will also set stretch goals and make pathways more difficult as the *process* is as important as the endpoint.

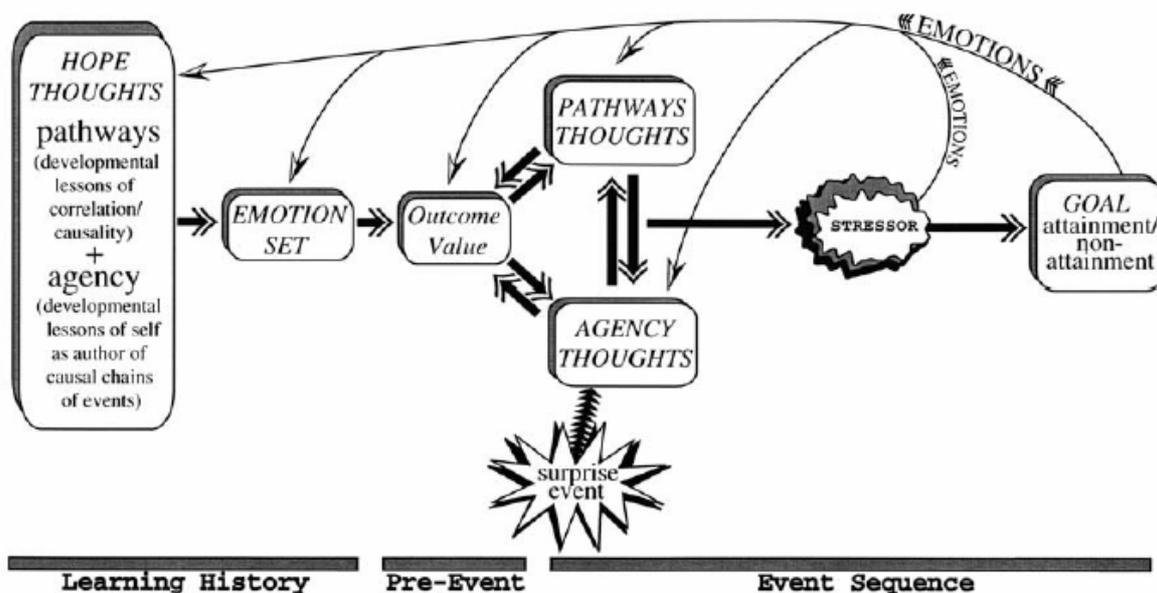


Figure One – Goal Attainment in Hope theory⁵⁰

The outcome value of the event is determined by the value and clarity attributed to the goal to be pursued. This relative importance will influence the amount of mental attention expended and will activate the pre-event analysis phase.⁵¹ Once the goal pursuit has begun, feedback

loops begin to develop through the process of pathways and agency thinking. High hope types will be positive about the process of goal pursuit and will engage in positive self-talk; they will be excited by the challenge of the pursuit in itself. The low hope type will be less confident and likely to be feeling a rush of negative emotions that will affect cognition.⁵² Those who are able to express and process their emotions should facilitate pathways and agency thought, hence the interior development of the individual comes into play.

Although the goal directed cognitions are eliciting the particular emotions, those emotions in turn are shaping and informing the cognitions of the person who is in the throes of goal pursuit.⁵³

At some point in the process a surprise event may take place and the reactions to this will be different dependent on the type. High hope types will develop a plausible route and have a high degree of confidence in the route; they will also have the ability to change the route in the face of challenge. Low hope types have more trouble articulating a route and in turn, will be less flexible in their thinking and therefore less able to generate alternatives.⁵⁴

In addition, there may also occur a stressor, this represents any 'impediment of sufficient magnitude to jeopardize hopeful thought.'⁵⁵ This will usually derail the pursuit of a low hope type with the resulting negative emotions cycling back to reinforce the situational and dispositional sets already existing. The high hope type will regard the stressor as a challenge and react through realigning pathways or rechannelling agency through alternate pathways. High hope types work around the stressor and the resultant positive feedback will reinforce their positive dispositional and situational thinking.⁵⁶ High hope types are also willing to ascribe power to others if that is seen as the best way to reach their goals.⁵⁷

Once the stressor has been dealt with, or if no stressor appeared, then 'pathways and agency thoughts should continue to alternate (as shown in the bidirectional arrows) and aggregate through the event sequence'.⁵⁸ Having attained (or not) the goal which was pursued, emotional energy (positive or negative) will flow back through to inform the next pursuit. In the case of high hope types, any negative outcomes will be cast in terms of improvements for the next pursuit, while low hope types will recast the outcome as a flaw in their thinking and self doubt.

Can hope be learned?

Hope development in children and adults has been studied and a number of means of increasing hope have been identified. The most straightforward way of doing so is in children and Snyder has written many articles and a book on this, however there are ways of engendering hopeful thinking in adults.

Goals

1. make certain the goals being set are important to the individual rather than something set by others
2. sensitize the individual to the decision making processes that surround the identification of important goals
3. facilitate an array of goals, including those which stretch the abilities of the individual
4. ensure that goals are prioritized from least to most important in order to focus effort

5. ensure that enough time is allotted to focus on the important goals

Agency

1. use positive self talk
2. think of problems as challenges
3. remember past experiences to inform present challenges
4. cultivate the ability to laugh at one's circumstances – especially useful at times when blockages appear
5. learn to enjoy the process of goal attainment, and not just focus on the goal itself
6. if a goal is truly blocked, switch to a substitute goal which is more reachable
7. take care of the physical body, eat properly, exercise, reduce all drug taking (i.e. nicotine, caffeine, alcohol etc)

Pathways thinking

1. break a long range goal into smaller, short range goals and begin on working on the first most reachable goal to trigger positive emotions once it has been achieved
2. use a mental road map and include alternate routes to the goal in case of blockages or stressors
3. mentally rehearse successfully pursuing goals in order to anticipate blockages
4. if goal pursuit is not successful, attribute this to strategy and actions rather than self blame and self doubt
5. realise that self reliance can stifle pathways thinking, and remember to ask for help if it is needed
6. develop friendships as a powerful source of guidance for reaching goals.⁵⁹

Once people become more aware of their goals and the strategies require to implement them, they are able to move from low to high hope thinking as the counterproductive nature of simply having reactions to stimuli is removed.⁶⁰

How could we utilise Hope Theory?

There are clear applications for Hope Theory in Futures Studies. Hope Theory builds a greater understanding of how people deal with the future than simply overlaying an optimism/pessimism dichotomy, and hopeful thinking as an exercise allows individuals to deal with complexity and uncertainty with more adaptability than optimism. The inclusion of agency in hope theory makes it a good fit with the activity of futures, as the movement to action is sometimes the most difficult point of any futures exercise.

In addition, futurists link futures thinking and present behaviour in order to move people towards their preferred future. If a component of futures thinking is hope, then it is imperative that futurists understand this cognitive and behavioural process.

More work is needed to identify exactly how the constructs in Hope Theory could be used in a futures context. A number of futures methodologies, for example visioning and scenarios, could benefit from explicit linkages to the cognitive process of hopeful thinking. It may also be that including some of the strategies for increasing hope in individuals may increase the attractiveness and usefulness of futures to a wider audience, as all levels of Upper Left development can access hopeful thinking and its benefits.

The finding that hopeful belief is directly linked to hopeful behaviours which in turn strengthen hopeful thoughts, gives a recursive cycle which can also be used to enact futures. The propensity for high hope types to view problems as challenges and to pursue alternatives if they hit roadblocks is a powerful cognitive and behavioural hook on which to hang futures thinking and behaviour.

The link between hopeful thinking and positive health outcomes is also an attractive by-product of Hope theory. What if hopeful thinking about the future could actually be proved to be good for you? That will surely make futures thinking more attractive in today's individualistic society! Similarly, in situations where the preferred future seems to be totally at odds with the perceived present, hopeful thinking can be utilised to motivate and orientate action to move towards the preferred vision.

Conclusion

Trying to engage with the optimism-pessimism dichotomy led to a journey of discovery which ended at the core of how humans perceive the future and enact their preferred visions. Optimism has been shown to be only useful in relation to pessimism, and there is a need for a movement away from the 'default frame'. Hope Theory may be one way to move towards futures which are preferred and can be acted on.

Such is the journey through the field of Futures Studies. One can begin at the surface and then dive into depths of understanding not only the possibilities for the future, but also how humans conceive and process futures knowledge. Whilst the high/low hope concept is a typology, the pathways and agency concepts embedded in Hope Theory suggest some additional work should be undertaken to utilise hope in the creation of preferred futures.

Postscript – 2006

Since I wrote this piece in 2004, I have done many hours of reading, process designing and workshop facilitation using Hope Theory as my basis of moving people from thought to action. I have found the identification of goals, pathways and empowerment to be one of the most powerful tools at my disposal when asking groups to interact and engage with their preferred futures. Much of the work on Hope in the last couple of years has been aimed at children and young people, trying to help many of them turn low Hope thoughts and behaviours into high Hope. One of the most attractive aspects to Hope Theory is that it, unlike the Optimism work, is not trying to push people into moral stances about how they 'should' react to things in their lives. Rather, it is a theory that talks about how we as human beings cognate information and move to action. I would argue that foresight work is about helping people set goals (their preferred future), identify pathways to that future, and then to empower them to take action in the present. Your future starts now!

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Notes

- ¹ Seligman, M (1990)
- ² Many thanks to Rick Snyder for his generosity.
- ³ Shorey, Snyder, et al (2002) p323
- ⁴ Shorey, Snyder, et al p326
- ⁵ Shorey, Snyder, et al p323
- ⁶ Bell, W (1998) p323
- ⁷ Slaughter (2004) p165
- ⁸ Slaughter (2004) p37
- ⁹ Rubin (1998) p495
- ¹⁰ McKiernan and MacKay (2002) p5
- ¹¹ McKiernan and MacKay (2002) p5
- ¹² Burt and van Heijden (2003) p1020
- ¹³ Macquarie Dictionary (1988)
- ¹⁴ Peterson (2000) p1 of 16
- ¹⁵ Tiger in Peterson (2000) p2 of 16
- ¹⁶ Jager, Janssen and Vlek (2002)
- ¹⁷ Taylor and Brown (1988) in Schneider (2001) p6 of 19
- ¹⁸ Freud, Maslow and Erikson thus characterised optimism. Freud believed it was what 'civilization possible but came with the cost of denial of instinctual nature and hence the denial of reality'. Peterson (2000) p2 of 16.
- ¹⁹ Peterson (2000) p3 of 16
- ²⁰ Peterson (2000) p3 of 16
- ²¹ Peterson (2000) p4 of 16
- ²² Peterson (2000) p5 of 16
- ²³ Schneider (2001) p10 of 19
- ²⁴ Schneider (2001) p10 of 19
- ²⁵ Seligman (1990) p53
- ²⁶ Seligman (1990) p292
- ²⁷ Peterson (2000) p5 of 16
- ²⁸ Schneider (2001) p3 of 19
- ²⁹ Schneider (2001) p5 of 19
- ³⁰ Schneider (2001) p7 of 19
- ³¹ Gollwitzer (1999)
- ³² Wengler and Rosen (2000) p725
- ³³ Peterson (2000) p10 of 16
- ³⁴ Peterson (2000) p10 of 16
- ³⁵ Peterson (2000) p7 of 16
- ³⁶ Meyer (1988) in Petersen (2000) p11 of 16
- ³⁷ Slaughter (2004) p15-16
- ³⁸ Tibbs (2000) p4
- ³⁹ McNeill and McNeill (2003) p4
- ⁴⁰ Snyder, Lopez and Shorey (2003)
- ⁴¹ Snyder, Tran, Schroeder, Pulvers, Adams III and Laub (2000) p48
- ⁴² Snyder (2002) p252
- ⁴³ Snyder, Tran, Schroeder, Pulvers, Adams III and Laub (2000) p46
- ⁴⁴ Snyder (2002) p267
- ⁴⁵ Snyder (2002) p251
- ⁴⁶ Snyder (2002) p251
- ⁴⁷ Snyder (2002) p252
- ⁴⁸ Snyder (2002) p252
- ⁴⁹ Snyder (2002) p252
- ⁵⁰ Snyder (2002) p254
- ⁵¹ Snyder (2002) p253
- ⁵² Snyder (2002) p254 Snyder mentions also that in his experience people with ADD find it very difficult to focus on goals and are low hope types.
- ⁵³ Snyder (2002) p254
- ⁵⁴ Snyder (2002) p251

⁵⁵ Snyder (2002) p254

⁵⁶ Snyder (2002) p255

⁵⁷ Shorey, Snyder, et al p326

⁵⁸ Snyder (2002) p255

⁵⁹ Snyder (1998) p429-30

⁶⁰ Shorey, Snyder et al p324

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