

flourishing scale & spane background

(this handout, with links to all cited research, was posted at www.stressedtozest.com on 23.01.11)

useful new scales: Professor Ed Diener and colleagues have recently published new, easily useable questionnaires to assess psychological "flourishing" and positive & negative emotions. This development could prove very helpful. A high level of mental health provides at least three overlapping benefits – it feels pleasanter & more enjoyable, it promotes better relationships & functioning, and it provides greater resilience (better "shock absorbers") to guard against slipping back into mental distress. These advantages have been demonstrated both for Corey Keyes' quite complex multilevel definition of flourishing and for Barbara Fredrickson's positive to negative emotions ratio. Diener & colleagues report that their "*Flourishing scale (FS) ... is strongly associated with other psychological well-being scales*" and they argue fairly convincingly that their "*Scale of positive & negative experience (SPANE)*" improves on previous measures of positive & negative emotion.

what scores to aim for: For both Keyes' flourishing and Fredrickson's high positivity ratio, it is the top 15 to 20% of the population who reap the most benefits. Until further research is done, this suggests we should aim, with Diener's scales, to score at or above 50 on the "*Flourishing scale*" and at or above 12 on the "*SPANE-B*" (total positive experience score minus total negative experience score). Limitations of this advice include the facts that Diener et al's scales have so far only been scored by student populations, and that we are assuming (perfectly reasonably) that the benefits shown for high scorers on Keyes's and Fredrickson's more complex tests would extend to high scorers on the simpler FS and SPANE.

more details: Ed Diener has a good track record with wellbeing scales. His "*Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS)*" has been used very extensively for many years. As with the SWLS, although the FS and SPANE are copyrighted they are free to use (with acknowledgment of their source) – see the questionnaires "*Flourishing scale*" and "*Scale of positive & negative experience*". The full text of the research paper describing these scales is also freely available from Ed Diener's website. The paper's abstract reads:

Diener, E., D. Wirtz, et al. (2010). "*New well-being measures: short scales to assess flourishing and positive and negative feelings.*" *Social Indicators Research* 97(2): 143-156.
Measures of well-being were created to assess psychological flourishing and feelings—positive feelings, negative feelings, and the difference between the two. The scales were evaluated in a sample of 689 college students from six locations. The Flourishing Scale is a brief 8-item summary measure of the respondent's self-perceived success in important areas such as relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism. The scale provides a single psychological well-being score. The measure has good psychometric properties, and is strongly associated with other psychological well-being scales. The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience produces a score for positive feelings (6 items), a score for negative feelings (6 items), and the two can be combined to create a balance score. This 12-item brief scale has a number of desirable features compared to earlier measures of positive and negative emotions. In particular, the scale assesses with a few items a broad range of negative and positive experiences and feelings, not just those of a certain type, and is based on the amount of time the feelings were experienced during the past 4 weeks. The scale converges well with measures of emotions and affective well-being.

The construction, testing and ready availability of these new scales is an encouraging further development in the field of positive psychology.
