Happiness Incubator

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Traditional business models rely on the increasing demand and consumption of human and natural resources, the activities of which contribute to a variety of sustainability issues such as climate change, inequality, and exploited workforces. While existing businesses are identifying the need to reduce their impacts on these issues, there is a greater need for new business models that challenge a consumption based economy. Truly transformational sustainable enterprises would both seek to have sustainable business practices while also aiming to address sustainability issues at the core of their mission.

One sustainability issue that society is challenged with is the state of happiness in the U.S. The US has fallen from 3rd to 19th in the World Happiness Index from 2007 to 2016 (Saches, 2017). The idea of sustainable community development has been around for a while, but only more recently has there been a focus on happiness (Cloutier and Pfeiffer, 2015). Happiness is both a characteristic of individuals and communities, as social bonds play an important part in individual happiness. There has been a small focus in developing happiness in residents as a sustainability principle, despite the fact that many elements of sustainability contribute to one’s happiness. Community development can also be used to create social capital, the creation of collective knowledge and resources (Cloutier and Pfeiffer, 2015; Rohe, 2004). This social capital can be used to bring people together and continue to make positive change. This could be a great area of focus for new businesses, if it can be done in a sustainable way.

There are therefore two points of intervention for sustainability. The first point of intervention is creating new sustainable enterprises that challenge the current economic model. And the second point of intervention is addressing the happiness crisis (and therefore sustainability issues) occurring in the U.S. The goal of the project was therefore to create a business proposal for a transformational, sustainable enterprise known as The Happiness Incubator. The objectives of the project were:

• To research and review different business models that promote sustainability principles.
• To synthesize current literature on community development and happiness.
• To develop a business idea that incorporates sustainability solutions for social, environmental, and economic issues.
• To improve my ability to lead happiness exercises.

The desired future state from this project would be the full creation of The Happiness Incubator: A transformational enterprise that aims to help cultivate happiness in individuals’ lives by promoting sustainable living practices and creating a strong sense of community.
In order to meet these goals the project had four phases. The first phase of the project was a review on the current state of business models and the economy, as well as a review of literature on happiness, community development, and sustainability. The second phase of the project was the development of the business idea using the Transformational Sustainable Enterprise Framework. This framework first evaluates a business based on an analytical component: a systems approach to analyzing the economic activities and organization of the business. It then evaluates the business using an evaluative component, or how the business is or isn’t contributing to sustainability.

The third phase was the development of the business plan. Existing tools were used to define and segment the market, determine the beneficiary experience, create a financial feasibility analysis, and create the business proposal. Finally, the fourth phase was the creation and facilitation of happiness workshops. These workshops were created as a supplement to the business proposal as evidence for what would happen inside The Happiness Incubator and prove my ability in leading these exercises. A mix of prior knowledge, personal experience, and research was used to create these happiness workshops. Feedback forms were used to identify areas of success and improvement.

**Project Outcomes/Results**

**Phase 1:** A review of the current state showed that the economy is largely dominated by profit based businesses and attempts at sustainability are rarely well rounded. The literature review showed that sustainability, community development, and happiness are closely linked. Few businesses are attempting to use these three as a basis for economic development.

**Phase II:** The TSE framework identified the different sustainability lenses needed to create a truly sustainable business. This approach considered the design of the space that the business would reside in, how employees would receive benefits, and how the business should operate (B Corp, nonprofit, etc.).

**Phase III:** The business proposal was completed and identified a market for such a business. The financial feasibility analysis was the most challenging element of this project and is highly dependent on the space in which the incubator operates.

**Phase IV:** The happiness workshops were largely experimental and feedback forms were the only benchmark for success. Attendees enjoyed the experience, but a larger audience is needed to identify gaps in sustainability knowledge in the general public.

The project reviewed the academic knowledge on happiness, community development, and sustainability, which supported the convergence of these topics and the need to create economic development in this area. The business proposal showed that a transformational sustainable enterprise can exist and there is a strong argument for an untapped market. Moving forward, potential investors need to be identified. If an ideal location was chosen then the business proposal details could become more refined, which would make the project proposal stronger. More advanced happiness workshops could be conducted outside of receptive audiences as a way to further prove my capacity as a facilitator.