

Week 3

As we did not finish the previous week's class on Theoretical Perspectives, we had to use some time to wrap-up this material. Once that was done, here's what we did this week on surviving well.

1. We started with two provocations about work and surviving well. The first was a little video upload from the documentary *Happy* (see my comments below about the director of the film). We watched the short video upload on the *Happy* website which features Mano J Singh, a rickshaw puller in Kolkata, India, who works 12 to 14 hours a day, see <http://www.thehappymovie.com/film/>. Then we watched an extract of [the documentary about Heidemarie Schwermer from Germany](#) (we watched 20:42 – 25:50). In 1997 and in her 60s, Heidemarie basically gave away what she owned, except for what she could pack into one suitcase. Since then she has lived a life without money. As she says to a shop-owner whose floor she is mopping in return for some food (in part of the extract that we watched), "It doesn't work the way it is now. You have to work all the time while others have nothing". Both of these clips raise issues about the role that paid work plays in our life and the connection between work and wellbeing. I got the students to work in pairs to identify why we watched these two clips and what they say about the relationship between working and surviving well. When we talked about the two examples students particularly commented on Heidemarie as someone they found "inspirational" because she was "an ordinary person who did something." ([Slides 1 to 5](#))
2. We then talked about the idea of surviving well in terms of the five different forms of wellbeing that we talk about in TBTE. Again working in pairs, the students "assessed" [the wellbeing of Mano and Heidemarie](#). ([Slides 6 to 9](#))
3. Then I got the students to work by themselves on the [Take Back Work exercise](#), but paired them up once they started to work on planetary wellbeing. One student found that WWF has done a lot of work on [Hong Kong's Ecological Footprint](#). The most recent report (2014) identifies that on average Hong Kong has an ecological footprint of 3.1 (just over double the global average of 1.5 Earths).

Note re the director of the film *Happy*: This film is directed by Tom Shadyak who has also produced/directed/written a bunch of films including *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* and *Bruce Almighty* (with Jim Carrey), *The Nutty Professor* (with Eddie Murphy) but more interestingly he's made documentaries like [I Am](#), which is based on a rethink of his life after a 2007 bicycle accident left him with post-concussion syndrome (it uses the sound grab "The shift is about to hit the fan"). It's appropriate that this Director's work is used with this chapter as he is an example of a "downshifter." As we discuss in the chapter, downshifters are people who simplify their life by cutting back on paid work, and income, in order to spend more time on the things that have meaning in their life, e.g. family, friends, their own activities etc. Downshifters come from across the income-spectrum; it's not just those who are well-off who make this decision. Although in Tom Shadyak's case there's no doubt he is a well-off downshifter, see <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/jan/16/tom-shadyac-hollywood-movies-film>.

Worth noting too that there's a new Australian online series (2015), [The Equilibrium Challenge](#), that is working with men in senior management positions to reduce their paid work and get more of a work-life balance. The rationale is that if conditions are to change for workers, then managers have to take a leadership role and also make changes; plus if things are going to change for women in terms of family responsibilities, then men also have to change.