

Prof. Hans Henrik Knoop

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Bio

Hans Henrik Knoop is Associate Professor and Director of the Positive Psychology Research Unit at Aarhus University, Denmark. He also serves as Extraordinary Professor at Optentia, North-West University in South Africa, and as Associate Editor at Frontiers of Psychology's Positive Psychology Section.

His work is focused on flourishing in education, work, and society with a strong interdisciplinary approach. His research within positive psychology has involved thousands of educators and leaders and data on well-being from almost 300.000 Danish pupils. At Aarhus University he has co-directed the Master Program for Positive Psychology for a decade and has hosted international conferences relating to education and positive psychology in Denmark in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2017, and 2021. He was the President of the European Network for Positive Psychology for two terms from 2010 to 2014, served on the IPPA Board of Directors from 2009 to 2016 and is currently serving on IPPA's Council of Advisors.

Hans Henrik Knoop has authored and co-authored more than 200 publications and has delivered more than thousand invited keynotes and lectures in Denmark and at conferences in Australia, Austria, Croatia, China, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Scotland, South Africa, Slovakia, Spain, the Philippines, the U.K. and the U.S, and is a frequent commentator in newspapers, radio and television on matters of learning, creativity, ethics, and positive psychology.

Keynote Address on:
Towards a Universal and Uniting Understanding of Well-Being

Abstract

Well-being has become one of the hottest political topics of our time – not least because a series of studies point to an increasing lack of well-being among especially children and young people. However, well-being and lack of well-being are concepts that are understood and defined in many different ways, which, all things considered, increases the risk of uncertainty and misunderstandings – and thus also the risk of efforts to enhance well-being failing. Social systems such as democracies, educational institutions, and collegial communities generally weaken when they are internally fragmented, and the absence of a common understanding of such a central concept as "well-being" can thus be seen as unequivocally socially fragmenting. A significant part of the explanation for the multitude of definitions is that well-being is a multidimensional concept – i.e., a concept that encompasses a wide range of dimensions, some of which are universal – i.e., applicable to all of humanity – and some are culturally determined – i.e., varying from culture to culture. A darker explanation could be that some have an interest in opponents not understanding each other – and therefore actively try to sow doubt about the possibility of effective communication. Indeed, the obvious AI-driven disinformation on social media may well be motivated by just that, employing anew the power strategy of “divide and conquer”. People who do not understand each other are by definition divided and weakened.

In this presentation, I argue that there are dimensions of well-being, and thus sources of well-being, that are universal, and that humanity has a common, uniting interest in - and that it is crucial to understand this if we are to better promote well-being and prevent ill-being. Firstly, I argue that a common concept of well-being can be anchored in three universal basic conditions that condition all human well-being and health. Secondly, a small but quasi-

representative selection of influential well-being definitions is presented, which clarifies both the variation and the common denominator between them. Thirdly, inspired by system theory, humanistic psychology, and positive psychology, a proposal for a general, falsifiable theory of well-being based on universal dimensions of well-being is outlined.