

# Is your time worth saving?

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## Abstract

Do you never doubt your calling? A majority of large animal veterinarians face days that are booked solid. It doesn't matter if they're in an ambulatory setting, truck-in setting, or referral setting; there simply is no shortage of work for large animal veterinarians. This fact is unlikely to change as the baby boomer veterinarians age out of practice and vet schools continue to see < 5% of their students practicing large animal medicine at one year post-graduation.<sup>1</sup> Knowing this, how do practitioners avoid the feelings that are commonly associated with such demands upon their time; feelings of overwhelm, being overworked, and burned out? All of which are known to result in significant ill-being aka a lack of prosperity, happiness and health.

The current state of the industry reminds the author of a quote from Philipp Stölzl's *The Physician* in which a young physician (Robert Cole) questions his mentor (Ibn Sina) after a particularly deadly outbreak of plague strikes their city, asking him; "Do you never doubt your calling?" Ibn Sina then pauses in thought and responds; "Every Morning. Every Evening. In between, I work too hard to think about it."<sup>29</sup>

This has become the default status within our realm of the veterinary industry. Practitioners can't question their calling, their career, because they don't have time to. They must keep plugging away day to day just to get the work done. However, this ignores several basic human needs, commonly referred to as "basic psychological needs" (BPN) which are necessary to craft motivation, create positive emotions and establish a state of flourishing. Basic psychological needs are governed by three unique entities; autonomy or a sense of control over our lives, competency or the ability to learn, interact and develop with our environment, and relatedness or the ability to build and foster meaningful relationships.<sup>2</sup> Ironically, if we force large animal practitioners to slow down enough to reflect upon their best moments in medicine they often describe times in which they had felt free to fulfill these 3 basic needs.

The question then becomes: how do we create more of these highly satisficing moments for practitioners? They will never be able to rid themselves of many of their less psychologically fulfilling duties. No matter what, things like rectal exams, foot work and routine surgery will always represent a primary avenue of revenue and time commitment for them but could be considered mundane. Making the primary question; "How do practitioners find more time in an already busy day?"

In order to do this, veterinarians must begin to redefine time, reconsider its value, reflect upon just how efficaciously it is used, and intensify its management.

**Key words:** time, burnout, money, management, efficacy

## Redefining time

### Time is elastic

*"Time is elastic. It stretches to accommodate what we need or want to do with it." - Laura Vanderkam.*

Many people think of time as a finite measure, incapable of growth but seemingly always shrinking in availability. This belief has created an entire generation of veterinarians who have struggled with a lack of enough time. They don't have time to do the things they want to do. Yet when presented with opportunities that are of great personal value, they can suddenly find time to engage in that activity.

Where does this "superhuman" ability to suddenly manipulate time come from?

The author would argue that these unique opportunities propel us to action via their potential to satisfy BPN. That potential then acts as their motivator to find time for the activity. Despite the commonality of these opportunities in practice, this idea is still a foreign concept to many veterinarians.

The idea being that if a practitioner concentrates less upon trying to save time for everything they need to do and instead builds a life and career around satisficing these basic psychological needs, time would suddenly become more elastic for them. This represents a concept that is often foreign and intimidating to many.

Ironically, this is a skill that most veterinarians already use, they just don't do it at a conscious, mindful level. Most individuals can elicit similar personal experiences with the concept of time elasticity via a small amount of self-reflection and awareness.

To elicit a relatable example, the author encourages clients to use a reflection technique in which they attempt to mindfully identify their prior use of time elasticity.<sup>3</sup> Getting the practitioner to focus upon a time in their career when they experienced their most effective, productive and rewarding times in practice.

The goal of this exercise being to expose participants to the power of leveraging time elasticity to create basic psychological need satisfaction (BPNS) or the achievement of autonomy, relatedness and competency. Defined by Laura Vanderkam in her now famous quote, "Time is elastic. It stretches to accommodate what we need or want to do with it." Time elasticity refers to our ability to find time to do things when we autonomously deem them important or need fulfilling.

Vanderkam uses the example of a busy mother, business owner and high performer in her 2016 TED Talk.<sup>3</sup> Referencing a personal time log her client had created, she knew that this client had almost no free time in her week. Yet, when presented with an emergency breakdown and subsequent flood in her house, this client was able to find six hours in her busy day to identify and coordinate contractors for cleanup and correction of the plumbing problem, seemingly becoming able to manipulate and create additional time to rectify this problem.

Using this story as our reflective model, let's do a brief exercise. Think of a time when one of your biggest or best clients required you to do a large project or consulting report that was of deep interest to you. Knowing that your days are like every other practitioners', it is unlikely that you had open hours to

work on this project. Yet, invariably you found time to get the job done. When you really consider the moment, it's likely that it represents one of the top 25% of positive experiences you've had in your career. Despite "not" having time to engage in the activity prior to that client's request, you found a way to complete the project.

After you complete this exercise, take a moment to find a Post-it note, write down how exactly you believe you were able to create time for this project, and then place it in a prominent location at work or home. By carefully considering when you did the work, the resources you used, the skills you learned, and who helped you along the way, you will have crafted the foundation for your understanding and future manipulation of time elasticity.

For some experiences, the motivation originates from the sense that the project is a personal choice and by its very doing, you gain a feeling of control back. For others the powerful experience of learning and growing one's skillset to meet the client's challenge was motivation enough. Still others find that the simple act of service to the client and feeling more closely connected to them and their needs is enough motivation. But likely as you reflect, it will be the unique combination of each of these that motivated you to carve out and stretch your very limited resource of time to meet the client's needs.<sup>2</sup>

This reflective exercise becomes a very teachable moment for budding professionals. Showing them how, when presented with an opportunity to meet their BPNS, they were able to make time more elastic and to "find time" to do the things that matter to them. The moment of realization being that when they are presented with a need to find time for something that truly matters to them, they can stretch and manipulate time and make "it" happen.

It is this redefinition of time's finitude that becomes their first step toward a deeper understanding as well as a driving need for efficient time utilization as well as time management. Beginning to make practitioners consider what is the true value of time and more deeply what is a just reward for its expenditure?

## Time's value

### Is time money?

Humans are just one cog in the infinite evolutionary machine. We have been programmed, just like every biologic iteration before us, to evaluate energy expenditure vs. its end result. Every action therefore needs justification. Filtering through the time expenditure opportunities so that the ones we choose result in the most potential "value" to us.

Currently, the most accessible measure of time's value is money; it is easily comprehensible, tactile and readily measurable. In fact, it is so common and universally used, it has its own catch phrase, "Time is Money". However, if considered from an evolutionary context, money, as a measure, is a counterintuitive and paradoxical metric for valuing energy expenditure, whose maximization often results in less than efficacious time utilization. Yielding subpar returns as related to an individual's achievement of a state of flourishing or overall happiness.

Hsee et al (2010) showed that human beings have two paradoxical desires that can be manipulated when monetary measures are utilized as a primary measure of time efficacy.<sup>4</sup> First, humans dread being idle and want to be busy. Second, humans also need a reason to be busy and will not relinquish an idle state unless there is a sufficiently valuable "reward" for rallying to action.

These two conditions of idleness and busyness cannot exist at the same time. However, in today's economic environment, with abundant examples of tangible measurable rewards such as money being dangled in front of practitioners, it's easy for us to feel driven to action aka busyness when presented with a reward of money. Money's nature of being very tangible and easily measurable again makes it an ideal reward for busyness. One that the brain can quickly process and evaluate.

This "ideal reward" has quickly become the "go to" measure for effective busyness. Sadly, before most practitioners are aware of it, their associative memory of their ability to learn and remember the relationship between unrelated things takes over and they become trapped in the thinking that more money means they're using their time efficiently. Surrendering a sense of autonomy and instead having every second of their time defined by the amount of money made within it.

Fortunately, money is only one measure of reward that activities can yield. Other less tangible rewards such as BPNS, are also psychologically important metrics for time efficiency. Although less utilized because they are more difficult to quantify, BPNS are just as or more important to an individual's overall motivation and ultimate flourishing. However, a fixation on the more neurologically accessible measure of money dominates, resulting in behavior that Hsee et al refer to as "Futile Busyness" or the act of making oneself busy doing tasks that serve no meaningful purpose other than to avoid idleness.<sup>4</sup>

The danger of this futile busyness behavior comes into focus when considering the practitioner's naturally busy schedule. When managers present them with the ability to earn more money (measurable reward) by taking on more tasks for these rewards, it only adds fuel to their unconscious evolutionary mechanisms, encouraging them to take on more and more tasks to avoid an idle state. This results in the feeling that time must be traded for maximal money rather than BPNS or a balanced combination of the two. Creating an environment that risks being basic psychological need thwarting (BPNT) or filled with activities that frustrate basic psychological needs in favor of the associated measurable external (monetary) rewards.

Basic psychological need thwarting behavior leaves veterinarians feeling only slightly better after completing tasks than if they had been idle because they lack meaning, frustrate BPNS, and ultimately reduce feelings of flourishing. This over time builds up ill-being causing the practitioner to develop a cognitive dissonance around whether the time spent being busy was truly well spent.

## The commercialization of time

Following this futile busyness logic, practitioners become indoctrinated into the "time is money" cult, evaluating every choice between opportunities solely through a lens of its monetary measure vs. considering the BPNS impact that results from that choice. This complete commercialization of time is a by-product of our capitalistic society in which individuals sacrifice time now for a "future" reward.<sup>5</sup>

In recent years, the commercialization of time has become more endemic in the veterinary profession. Rising vet school costs have inflicted significant financial pressures upon recent graduates. Seeking to create students who are able to manage these obligations, many schools have become significantly more involved in their students' pertinent pre-career financial discussions.<sup>6</sup> When interviewing current veterinary students,

it is not infrequent that they have been told exactly what they should make as a starting salary by their institutions as well as having been told it would be unwise to accept less than X salary. However, very few students end up being educated about how to define an appropriate work-to-time exchange through the context of BPNS as well as monetary compensation.

As a matter of concern, most of these early conversations seem to revolve around techniques that limit the budding veterinarian's time at work so they can experience BPNS outside their job, rather than seeking to improve/find a job's intrinsic value. Therefore, failing to help the future practitioner craft a job that uses multiple measures to assess its time worthiness.

Such pervasive conversations about money at the pre-career stage sets-up another generation of veterinarians to wholly measure their success simply by monetary metric. Risking ignorance of other, perhaps more important, supplemental time efficiency metrics.

This is expressly concerning when Niemiec et al (2009), showed that college graduates who set life goals at graduation based upon more extrinsic outcomes (such as monetary compensation, fame and social recognition) in their looming career and then achieve them failed to see improvements in their psychological health at one year into their career. As a result, they showed a lack of improvement in subjective well-being as well as greater feelings of ill-being (the feeling of being deficient in health, happiness or prosperity).<sup>7</sup>

Conversely, their peers who focused more upon intrinsic life goals at graduation (such as learning, sense of competence and enjoyment) and then achieved these, saw marked increases in their well-being and decreases in perceived ill-being.<sup>7</sup> Niemiec conveys the importance and impact these early career conversations have upon an individual's appropriate perceptions surrounding the commercialization of time and expected future career well/ill-being even before earning potential has begun.

Devoe et al (2012) looked even deeper at the effects of the commercialization of time mentality by interviewing actively employed workers.<sup>8</sup> They challenged workers to think about how much income they generated per minute worked, forcing them to calculate this value based off their wages. Creating individuals who were mindful of their current time-to-money conversion measures. The researchers then presented the participants with several different activities meant to induce happiness, which were then followed by subsequent idle states.

Regardless of the activity or idle state, individuals who had calculated their value in terms of money for time enjoyed the activities less than their control counterparts who had simply reported their annual income and time worked. Not only did they experience less enjoyment, the treatment group also displayed marked increases in overall impatience; a key behavioral marker of burn-out. This condition is one of the most common psychological conditions affecting today's veterinary practitioner. This impatience, as related to "time is money" metrics, has these individuals back on the futile busyness track; immediately tracking down the next reward in an effort to maximize their time for money.

Interestingly, impatience has also been found to down regulate the centers of the mind responsible for reflection and mindful savoring of activities. Reducing the ability of the veterinarian to enjoy their monetary reward as well as critically consider it. This associated inability to savor is concerning as the hedonic treadmill, or the idea that an individual's level of happiness

increases or decreases in response to positive/negative life events and then moves back toward where it was prior to the activity/reward, is a readily recognized psychological phenomenon in which individuals experience diminished positive returns for external rewards over time, quickly returning to their baseline well-being after their initial reward.<sup>9</sup>

This is particularly prevalent when we consider monetary compensation is governed by Weber's law. Stating that a doubling in quantitative income must occur for a meaningful and intrapersonally measurable change to occur. Within an individual, Weber's law shows just how frustrating busyness can be if it's monetary reward (usually small in comparison to total compensation) will really not be felt until an individual's income doubles.<sup>10</sup> It is also important to note that Weber's law is not limited to monetary rewards and also exists within other extrinsic rewards as well including new positions, fame, social recognition or property acquisition.<sup>10</sup> As or more concerning than the implications of Weber's law, is the professional's ignorance to mindfully consider other more rewarding qualitative returns from the act of trading time for the doing of an activity; these being their opportunity to BPNS.

Practicing veterinarians who suspect they may have become victims of time commercialization can test themselves for this mentality with a quick and easy self-assessment. Begin by booking an appointment slot of 15-60 minutes and then forcing yourself to do nothing in that slot. Personal reflection is encouraged in this time but no other work or external activity is permissible. If during this period you experience extreme anxiety, anxiousness or even stress about this idle state regarding loss of production/service, then you may be under some degree of time commercialization bias.

By this point the reader is probably wondering, "Does monetary compensation matter at all?" Should the industry just focus upon situations where BPNS occurs if they want to efficiently trade my time? The answer to this question appears to be yes on both accounts.

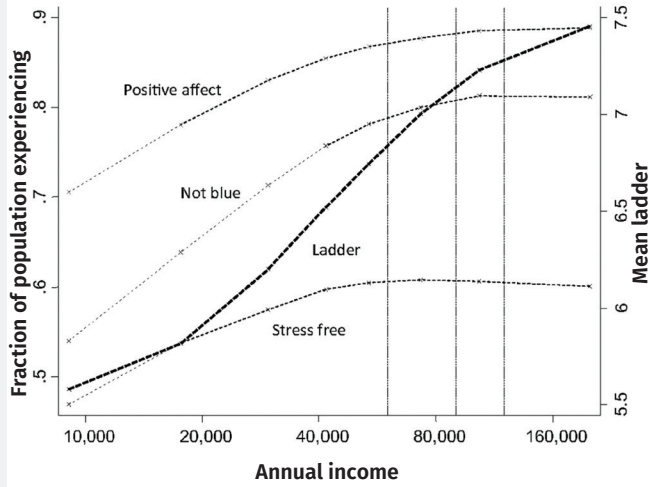
## Does money matter at all?

Can a practitioner's income or specifically time traded for money improve happiness alone? Two conflicting camps have existed regarding this question since 2010. Kahnmann struck first in 2010 finding (Figure 1) that increasing income can have a positive impact to a point, which in his study was \$75,000 USD.<sup>10</sup> After this point, participants saw little to no improvement in happiness.

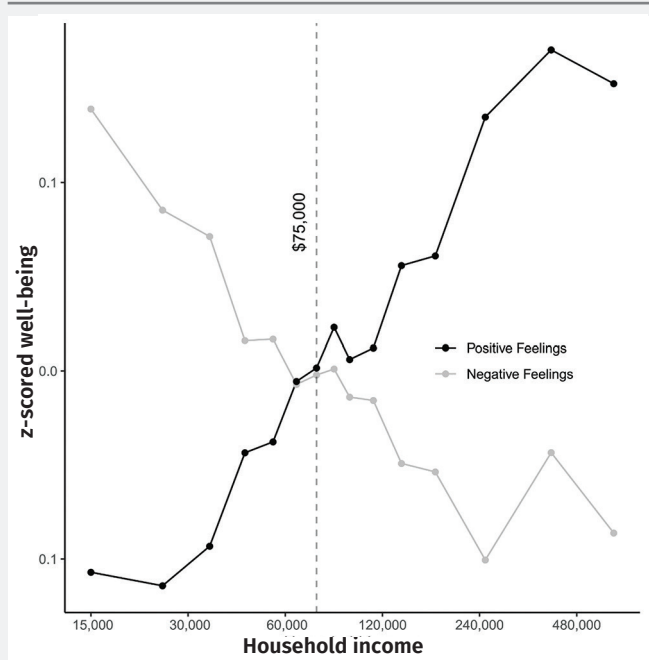
In the other camp was Killingsworth. Their landmark study in 2021 used continuous well-being measures to identify that happiness increased up to and beyond Kahnmann's \$75,000 USD threshold, challenging his findings.<sup>11</sup> Showing that as income increased positive feelings continued to increase well beyond \$75,000 (Figure 2) challenging the predominant thinking about the relationship between income and well-being and therefore the time-for-money reward paradigm.

However, in 2023 Kahnmann and Killingsworth showed that neither of their findings were completely correct by proving that there is actually a unique interaction between income and both emotional and life satisfaction.<sup>12</sup> In their landmark adversarial collaboration they showed that additional income does improve both emotional and cognitive well-being, but only if the individual's happiness was already above the 20<sup>th</sup> percentile prior to the income increase (Figure 3).<sup>12</sup>

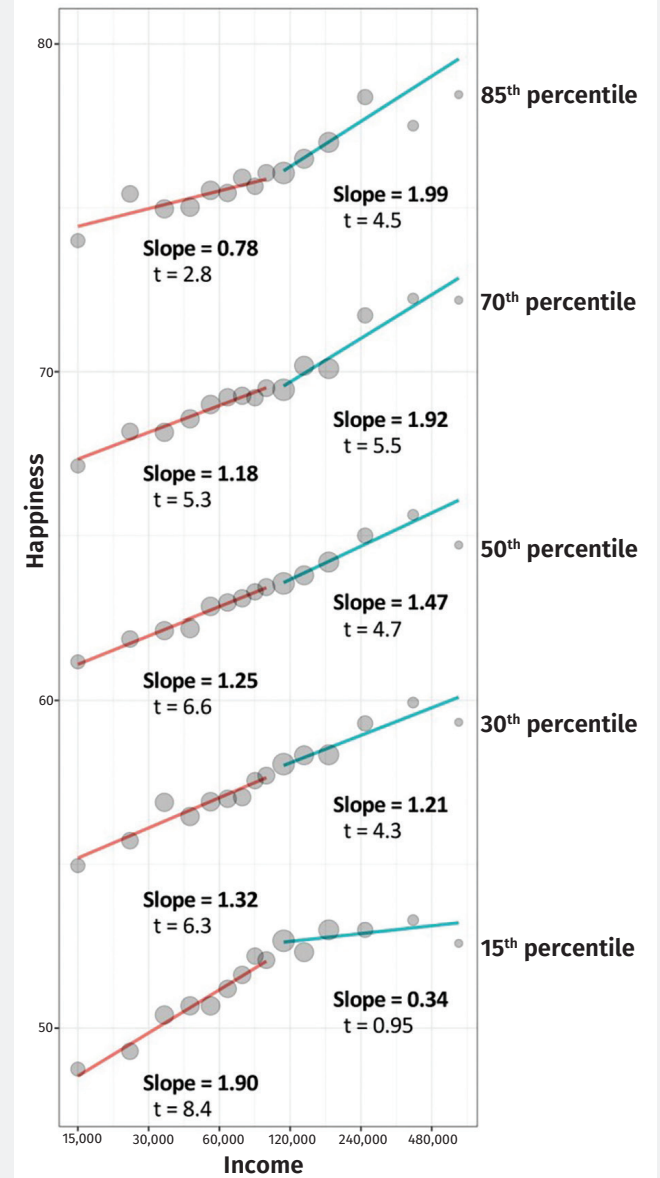
**Figure 1.<sup>10</sup>** Positive affect, blue affect, stress, and life evaluation in relation to household income. Positive affect is the average of the fractions of the population reporting happiness, smiling, and enjoyment. “Not blue” is 1 minus the average of the fractions of the population reporting worry and sadness. “Stress free” is the fraction of the population who did not report stress for the previous day. These three hedonic measures are marked on the left-hand scale. The ladder is the average reported number on a scale of 0-10, marked on the right-hand scale.



**Figure 2.<sup>11</sup>** Mean levels of positive feelings (Positive Feelings is the average of confident, good, inspired, interested, and proud) and negative feelings (Negative Feelings is the average of afraid, angry, bad, bored, sad, stressed, and upset) for each income band.



**Figure 3.<sup>12</sup>** Emotional well-being of the 15th, 30th, 50th, 70th, and 85th percentiles of the person-level happiness distribution in MK, calculated within each income category. Slopes were calculated below and above 100k, using quantile regression.



This result indicates the potential for a limited effect of income if significant levels of ill-being or lack of happiness exists prior to attainment of increasing income. Proving that trading time for money alone will not always bring elevated well-being. If the individual feels their work environment contains a significant amount of BPNT and subsequent ill-being, no level of compensation will result in an increased positive well-being environment.

Does money matter at all? The end result would appear to be just as black and white as many other scientific theories. Most likely it does play a role in our happiness and subjective well-being, therefore it does warrant some attention and resources when considering time efficacy. But just as important is our current well-being prior to that income being realized. Without the prior elevated level of well-being that money for time trade will yield little to no positive well-being result.

Just as important, the researchers showed that this is a non-linear effect with prior emotional well-being (greater than the 20<sup>th</sup> percentile) having increasingly accelerating effects upon happiness when monetary rewards are realized and increased. Therefore, investments in BPNS prior to and during attempted time for money transactions should have marked effects upon happiness after the reward is received.

The active pursuit of trading time for BPNS, a prerequisite for subjective well-being, must not be ignored as well, and at the least must balance with the practitioner's pursuit of monetary measures.<sup>13</sup> It is at this time that we must begin to actively consider ways in which we can re-educate the individual about well-being measures as an alternative or invaluable supplement to monetary only measures of time efficacy.

### **If not only money, then what measure(s)?**

Subjective well-being, our proposed supplemental measure of effective time usage, seems to be the most literary appropriate primary measure of efficient time utilization. Characterized by the creation of individuals who are healthy, fully integrated and flourishing, elevating subjective well-being creates individuals who flourish at both life and in their careers. These individuals are also highly motivated and routinely perform at a high level.<sup>13</sup>

Slemp's et al (2024) expansive meta-analysis of over 800 independent research sample sets proves that interpersonal settings, such as veterinary clinics, that routinely support expressions of autonomy, competency, and relatedness (BPNS), produced significant effects upon subjective well-being, motivation and performance (the author encourages owners and aspiring owners looking to improve this aspect of their clinic culture to review this paper for BPNS intervention ideas as the discussion of exactly how to implement such protocols extends beyond the scope of this paper).<sup>13</sup>

Accepting these results, practitioners can safely infer that individuals who routinely seek experiences that are BPNS and avoid experiences that are BPNT will experience greater perceived satisfaction from their time exchanges. Encouraging them to identify situations in which the risk for a high BPNS:BPNT ratio and a subsequent elevation of well-being exists and only then considering the monetary aspect of the time expenditure. Assuring they will have the benefit of BPNS to bolster subjective well-being prior to a monetary reward. Allowing them to increase the expected incidence of subjective well-being and depress the expected incidence of ill-being (negative emotions or health).<sup>14</sup>

Defined as the individual's perception of their life satisfaction, happiness and overall fulfillment, subjective well-being can be broken down into two unique intrapersonal experiences. First is emotional well-being (what individuals define as happiness) or the emotional quality of an individual's life determined by the ratios of emotions such as joy, stress, sadness, anger, etc. experienced over a period of time. The second part of subjective well-being is cognitive well-being or what we will call life satisfaction. This refers to the individual's evaluation of life overall and their satisfaction with each domain within it. Looking more deeply at what influences each aspect of subjective well-being, effective well-being and life satisfaction, we find two distinct entities that can be influenced by differing and sometimes confounding inputs.

Considering effective well-being, as defined by a practitioner's emotional experiences in life, researchers find that this form of well-being is most affected by factors such as the individual's health, caregiving and feelings of loneliness.<sup>10</sup> Making it more distinctly governed by the BPN of autonomy and relatedness. Alluding to the importance of the ability to control and develop meaningful relationships if individuals want to elevate their subjective well-being.

Conversely, life satisfaction as defined by a practitioner's satisfaction within each of life's domains, is more closely tied to factors such as income level and education.<sup>10</sup> Making this aspect of subjective well-being more affected by factors such as autonomy and competency. Showing professionals the importance of feeling in control of their compensation level as well as professional learning and development.

These subgroupings of well-being suggest that income could have a significant impact on subjective well-being, or at the least, the life satisfaction portion of it. This would seemingly bring back the validity of the "time is money" statement. Again, suggesting that some component of time, traded for money, could result in greater life satisfaction, and therefore, its parent subjective well-being. Yet again we need to address Kahnmann and Killingsworth's 2023 masterpiece (Figure 3), because without a prior state of positive effective well-being, there will be no subsequent increase in its measure post-monetary reward resulting in marginal, if any, increases in well-being for that time-money exchange making it an inefficient use of time.<sup>12</sup>

## **Well-being results from efficient time usage**

### **Crafting time affluence via the art of creative neglect**

Once individuals understand that time is finite but malleable, and that trading it for only money will not necessarily improve their overall feelings of subjective well-being, then they can begin to evaluate their time utilization in new and novel ways. These realizations often begin with the identification and reduction in futile busyness tasks through a technique Oliver Burkeman describes in his book *Four Thousand Weeks* as "creative neglect."<sup>15</sup>

Creative neglect is derived from the fallacy that we have time for everything. If we truly accept that time is finite and to find more of it we must manipulate our time efficiency by either eliminating the task, reducing the duration, or improving the efficiency of the task. Only then can we embrace it as a finite resource.<sup>15</sup> Using this concept Burkeman (2021) proposes that individuals manage activities like futile busyness by re-evaluating how we "spend it" so they can become more "time affluent."<sup>15</sup>

The irony of the time affluence model is that we actually need to consider time as its own currency, with its own intrinsic potential and value.<sup>15</sup> In this model, the practitioner uses their daily time budget just as one would set up a household budget. There are operating cost-type bills for things like sleep, eating, social time, etc. in this budget just as a household has bills for heat, water and food. A time affluence budget also has bills for discretionary spending for things like exercise, reading or hobbies just like a household would have as well.

What creative neglect challenges practitioners to do is find a justification for every activity they're "paying" time for. This justification is considered through the context that we do not always choose an action or condition that is best for their

well-being.<sup>4</sup> In such a model, practitioners are encouraged to pay themselves first. Much like successful households pay into debts or retirement prior to discretionary expenditures. Practitioners are encouraged to budget their time in ways that pay into their BPNS and ultimate well-being first, resulting in improved life satisfaction, high performance and flourishing.

Determining what activities warrant a practitioner's time expenditure can be difficult. When presented with so many opportunities to take on more cases, clients, challenges, projects, and business ventures, how does an individual know what opportunities to settle into?

## Investing time affluence for well-being returns

The prevailing uncertainty about what opportunity is the best balance between BPNS and monetary compensation creates feelings of being unsettled and can paralyze a practitioner. Yet they must choose which opportunity they wish to pursue because they cannot manage more than six substantial projects at once.<sup>16</sup> Mindful evaluation of the meaningful level of busyness each opportunity poses is critical as a filter for each opportunity.

This evaluation will never be black or white. Rare is the opportunity to fulfill all three BPN in a manor weighted equally between each need while also being able to maximize financial return. This requires practitioners to accept that they will never necessarily be able to maximize their return on invested time since they do not have unlimited amounts of time, resources, or energy to yield such an outcome.<sup>16</sup> However, neither do they need to settle for the current opportunities before them and be resigned to their current time expenses.

Individuals can use the time value of money, a basic economic principle that states that money now has more value than future earnings given that it can be invested and begin earning returns immediately, in this context.<sup>17</sup> Applied to time one can say that the opportunity cost of using your new found time affluence in an inefficient way would be equivalent to socking away \$1,000 dollars in a sock drawer for a decade vs. earning an average 7% return on it in a market index fund.

Knowing this opportunity cost, what does an efficient time investment look like? Professionals should be looking for investments that will energize and activate them; crafting an environment of motivation for their organismic development. Such activities can be grouped into two forms of reward which motivates or controls the individual; intrinsic or extrinsic. The implications of each having long lasting effects upon a practitioner's career motivation, life satisfaction and flourishing level.

Beginning with extrinsically motivated time investments, we find that these are often opportunities that seek to exert more control over an individual by leading to a separate rewarding outcome of them from the task. Such as working to avoid discipline. Achievement for recognition. Success for promotion. Alternatively, intrinsic motivated time investments are opportunities that generally are felt as less controlling, more autonomously derived, and result in greater internal interest or enjoyment than external rewards. Hard work for enjoyment. Learning to grow new skills. Fulfilling one's values.<sup>18</sup> When practitioners consider their discretionary time investment, it's important that they look at it through a lens that evaluates their ability to use time in a way that engenders greater intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic motivation.

When presented with a task, it's likely that it exists somewhere between complete external control and complete internal control; as subject to Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) which describes the scale (Figure 4) that defines the continuum between these two points.<sup>2</sup> Describing the different forms of extrinsic motivation as well as describing the behaviors of internalization and integration OIT seeks to define how practitioners can modify or adopt extrinsic control to make the time invested in these tasks yield greater BPNS and subjective well-being.

## Settle for improved time affluence

It would be naive to suggest that as much as practitioners would like their day to be filled with easily differentiable intrinsic vs. extrinsic time investment choices, this is often the case. Many tasks found within the veterinary job description represent natural and unalterable time "commercialization" that look holistically extrinsic in scope and control. But this does not mean that there are not ways to trade the time spent doing these tasks for more intrinsic rewards by harnessing the OIT continuum and BPNS at various levels to increase feelings of intrinsic motivation.

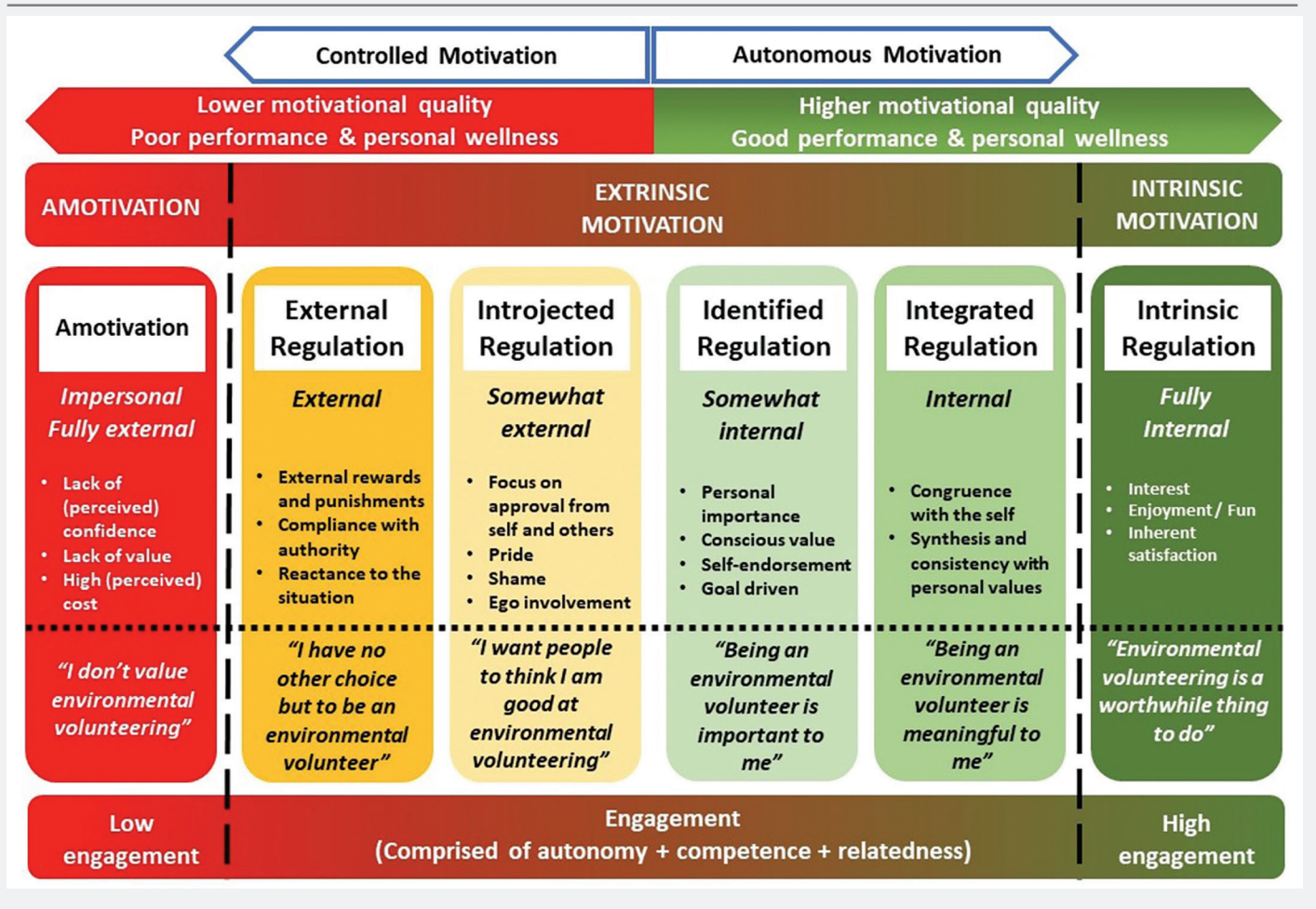
Knowing the ultimate goal is to trade aspects of this newfound time affluence for the intrinsically rewarding measure of well-being, what is the best way to do this? The author agrees with Reis and Sheldon (2000) who showed that activities which fulfill BPNS resulted in greater subjective well-being in participants.<sup>19</sup> Thus, practitioners should consider BPNS as an "index fund" to invest time into.

However, just like any index fund, BPN investment must have a balanced portfolio. Milyavskaya (2009) showed that individuals must look for opportunities across all of life's domains that are equally satisfying of all three BPNs to maximize their subjective well-being. Satisfying only one or two of these needs in each of life's realms will not result in a marked increase in well-being as meeting all three in each of life's realms.<sup>20</sup> This is where practitioners can begin to create time elasticity within the context of their opportunities. They can select opportunities that currently are lacking in one or more BPNS area and/or monetary compensation and consider ways they could add time, resources, or learning opportunities to it to improve the time efficiency return. This technique of taking a current opportunity and recreating it based upon maximizing ongoing available resources is known as satisficing.<sup>16</sup> Resulting not in the ideal, visionary or maximized return one might wish for but also not just accepting or settling for the presented well-being or monetary system.

One key aspect of satisficing that differentiates it from settling, which allows us to say yes to all the opportunities before us because each can be accomplished at a suboptimal level if settled upon (yielding suboptimal results), is that satisficing will require individuals to say "no" to some of those opportunities. This "no" allows practitioners to recover the time and resources that would be required for those other projects and apply them to the "yes" projects, maximizing their effect. Having a greater overall impact upon well-being as well as compensation, even though it doesn't result in the maximum potential that the opportunity would present in a world with unlimited time and resources.

This mindful choice focuses the practitioner on meaningful work by closing their mind off to the fantasy that they can "do it all." By embracing what Burkeman (2021) calls "the joy of missing out" they can make powerful choices that result in time allocation toward only meaningful work that will be BPNS.<sup>15</sup>

Figure 4.<sup>2, 28</sup> Organismic Integration Theory



This requires a conscious choice to avoid settling on opportunities presented to the practitioner and instead mindfully selecting the work that is most meaningful for the fulfillment of your BPNs while also providing appropriate levels of well-being and monetary compensation. Empowering the individual and their sense of self-determination. Amabile and Kramer (2011) showed that individuals making regular progress on this meaningful work are happier and are up to 50% more creative.<sup>21</sup>

A final side effect of satisficing is that even after its first implementation, it begins to prime the reticular activating system in the brain. This portion of the brain has many responsibilities but one of its primary functions is to act as a filter for information and stimuli coming in.<sup>22</sup> If individuals mindfully select for meaningful work that satisfies BPN, well-being and monetary rewards, it is highly likely that the brain will continue to seek out and present similar opportunities in the future. Assuring the practitioner that they successfully invest their time affluence in time efficient areas.

## Building lives that manage time itself

### Exercises to improve time affluence

The key to finding success in meaningful time efficiency management is threefold.<sup>15</sup> First, practitioners must pay themselves in time first, before any other time commitment is written. The prioritization of time utilization toward personal goals,

self-care and meaningful tasks is key. Practitioners who begin spending time in this way ensure that they will provide a solid foundation of BPNS prior to any other commitments, meaning they will have greater chances to experience life satisfaction, well-being and flourishing.

Second, practitioners must learn to limit their projects.<sup>15</sup> In a world where time is defined as money, and more projects (and/or clients) yield more income, this may seem counterintuitive to clinic owners. Every project or client a practitioner takes on represents a potential increase in futile busyness as well as diluting out the professional's ability to make progress with their existing projects or clients which results in a practitioner facing a myriad of time efficiency challenges such as never really progressing their projects/clients in a meaningful way. In turn neglecting more difficult or longer duration interactions in favor of working with shorter and less demanding clients, only working on projects that have become "emergencies" in that moment, or ignoring less measurably rewarding projects in favor of projects whose progress is more easily assessed but has less impact upon them personally.

Third, practitioners should be encouraged to avoid the trap of middling priorities. Perhaps the most cited example of middling priorities management comes from the previously attributed, but now disproven, Warren Buffett quote about the 25/5 rule.<sup>23</sup> This rule encouraged individuals to write a list of their top 25 career goals, circle the five most important goals,

and then cross off the other 20 goals you hold less important. This reflective exercise naturally encouraged practitioners to consider high-value intrinsically based goals over lesser goals which are likely to satisfy BPN. Training them to become okay with saying “no” to opportunities posed to them.

Looking at the 25/5 rule through a lens of managing time efficiency specifically when practicing medicine, we can consider Michael Port’s middling priority exercise called “Dump Your Dud Clients.”<sup>24</sup> Every practitioner has them. The clients you dread on the schedule, who drain your life’s energy, or frustrate. They deplete your motivation, strip your sense of autonomy, make every interaction a quid pro quo, and fail to provide you any opportunity to learn or grow your skills. As Port describes, there is nothing necessarily wrong with them, usually, but they’re just not right for you. However, they may be right for someone else within your practice or another practitioner in the area.

The challenge of dumping your duds comes in the form of tactfully and lovingly identifying who they are and then using that same mindset to help them move on. Practitioners can begin by defining who exactly is their ideal client. The type you love to be around, interact with, and align with your values and personality. This is called creating an “avatar” as defined by the practitioner. To begin with, practitioners can look at their client list and identify who on that list they love working with and identify five reasons why they love working with them.

Reviewing that list, they then select qualities that are non-negotiable client qualities and must have in their opinion and use them as a filter. This filter will help them create a three-column list, “Ideal Clients”, “Duds” and “Everyone Else”. Practitioners can specify that all their ideal clients will have at least 75% of these qualities; qualifying as ideal or everyone else. If neither apply, they need to be moved on to another practitioner or practice who would value them more, freeing up time.

The final and perhaps most powerful part of this exercise is reinvesting this newfound time affluence in clients who are in the ideal and everyone else category by mindfully considering and creating a roadmap of progress and growth. This roadmap should align with the practitioner’s vision of an ideal client, their competency goals, and vision for a growth relationship. This is a critical step for any practitioner, young or old, because as Tom Peters says, “You are your clients.”

Using any of these three techniques, practitioners can increase their time affluence as well as their sense of control over their time efficiency. Doing so also facilitates a fundamental shift away from a day-to-day practice featuring elevated levels of futile busyness toward what Hsee defines as “Meaningful Busyness,” or getting “people [to] search for meaning in order to work” rather than “people work[ing] to search for meaning.”<sup>24</sup>

This fundamental shift toward meaningful busyness or work that aligns with an individual’s values, purpose and sense of impact upon the world is key to improving subjective well-being and life satisfaction in the veterinary field. To understand its impact, as well as the impact of saying “no” to manifest creative neglect, practitioners will need a rudimentary understanding of the motivational theories behind well-being.

## Techniques in time management

The practical application of BPNS can be difficult without a structure to define its parameters. In our system we use the mnemonic PACE as a reminder to practitioners of the mindful selection of activities that satisfy these needs. PACE stands for performance, appropriate boundaries, cup filling and expectations. The fulfillment of which will assure the practitioner that they are participating in BPNS activities.

The first category being “performance” and last category “expectations” go hand-in-hand, providing the practitioner with a sense of autonomy via planning. First, expectations refer to the practitioner’s ability to set meaningful goals that are related to intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivators. These goals contain large encompassing objectives and are then broken down into smaller weekly to monthly initiatives and finally into daily tasks. This facilitates progress on the project as well as provides feedback for the individual so they can consider if the goal is still an appropriate expectation or if it needs to be altered.

One key to this aspect of time management comes from Niemiec’s (2008) pre-graduation research in that a practitioner who is beginning to create expectations for themselves must be able to clearly identify if that expectation or any of its initiatives are based in extrinsic or intrinsic rewards.<sup>7</sup> Knowing that extrinsic rewards would result in a less rewarding (no well-being increase and increased ill-being) experience a practitioner must critically evaluate each goal and its motivation.

After the creation of these expectations, it falls on the practitioner to critically evaluate their performance as they attempt to complete their tasks, initiatives and objectives. This reflective activity challenges the individual to consider if their performance is resulting in an appropriate intrinsic reward and how does that relate to their aspirations for fulfilling their expectations. The reflective aspect of PACE allows individuals to quickly ID and adjust BPNS or BPNT and assure themselves they are truly satisficing that expectation.

The next key aspect to appropriate time management involves managing the relatedness the practitioner experiences. Standing for appropriate boundaries, the “A” refers to the ability to control who they build relationships with and who they spend their time with. A key aspect to BPNS is the relatedness that is necessary for increasing intrinsic motivation.

Not only is “time with others” a basic psychological need, but it is also a main stressor when it comes to time management. Perlow (1999) does an excellent job of describing how inefficient interpersonal time utilization can create a “time famine.”<sup>25</sup> Described as a lack of time because of interpersonal dependence and detrimental patterns of interaction, time famine portrays the negative effects of uncontrolled relatedness, sapping time, creativity and autonomy from all involved.

Taking back this time involves establishing appropriate boundaries. Such boundaries can be as simple as not responding to after-hours text messages or as complex as completely shutting down all communication during specific hours of the day so focused work can occur on expectations or other meaningful work. This is how managers and veterinarians can get to do more uninterrupted “deep work.”

Newport (2016) defines deep work as “Professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit. These efforts create new value, improve your skill, and are hard to replicate.”<sup>26</sup> This

is the ultimate BPNS; focused work that individuals choose, needs controlled interpersonal feedback, and develops a new skill. However, it requires that interpersonal interaction be controlled or limited from time to time so the focus on complex problems, skills or learning can occur.

No matter how these boundaries are constructed, they must create “quiet time,” or time when interpersonal interaction is strongly or completely discouraged. Creating a brief yet powerful deep working environment for a desired amount of time which has been proven to improve productivity by up to 65%.<sup>25</sup> This does not necessitate avoiding collaboration or productive relatedness but rather avoids activities that would disrupt BPNS during specific times of the day. Later opening the window back up for interpersonal collaboration and relatedness development.

Finally, PACE demands that practitioners be accountable for their own “cup filling” or competency developing activities. Competency refers to an organism’s ability to interact effectively with its environment through prolonged feats of learning.<sup>2</sup> Cup filling gets its power from the practitioner’s autonomous selection of skills that are interesting to them and then the subsequent commitment of time resources toward developing them, thus meeting two of the three basic psychological needs.

The commitment to cup filling daily forms the cornerstone to PACE and BPNS. It is a daily commitment to this activity that helps it slowly build into an area of expertise that can be shared with the world. Another less-appreciated side effect of cup filling is its ability to free its practitioner from “constrains of the small” by forcing them to ignore less pressing tasks for periods of time each day in favor of bigger more meaningful work, forcing them to say “no” naturally.<sup>27</sup>

## Time management is complex yet simple

Time will stretch or shrink depending upon the practitioner’s ability to control it. Those who fail to control it will face a shortage of time and will always be “borrowing time” to make up for their lack of time affluence. However, individuals who realize that time stretches to make room for things that matter and invest in mindfully choosing those activities that are meaningful will rarely feel short on time. They will say “no” to activities that are not efficient or fail to improve well-being.

It is important to remember that managing time is not a one-off event. It requires continual mindful monitoring, reflection and adjustment to assure that BPNS remains high while BPNT is eliminated as often as possible. The result of all of this work is a high performing, happy and flourishing veterinary professional.

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