Shaping ideal futures:

Writing a letter to the future

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Abstract

The Covid-19 crisis and measures have created an extraordinary situation that has affected most people around the globe. Adapting to and coping with this unpredictable situation has proven challenging for many. Apart from the direct effects such as a loss of income, normalcy, and postponed healthcare, many people have experienced a loss of meaning in life, negatively affecting their mental health and well-being. This has led many people to experience a downward spiral of negative emotions, prompting immediate, survival-oriented behaviors and learned helplessness. An effective way to counteract this is to restore a sense of autonomy by writing about making the world a better place. This can be achieved by letting people reflect on an ideal world free of constraints and contrasting this with the idea of the world that will come to pass if nothing changes. Prior research in the field of positive psychology has shown that brief interventions can help counteract many of the aforementioned negative consequences and even aid in developing a more positive future outlook that individuals act upon. In this paper, we highlight an intervention, that seems especially promising in this respect: Letters to the future. Writing about how and when one will contribute to this ideal future, is key in ensuring that this comes a step closer to becoming reality. Acting upon dreams and plans can also have real-world positive consequences. In sum, based on positive psychology, goal-setting, life-crafting, and mindset theory, we propose an intervention that offers ways to increase positive emotions, enhance social support, increase self-transcendence, and action repertoire, and potentially kickstart societal change. As this intervention can be done online and is scalable, we propose to use the intervention on a wide scale to improve mental health and well-being worldwide, and at the same time make the world a better place.

Keywords

Letters to the future; Future world crafting; Life crafting; Positive Psychology intervention; COVID-19 crisis; Abundance versus Scarcity mindset; Self-transcendence; Positive ripple effects

Highlights

- Many people experienced a loss of meaning in life and a downward spiral in terms of mental health as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

- Letters to the future, i.e. writing about how to make the world a better place, could counteract this downward spiral and potentially create positive ripple effects for individuals and societies.

- Letters to the future also seems promising in restoring a sense of purpose in life, increasing positive emotions and improving social support.

Introduction

"Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world."

– Harriet Tubman

"Good writing facilitates the making of connections in a way that inspires openheartedness, thinking, talking, and action."

-- (Pipher, 2007)

Writing about a future idealized world has long been recognized as a powerful way to not only transform the way we look at the world, but also to inspire positive action (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006; Pipher, 2007; Schippers & Ziegler, 2019). Since trying to make the world a better place is something most would agree is worth striving for (Reisch, 2017), interest in how and why (young) people try to shape the world we live in has been gaining more research attention (Müller-Bachmann et al., 2022; Reisch, 2017). In this narrative review, we argue that reflecting on the future of the world might be especially important in times of crisis. These days, the world is being plagued by different crises, such as Covid-19, the climate crisis, the cost-of-living crisis, and geopolitical instabilities. This causes many challenges, and can leave people feeling helpless, experience mental health problems, or even experience a loss of meaning in life (e.g., de Jong et al., 2020; O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009; Schippers et al., 2022). In this paper, we propose a cost-effective, scalable, intervention that we expect will contribute to restoring the resilience of individuals as well as of society in times of crisis: Letters to the Future.

The recent Covid-19 crisis, for example, has created a unique challenge with measures taken to contain the spread of the virus changing the lives of billions of people. This has, unfortunately, negatively impacted people's mental and physical well-being (for reviews see Schippers et al., 2022; Schippers, 2020). For instance, it has been suggested that many people have experienced life-changing losses and accompanying negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, and depression, and their experiences have been compared to grief-like emotions (e.g., over the loss of normalcy or a loss of purpose in life ; de Jong et al., 2020). Another example of a current crisis is the climate crisis: many young people substantially worry about climate change and these worries have also been related to mental health problems (e.g., Hickman et al., 2021; Ramadan et al., 2022), a sense of loss of meaning in life   , and ecological grief (for an overview, see Ojala et al., 2021). Often, these types of crises are characterized by a problem-framing that touches on people's fears, which is effective in drawing attention to the problem, but simultaneously makes individuals feel helpless, overwhelmed and feeling that they are not able to contribute to solving the problem (e.g., O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009). Ojala et al. (2021) suggest that although negative feelings regarding climate change can act as a motivation to act, it is important to provide people with strategies to cope.

As most people feel a need to be in charge of their lives, i.e., the need to have a sense of autonomy and meaning in life (Schippers & Ziegler, 2019), these large crises pose a serious problem. It has been shown that meaning in life - the feeling that one has a sense of purpose, coherence, and significance (Martela & Steger, 2016)- is a key human need that individuals tend to strive for (Schippers & Ziegler, 2019). Research indicates that people with a higher sense of meaning in life, have better physical health, reduced mortality risk, and lower levels of depression and loneliness (Kim et al., 2022). As large crisis situations are expected to negatively affect the

sense of meaning in life (e.g., de Jong et al., 2020), there is a strong need to contain and buffer the negative consequences of these global crises (Schippers et al., 2022; Schippers, 2020), and help individuals and society to regain resilience.

In this narrative review, we propose a scalable positive psychology intervention – Letters to the future, developed by the first author - that we anticipate can help make people more resilient during world crises and can instigate social change. We expect that this intervention can help people regain a sense of control and meaning in life, and also to recognize their own potential role in coping with, managing and overcoming these crises.

The "Letters to the future" intervention proposed in this paper is aimed at letting people reflect on and act upon an ideal future for our world. The intervention is inspired by life crafting interventions (de Jong et al., 2020; Schippers & Ziegler, 2019), and combines mental contrasting with goal setting, to 1) make people more aware of their view of the world and the problems in the world, and their own norms and behavior (and possible discrepancies between these two) 2) make people aware of the impact they can have themselves on these problems in the world, and 3) provide participants with tools to set concrete goals and create attainment plans to contribute to this ideal world. We expect that this intervention will help individuals develop self-transcendence and meaning in life. In addition, we expect that the intervention can improve mental health in crisis situations and build an action repertoire to make the world a better place. Also, we expect that the intervention might aid in finding creative solutions for "wicked world problems", and might create positive ripple effects, which can be the start of societal change.

Below, we first discuss how positive psychology interventions such as reflecting on an ideal world may enhance the experience of meaning in life and well-being. Next, we briefly outline the elements of our proposed intervention and how they can contribute to meaning in life, and to

creating an action repertoire. Subsequently, we describe how and why such an intervention can change people's mindset, specifically, from a scarcity mindset to an abundance mindset, as well as possibly increase self-transcendent motivations (cf. Hudig et al., 2022). Next, we outline how such an intervention can be implemented, used, and scaled up. Finally, we explain how the effects can spread beyond the individual and create positive ripple effects in society.

Positive psychology interventions, meaning in life and well-being

Positive psychology is the "scientific study of positive experiences and positive individual traits, and the institutions that facilitate their development" (Duckworth et al., 2005; p. 629). In their conceptual framework, Duckworth et al., 2005 discern three broad domains: pleasure, engagement, and meaning. Positive psychology interventions often demonstrate effectiveness aimed at cultivating these domains. This can be by (1) the undoing effect (2) instilling hope (3) building of buffering strengths (4) the upward spiraling effect, and (5) narration (Duckworth et al., 2005; see also ; Seligman et al., 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

A recent meta-analysis has shown that positive psychology interventions often lead to an increase in well-being, strengths, and quality of life, as well as decreased depression, anxiety, and stress. Importantly, it suggests that these gains were maintained after three months of follow-ups (Carr et al., 2021). Thus, the immediate effects and the effects over time have been well-documented (Carr et al., 2021). Moreover, these interventions have been shown to enhance happiness and their effects can largely be influenced by our actions and behaviors, such as choosing and/or writing about enjoyable goals to strive for (Dekker et al., 2020; Higgins et al., 1997; Schippers et al., 2020; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). During the Covid-19 crisis, several

studies have shown that positive psychology interventions could buffer the negative effects of the crisis, such as loneliness and depression (Brouzos et al., 2021; Waters et al., 2022).

Interventions that require writing about the ideal self (or world), have shown especially great promise in enhancing well-being and meaning in life (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006; Carver et al., 1999; Peterson & Mar, 2004). Importantly, it has been shown that writing about the ideal future self has the inherent capacity to bring about change (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006). Indeed, when people write about their ideal future, they connect with this future and can see more possibilities where they can contribute to making changes. Moreover, once individuals increase their own well-being and meaning in life, their agency is likely to increase, which, in turn, may have positive ripple effects via a process of emotional contagion and 'sensegiving" (Barsade, 2002; Schippers & Ziegler, 2019). This may especially be the case for ideal goals with a focus on hopes and aspirations (Higgins et al., 1997).

Importantly, whereas "sensemaking" is an important activity to help individuals gain clarity in ambiguous situations, "sensegiving" also entails influencing the sensemaking processes of others (Weick et al., 2005). Thus, we argue that imagining and shaping not only our own futures but also the future of the world might be a powerful tool to kickstart action and might aid in solving "wicked social problems" (Gümüsay & Reinecke, 2022; Lönngren & van Poeck, 2021). This is rooted in the notion that people who imagine a better future (for themselves and/or the world) will have a more positive and optimistic mindset. This, in turn, will allow them to focus on the resources and opportunities available to them and actively take charge of things rather than being victims of current circumstances (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Schippers & Ziegler, 2019).

Our expectations are partly based on the fact that previous work also suggests that meaning in life can be positively impacted by targeted interventions (Kim et al., 2022; Ryff, 2014). For instance, meaning in life can be positively impacted if people reflect on "futures that matter" (i.e., engage in sensemaking in terms of possible and preferred futures), and are given an active role in shaping such futures (Whyte et al., 2022). Indeed, making sense of possible futures may be just as important as making sense of the past (Hernes & Schultz, 2020), and increasing attention has been devoted to understanding how the future can be shaped (Gümüsay & Reinecke, 2022).

A positive psychology writing intervention that includes writing about the future is the Life crafting intervention (Schippers et al., 2020; Schippers & Ziegler, 2019). This intervention has three main elements that build on each other: finding a passion, making a concrete plan, and making it public (Schippers et al., 2020; see Figure 1). The first part entails a broad reflection on one's values and passion, competencies, and habits. The second part becomes more specific. In this part, among other things, participants contrast their future life when they make no changes in their current life with their ideal future. As a next step, they formulate and prioritize specific goals, and create concrete goal attainment plans, to bring them closer to this ideal future. A final element is making these goals public and discussing them with others, to increase the chance of goal attainment (for a more elaborate overview of life crafting, see Schippers & Ziegler, 2019).

In the next section, we will outline a variant of this life crafting intervention – Letters to the future - focused on writing about the future of the world, instead of only focusing on one's personal life. We believe that this intervention will specifically be useful in world crisis situations, where people may feel helpless and overwhelmed by the large societal problems, and are not aware of what their own impact on the situation can be. We expect that this scalable, low-cost intervention

can restore personal resilience, well-being, and meaning in life, and can also play a role in buffering societal resilience in times of crises.
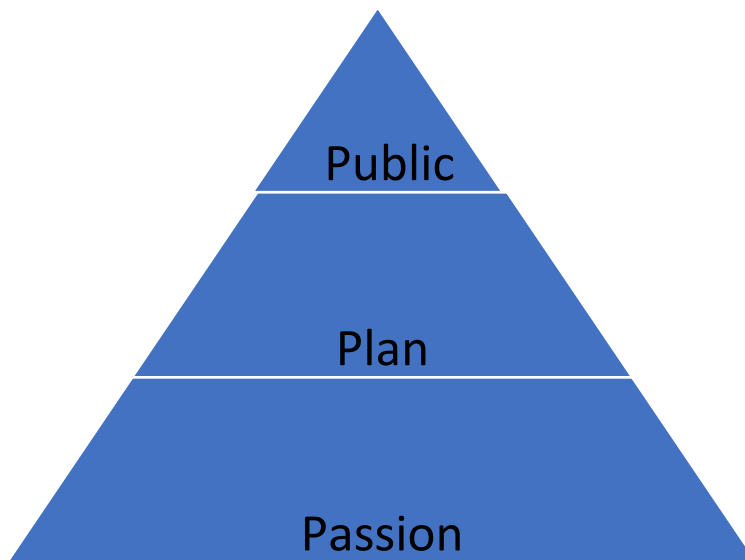
Public

Plan

Passion

Figure 1: 3 P's of finding purpose and meaning

Letters to the future: A positive psychology intervention

Given that many societal conditions are accepted as a "given" and/or difficult to change, people often have the idea that they can barely influence the fate of the world through their thinking, writing, and actions (cf. Reisch, 2017). Moreover, because people tend to find writing about an ideal world to be difficult, they give it little thought (cf. Reisch, 2017). Therefore, some authors have suggested that writing about how to make the world a better place should be part of students' regular curriculum (Bomer & Bomer, 2001). Indeed, integrating writing about the future into the school curriculum has been linked to a variety of positive effects, such as increased health (King, 2001), optimism (Malouff & Schutte, 2017), a social impact (i.e., self-transcendent) mindset, and sense of purpose (Hudig et al., 2022), as well as increased academic performance (Morisano et al.,

2010; Schippers et al., 2020; Schippers et al., 2015). Specifically, work by Hudig et al. (2022) among 748 first-year students showed that a social impact mindset is malleable and that 58% of the students changed their mindset during the first year of their studies following a goal-setting (i.e., life crafting) intervention. Low-impact mindset students (i.e., students that were rather unclear about their motives for studying) that changed to a social impact mindset showed an increased purpose in life (Hudig et al., 2022).

Letters to the future (IkigaiTV, 2022) is a positive psychology intervention aimed at promoting meaning in life and potentially inspiring societal change (Dyer, 2010; Westley et al., 2009) consisting of three parts : (1) passion (contrasting an ideal future world with a future that continues as is; (2) plan (making concrete action plans to achieve this ideal future) and (3) public (discussing these plans with others). The elements laid out in Table 1, provide the context for developing a potentially effective "letters to the future" intervention that can give people hope and purpose, increase well-being and may inspire positive societal change initiatives. Figure 2 shows a screenshot of the intervention from the website (See Table 1 and Figure 2).
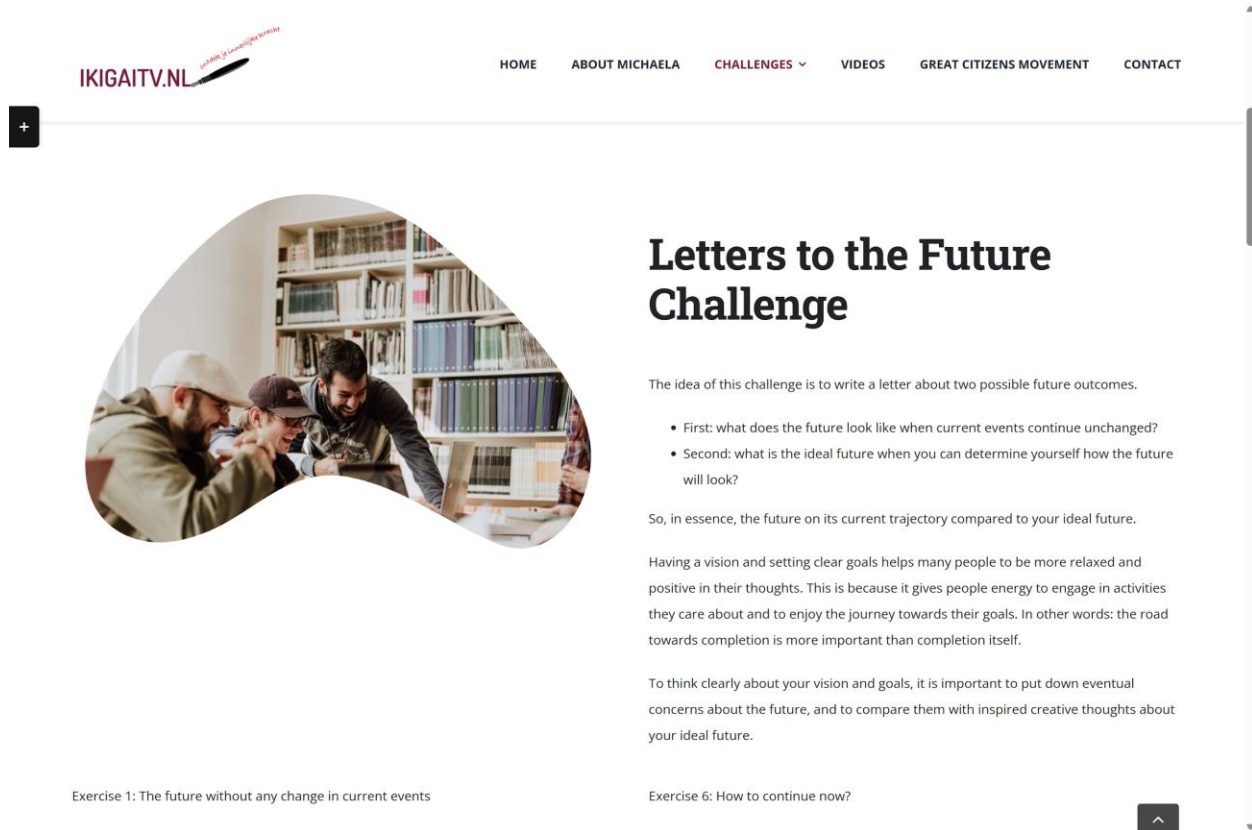
Figure 2: Screenshot of the online version of the "Letters to the future challenge" (IkigaiTV, 2022).

Specifically, in the first part of the intervention, people are asked to contrast two possible futures by asking them to reflect on: (1) "what does the future look like if you and current events continue unchanged?", and (2) "what is the ideal future if you can determine yourself how the future will look?" (see Table 1). In that sense, people are asked to contrast an ideal future with a future where nothing changes. Helping people envisage a future for the world that is attractive and energizing, is key in prompting actual (behavioral) change (Oettingen, 2012; Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2010; Oettingen et al., 2018). Indeed, by thinking about the consequences of not taking action, the goal framing effect would predict that people are more likely to take action (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). In the second part of the intervention, after writing and reflecting on what the ideal future can look like, participants are asked to formulate and prioritize concrete goals, identify

obstacles, and make plans on how to achieve those goals (elements 3, 4, and 5 in Table 1). This part is similar to the part used in life crafting (Schippers & Ziegler, 2019) and goalsetting (Schippers et al., 2020) interventions, with the main difference being that the goals are about the ideal future world and not about the ideal self. The third and final step includes discussing the goals with others and trying to put these into concrete actions (element 6 in Table 1). It is important that people share their thoughts with others and make their convictions and goals known to the broader public (Hudson et al., 2018). This is likely to provide a sense of responsibility in pursuing these goals and it may also spark inspiration and a call to action for others.

Table 1: Elements and description of a "letters to the future" intervention

Elements	Tasks involved
1. Present and future world without any changes	What does the current world look like and how does it influence people's lives? What will the future (5-10 years ahead) look like if you and the forces around you don't change, and humanity continues on its' current trajectory?
2. Ideal best possible world if there are no constraints	Imagine what your ideal world would look like if there were no constraints.

	Envision an active role you would like to play to achieve this world. Contrast this with the writing in section 1.
3. Specifying and formulating concrete goals	Keeping your ideal world in mind, reflect on the following questions: -What can you do in your direct environment, and outside of it? - How can your knowledge and skills improve the world? - How can (and will) you make a difference and create a positive ripple effect in the world? - Write down concrete goals
4. Prioritize goals, goal attainment and "if-then" plans	- Prioritize the goals you came up with in section 3 - Describe first steps, something that you can do today, in reaching these

	goals
5. Identifying and removing obstacles	- Identify and describe ways to overcome obstacles to your goal-achievement plans
6. Sharing your vision and public commitment	Establish a format to share your vision with the world, for example: - Communicate and discuss goals with friends and family - Make a vision board and share on social media - Write a blog or a film in which you explain your dreams - Publish via a "Letters to the future" channel (e.g., GreatCitizensMovement, 2021)

Examples of writing

The first and third authors gave the intervention to 732 first-year students at three universities (all first-year students) as part of a series of interventions that students received, such as life crafting, gratefulness diary and gratefulness letter. Students were asked to fill out the interventions throughout the academic year, and the "letter to the future" was written once during that year.

Students were sent a link along with informed consent, asking whether their answers can be used for research purposes. For each element, we chose a few examples out of what the students wrote. For elements 1-5, we give some examples below. For element 6, given that this consisted of ideas students had to execute in real life (e.g., writing a blog or making a video) we were not able to collect the answers or actions they undertook.

Element 1: Present and future world without any changes

"Some positive aspects is that we're thinking more about the environment and where it is heading, however, we're not doing enough about it. I think if we don't work on it faster, it will have a really bad impact on our lives."

"If nothing changes in the next couple of years, I think that technology will be greatly improved. This may lead to some medical and or environmental breakthroughs. On the other hand, with the current global warming issue and the climate goals which haven't been reached the technological advances may not be sufficient to sustain the way of living that we do today. I think that our social life will be almost the same. The freedom of thinking and acting will not change, simply because our government can't agree on anything."

Element 2: Ideal Future (Ideal best possible world if there are no constraints)

"In the ideal future mankind work on their goals as a whole team. For example to realise a sustainable future, but also to explore farther than just earth. People can give a well-structured opinion but are open for other opinions and they are able to 'give' rather than just 'receive'."

"In an ideal future, people are sportive and do their best to make a healthy lifestyle. everyone is motivated to contribute to making the world a better place and have the future in mind and don't think totally in short term solutions."

Element 3-5: Specifying and formulating concrete goals

"Connect people who are willing to improve the world with each other so that we as humanity will benefit. This will help towards reaching our ideal future."

"Help others achieve their goal. This would not only benefit them, but also you as you will learn from their problems and challenges."

"Engaging in acts of kindness is important to me because it will make other peoples day better and they will most likely engage in acts of kindness as well. If I'm connected with people who are willing to improve the word, it will most likely encourage me too and that will make me feel better about myself."

Intervention

The examples show that students were quite engaged with the process, as was noticed before in a similar life crafting intervention (Schippers et al., 2020). They also indicate that many students do think of the wicked world and societal problems and show a willingness to help solve these.

The question also is whether the intervention can change people's mindset, e.g., from a scarcity to and abundance mindset (Chung et al., 2019). In other words, the question is whether the intervention could shift people's mindset from the idea that resources are limited and we need to regulate their use (i.e., a scarcity mindset), to a mindset in which the idea is that there are enough

resources for everyone and that giving will create abundance for everyone via a process of reciprocity (Chung et al., 2019). At the same time, combining an abundance mindset with a mindset of goals and goal-directed behavior can increase the chances of sharing resources, be it time, money or skills to make the world a better place. This will be elaborated on in the discussion section.

Discussion

The world is currently being plagued by a number of other crises such as the climate crisis, cost-of-living crisis, and geopolitical instability, that are likely to have a negatively impact on people's well-being. Also, the impact of the Covid-19 crisis continues to have a negative physical and mental effect on individuals   . Inspired by positive psychology interventions, such as life crafting interventions (de Jong et al., 2020; Schippers & Ziegler, 2019), in this paper we have proposed an intervention that can aid in promoting a sense of meaning, increase well-being, and may help contribute to a change in people's mindset and to positive societal change (cf. Atkinson & Scurrah, 2009; Igras et al., 2021; Reisch, 2017). Specifically, we have outlined a "letters to the future" intervention in which people can write about the ideal world they have in mind as opposed to the world that will come to pass if nothing changes. This allows individuals to develop an action repertoire and be very concrete on what and how they can contribute to making sure this ideal world will be co-created (e.g., Letters to the Future Challenge, IkigaiTV, 2022)

Scarcity versus abundance mindset: How and why letters to the future can create an abundance mindset

People tend to see resources as scarce and in many instances, this is indeed the case (Li et al., 2023), be it a on a societal level, for instance, due to crop failure, or at the individual or group level

when inequalities are high. Historically, as is accounted in many history books and even the Bible, times of abundance and times of scarcity alternate (Barbier, 2010). On a personal level, a lack of resources may be related to unhappiness and frustration, while at a societal level this may lead to conflicts and social problems (Krishnan, 2022), especially when inequalities are high or on the rise (Schippers et al., 2022). While objective scarcity is a fact of life, the way people perceive and deal with scarcity or abundance makes a lot of difference in terms of behavior (Shaheen et al., 2023). Perceptions of scarcity influence people's day-to-day decisions; for instance, the idea that there was a scarcity of toilet paper during the Covid-19 crisis led to a surge in panic buying (Li et al., 2023). Moreover, these scarcity perceptions have a range of effects on people's cognitions and behavior; for instance, they have been shown to increase anxiety and fear (Islam et al., 2021), often leading to attempts to regain control such as panic buying (Ma & Liao, 2022; Omar et al., 2021; Prentice et al., 2022). Stockpiling is also more commonly observed as a reaction to possible shortages (Garbe et al., 2020; Micalizzi et al., 2021). A scarcity mindset can emerge if people perceive a shortage of resources (Shah et al., 2012). Research also indicates that people with a scarcity mindset tend to experience negative emotions, have less executive control (Shah et al., 2012), exhibit increased antisocial behavior (Chang et al., 2022) and less ethical behavior due to a self-centered bias (Haderlie Jr & Lee, 2022). These behaviors may be due to reduced feelings of empathy, as a result of self-centeredness' and a focus on scarce resources (Li et al., 2023). At the same time, people high on empathy are more likely to share scarce resources (Cui et al., 2022). According to Shah et al. (2012; p. 682): "Resource scarcity creates its' own mindset, changing how people look at problems and make decisions". Scarcity then leads to a focus on the area of scarcity (e.g., food, time, health) and may create behaviors, such as borrowing money against high-

interest rates, or asking extension for deadlines, without sufficient attention as to whether the benefits outweigh the costs, and leading to constant financial or time juggling (Shah et al., 2012).

Prior research shows that social marketing campaigns aimed at reducing wasteful behaviors by highlighting the severity of scarcity may have the opposite effect of customers becoming more selfish, experiencing less anticipated guilt of wasting resources and increasing rather than reducing the amount of resources used (Tang et al., 2022). Instead of demonstrating the severity of scarcity to reduce wasteful behaviors, a more effective approach seems to be an intervention that ensures reflection on environmentally related choices (Tang et al., 2022). Interventions that make sure people shift their mindset from a scarcity to an abundance one may be helpful not only on an individual level, but also on a group and societal level (Putnam-Walkerly, 2021; Threet et al., 2022).

As the Letters to the future intervention explicitly asks participants to explore all paths toward achieving their goals, creativity, and energy may be enhanced, and creative solutions for wicked problems are likely to be proposed and implemented. As the first part of the intervention increases a dreamlike state, where people can fantasize about the ideal world, one can state that the first part relates to free thinking and writing, whereas the second part narrows down towards ideas and goals that need to be written down, together with a detailed plan to implement those goals. One could thus argue that participants move from a deliberative to an implemental mindset (Gollwitzer & Keller, 2016). In a deliberative mindset, many solutions are being considered, and pros and cons are being weighed, while in an implemental mindset, goal achievement plans are made and the goals themselves are hardly questioned (Gollwitzer & Schaal, 1998). Research on construal level theory (the relation between abstract versus concrete thinking and psychological distance, such as close in time or further ahead), showed that concrete (close in time) versus abstract (imagining a

future further ahead) made a difference in terms of problem-solving: a distal perspective was shown to improve creative problem solving of abstract problems, while a distanced time perspective seemed to undermine analytical problem-solving (Förster et al., 2004).

Abundance mindset, positive emotions, and self-transcendent mindset and behavior

Prior research showing a relation between an abundance mindset and positive emotions is scarce. Some authors claim that an abundance mindset is related to positive emotions and these in turn are related to self-transcendence (Van Cappellen & Rimé, 2013). Self-transcendence is characterized by a state of mind in which people see themselves and the world in a way that is beyond ego identity (Erikson & Erikson, 1998) and a heightened sense of meaning and connectedness with others and the world (Frankl, 1985). Emotions that are seen as self-transcendent are elevation, compassion, admiration, gratitude, love, and awe, and these can activate the care for others (Van Cappellen & Rimé, 2013). Appeals to self-transcendent emotions are at the core of spirituality and religion (Van Cappellen et al., 2013), and self-transcendence is related to positive emotions, prosocial motivations, and well-being (Wong, 2014), as well as related to the experience of meaning in life (Schippers & Ziegler, 2019; Wong et al., 2021). The main value of the Letters to the future intervention may then lie in the fact that first a self-transcendence or meaning mindset is created, in which abundance seems natural, followed by an implementation mindset, to not only follow up on a fleeting feeling of happiness when people self-transcend (e,g., giving to the poor) but to strategically build a life around self-transcendence with a clear direction and goal plan (cf. Schippers et al., 2020; Worth & Smith, 2021). As it has been shown that mindsets are malleable (Hudig et al., 2022; Ortiz Alvarado et al., 2019), this holds great promise, especially if the intervention would show to be related to a change from a low or self-impact mindset to a more self-transcendent social impact mindset (Hudig et al., 2022).

Effect of the Intervention

In general, it has been shown that positive psychology interventions enhance well-being and decrease depressive symptoms (for a meta-analysis see Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Other research has suggested that these interventions enhance performance, while diminishing stress and burn-out, as well as anxiety (for a review see Meyers et al., 2012). Moreover, prior research suggests that interventions that are aimed at harnessing post-crisis opportunities, like being forced to rebuild personal and societal life, are particularly helpful in restoring collaborative resilience and strengthening a common desired future (Goldstein, 2012). It is thus likely that self-transcendence and an abundance mindset are also triggered by this intervention, however, future research should measure if this is indeed the case. This research could for instance measure both before and after the intervention and see if there is an increase in both, as opposed to the control group.

Importantly, although different authors have discussed how positive change could be brought about by relatively small interventions (Pipher, 2007; Wilson et al., 2019; Wilson, 2011), evidence-based or evidence-informed large-scale interventions at making individuals' lives and the world a better place seemed to be lacking. Therefore, informed by positive psychology theoretical frameworks and interventions such as life crafting, we proposed a future crafting intervention 'letters to the future' based on the following elements 1) describing the present and future when nothing changes 2) writing about the ideal future 3) specify- 4) prioritize concrete goals 5) planning 6) shared vision. Importantly, this intervention is short, can be run online, and can be easily scaled up. It is also important to see which groups can profit most from such an intervention and to implement it in such a way, that maximum results can be achieved (cf. Dekker et al., 2021).

Next step

The next step would be to test the potential benefits of this type of inexpensive, short, and scalable intervention amongst the broader public, which we already started doing (IkigaiTV, 2022). Prior research has also shown that the format and duration of interventions are important factors in determining their effectiveness. For instance, it has been advised to use these for relatively older, motivated, and or depressed individuals (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Note that a combination of different positive psychology interventions may enhance their potential positive effects (Morisano et al., 2010; Vancouver & Day, 2005). Also, a large study that compared different interventions aimed at motivating people to change their climate beliefs and behaviours showed that although effects of these kind of interventions tended to be small, an intervention that was similar to the Letters to the future intervention (i.e., writing a letter to a future generation member, a socially close child) had the strongest effect on climate change mitigation policy support, showing that these kinds of interventions are able to instigate societal change (Vlasceanu et al., 2023).

Conclusion

Writing a letter to the future as outlined above can be instrumental not only in restoring or increasing a sense of autonomy but can also have positive ripple effects in terms of positive actions that people intend to take to bring about a more ideal world. At the same time, this intervention could help increase mental health and well-being. The intervention is scalable and can thus potentially be used by a huge number of people, even at the same time. As the time investment is rather low, only one or two hours, getting many people to do this intervention can have huge advantages. Using technology to assist in the intervention (e.g., the use of a chatbot; cf. Dekker et

al., 2020) may be of additional benefit, as a chatbot could probe participants more on reasons for the goals formulated, as well as make sure people reflect deeper on the chosen goals which may potentially enhance goal commitment (Dekker et al., 2020). Concluding, by writing about the ideal world and making concrete plans to change it via everyday actions, it may be possible to bring an ideal future as well as overall mental health and well-being a bit closer, one step at a time.

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