SMALL ACTIONS BIG IMPACT

Foundations of the Personal Sustainability Project

THE NATURE OF WORK is changing. The world is experiencing disruptions in society, technology and natural resource availability. Employees are searching for meaning from work, not just a paycheck. Employers are increasingly responding to this changing context by engaging their employees to ensure long-term survivability of the corporation.

The popular, narrow definition of sustainability (or sustainable development) is, "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Sustainability, 1987). This definition is frequently shortened to mean "protecting the environment." But in recent years, sustainability has been recast as a broader concept, encompassing the social, economic, environmental and cultural systems needed to sustain any organization (Werbach, 2009). A sustainable organization is prepared to thrive today and in the future. Similarly, a sustainable person is prepared to thrive today and in the future.

In response to the dual needs of engaging employees and creating innovative solutions to today's pressing challenges, Saatchi & Saatchi S developed the Personal Sustainability Project (PSP). PSP is based on a broad clinical and academic research foundation in behavior change, health and grassroots organizing.

This paper provides an overview of the major theoretical influences that support the Personal Sustainability Project. The approach stems from three primary content areas:

- Positive psychology
- Social cognitive models of behavior change
- Social network theory

The applied model of "The 4Cs" will be introduced in the final portions of this paper. The Personal Sustainability process has succeeded in generating ongoing behavior change and sustained action in thousands of individuals. This paper reveals its roots.

Positive Psychology Informs Behavior Change

Prior to the introduction of Positive Psychology in the 1990s by then-President of the American Psychological Association Martin Seligman, theory on human behavior was principally understood from a 'disease model' (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). This model, which still permeates the general and popular understanding today, views human nature as inherently flawed and fragile (Peterson, 2006). From this perspective, areas of in-depth attention include "poor performance, low motivation, unwell-being, ill-health, and disengagement" (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Although great strides were made toward understanding and reducing human suffering through the application of the disease model, Seligman legitimized a new way of framing human behavior (Peterson, 2006).

The ideas behind the field of positive psychology are not completely new (Peterson, 2006). There are underpinnings in the philosophical and theological traditions of both the past and present which addressed the meaning of life, happiness and virtue. Positive psychology is also rooted in the work of the 20th century humanistic psychologists, Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow (among others), who studied human potential and well-being.

There are three central tenets of positive psychology that are particularly germane to personal sustainability:

- Individuals are at heart full of goodness and excellence (Peterson, 2006)
- People are agents of their own change (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1989)
- Individuals thrive in positive environments (Joseph & Linley, 2006)

These principles are observed to operate in a social world that includes positive subjective experiences, positive individual traits, and positive institutions (Peterson, 2006). Positive subjective experiences include feelings of happiness, pleasure, gratification and fulfillment. Positive individual traits encompass strengths in character, talents, interests and values. Finally, positive institutions consist of families, schools, businesses, communities and societies. Influenced and supported by these three phenomena is an individual's own experience of personal happiness.
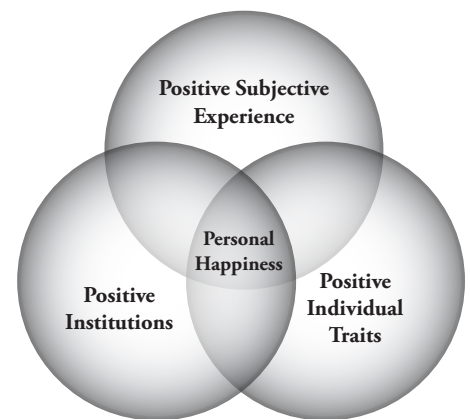
The Power of Happiness

Happiness has long been considered worthy of pursuit, but is frequently viewed as an elusive concept (Peterson, 2006). Many positive psychologists have focused their emerging research on the development of happiness and its associated outcomes. These experts discern that happiness can emerge from different paths, including: hedonism (pleasure), eudamonia (finding purpose; human flourishing), flow (engagement in activities), or victory (winning what is important to us). Each of these paths can contribute to a life of meaning and toward helping individuals thrive.

However, increased happiness has impacts far beyond the positive subjective experience of the individual. Happiness has been shown to lead to greater success in areas of life such as friendship, employment, marriage, income, and work performance (Peterson, 2006).

There are health-related outcomes of happiness as well: happy people do more and are healthier (Peterson, 2006). In a study of 216 people, Steptoe, Wardle and Marmot (2005) found that greater levels of happiness

were associated with reduced neuroendocrine, inflammatory and cardiovascular activity, as well as a reduced presence of the stress hormone cortisol. All of these factors are physiological indicators of health, lower levels are indicators of improved health.

Happiness interacts positively with social relationships and institutions. The World Values Survey, conducted four times since 1981 and comprising 90,000 people in 46 countries, found that satisfying family connections, meaningful work, trusted friendships and community involvement can provide a strong sense of individual well-being; and in combination can even neutralize a downturn in financial security (Layard, 2005).

Its impact can also be observed in the workplace acting on both individuals and organizations. In one study, individuals evaluated as happier had a higher income after five years compared to those evaluated to be less happy (Graham, Eggers, & Sukhtankar, 2004). At the organizational level, positive employees have been shown to achieve higher organizational performance (Ramlall, 2008). Those employees who feel their life purpose aligns with their role at work show higher levels of satisfaction, commitment, and output. Positive organizational cultures have in turn been linked to retention and reducing turnover costs. These outcomes are underlined by Fortune's "100 Best Companies to Work For" consistently outperforming their competition (Edmans, 2008).

The outcomes noted here, as well as the inherent value of happiness, make the case that it is worth pursuing in both personal and professional life. However, authentic happiness must be cultivated. Significant action must be taken by individuals to encourage, generate, and support their personal happiness. Inevitably, happiness means changes in patterns of thinking and behavior.

Social Cognitive Approach to Behavior Change: Self-Efficacy, Self-Management and Social Support

A cognitive approach to behavior change encompasses a range of theories, all of which maintain that attitudes, beliefs and expectations influence future outcomes. Cognitive theories assert that peoples' perceptions of themselves and their world are important, that confidence in themselves is vital, and the perception of the support of others is a key ingredient for personal success. These assertions orient around three primary constructs: (1) self-efficacy, (2) self-management, and (3)

social support (Munro, Lewin, Swart, & Volmink, 2007). The Personal Sustainability Project focuses on increasing these three interconnected areas of cognition to generate greater happiness, improved health, and a more sustainable community.

Self-Efficacy

The psychological concept of self-efficacy was originated by Albert Bandura, the eminent Stanford social psychologist and one of the early champions of the ability of psychology to support positive change. The concepts he has developed continue to be applied by him and many others to generate positive impact on a global scale (Bandura, 2006). Self-efficacy is described as the degree to which individuals believe they can reach a desired outcome. Whether the behavior in question is quitting smoking, taking public transportation more regularly, or adhering to a health regimen, Bandura (2004) asserted that efficacy beliefs influence goals and aspirations:

> *"The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goals people set for themselves and the firmer their commitment to them. People of low efficacy are easily convinced of the futility of effort in the face of difficulties. They quickly give up trying. Those of high efficacy view impediments as surmountable by improvement of self-management skills and perseverant effort. They stay the course in the face of difficulties." (p. 145)*

There are additional factors affecting how individuals approach their goals that figure importantly prominently in their experience of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2006). These include thinking optimistically or pessimistically and feeling more or less motivated toward a goal. They also read their emotional responses to challenges (e.g. stress, excitement, fear) as clues toward their abilities or vulnerabilities. Fundamentally, most people tend to monitor and adjust their progress toward achievement in large part based on their expected outcome.

Although our belief in ourselves is not consistent across all tasks (Maddux, 2002) – one may feel more able to cook a good meal than sing an opera – people do have a general level of belief in their ability to achieve a desired outcome across multiple situations (Latham, 2007). Trusting that one does possesses what is needed to complete a task, including one's own skills and capabilities, is often as motivating as believing that a desirable outcome can actually be achieved.

The Personal Sustainability Project promulgates the selection of a positive goal-

specific behavior that individuals feel both motivated and capable of integrating into their lifestyles. They routinely experience the perception that they are creating positive change for themselves and the world. This effect becomes self-reinforcing; for instance, eating healthier meals with organic vegetables a few times a week improves energy level, which fosters continued adherence and ultimately, strengthens the belief in one's ability to achieve desired goals.

Self-Management

While self-efficacy is the belief individuals have in their ability to achieve an outcome, self-management includes one's actual ability to set goals, achieve those goals, and change behaviors that get in the way (Sawyer & Crimando, 1984). Self-management embraces the idea that by assuming an active role in their lives, individuals have more control over their daily activities. As part of the goal-setting process, they engage in continuous self-reflection, problem solving, and emotion management. The result is that they become increasingly self-motivated, happy and healthy.

Self-management programs have been utilized for condition management in the health care system for decades. A recent study of over 700 elderly individuals illustrated the type of tangible results a self-management approach to health care can produce (Meng, et al., 2009). Those who were selected to participate in the program reduced their physical function decline by 54% over a 22-month period compared to those who did not participate. They also decreased their healthcare expenditures by 11%.

Compared to traditional education (Table 1), a self-management approach teaches skills to address identified problems and focuses on instilling people's confidence in their ability to make positive change (Lorig et al., 1999).

Once developed, self-management can be applied to a variety of settings (Sawyer & Crimando, 1984). Developing self-management skills is an integral component of the training Saatchi and Saatchi S uses to educate participants in the Personal Sustainability Project. Participants self-select goals that have deep personal meaning and are provided with a variety of tools to support their progress. By producing on a large scale some of the outcomes of traditional self-management education, the Personal Sustainability Project can have significant health and cost-saving benefits. One of the foundational self-management principles of PSP is peer-to-peer learning and support.

Table 1: Traditional vs. Self-Management Educational Approaches

	Traditional	Self-Management
What is taught?	Information & technical skills	How to approach and act on problems
What is the approach to problems?	Problems come from inadequate control of current state	Individual identifies problems they are experiencing, perhaps unrelated to immediate situation
What is the theory of learning?	Situation-specific knowledge creates behavior change which produces better outcomes	Individuals' confidence to make life-improving changes (self-efficacy) yields better outcomes
What is the goal?	Compliance with taught behaviors improves outcomes	Increased self-efficacy improves outcomes
Who does the educating?	Qualified professional	Professionals, peers, or ones' self

(adapted from Bodenheimer et al., 2002, p. 2471)

Social Support

The number and types of relationships an individual has in addition to the tangible (money, material possessions) and intangible (advice, praise) support offered through those ties comprise the concept of social support (Martin & Brantly, 2004). As a cognitive construct, social support is typically measured with respect to an individual's perception that it is present. When individuals perceive themselves as supported, it serves as a buffer against stress (Peterson, 2006). It also influences the perceptions individuals have of their own ability to set, reach and maintain their behavioral goals (Maes & Karoly, 2005).

Social support plays a significant role in behavior change and health. For example, research has shown that successful management of illness is largely influenced by social support (Martin & Brantly, 2004). A study of 35 postcoronary patients showed that those individuals with greater social support were more successful in maintaining positive health changes (Finnegan & Suler, 1985). Social support facilitates hope, confidence, and resilience (Hanna, 2002). It can be enhanced by:

1. Minimizing contact with those who have a negative impact on the individual around the change
2. Increasing the number of relationships with those who support the change
3. Expanding existing relationships in the direction of the change

PSP builds new relationships and activates existing relationships around the values of sustainability. These actions allow individuals to experience a greater sense of social support regarding the change they are personally undertaking and for the important expansion of their social networks.

Mobilizing Social Networks

The central concept of social networks is that the majority of individuals do not exist in isolation. In social networks people and their actions are considered interdependent; and individuals both gain information and are influenced through their ties with others (Smith & Christakis, 2008). This concept is different from social support in that it is not a determination of the level of support received from those friends and family. Instead, the ties themselves are the subject of interest. Social networks are examined with respect to their size, the relationships among multiple people through different contacts, direct and indirect ties, types of relationships, homogeneity of individuals, degrees of distance from one individual to another, the extent to which connections rely on only a few individuals, and the degree of resistance to established ties being severed. Social networks represent an under-utilized area of opportunity for creating the type of large scale behavior change needed to face today's challenges.

Health research over the past decade has drawn specific attention to the impact of social networks (Berkman & Glass, 2000). Social networks have been posited to affect health through five mechanisms:
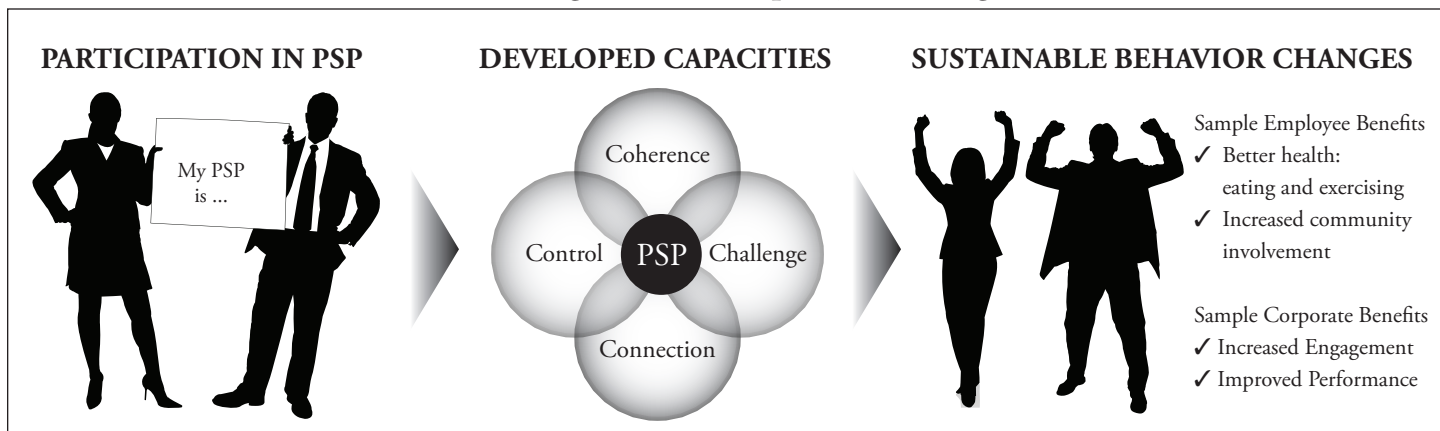
1. Social support
2. Social influence
3. Access to resources
4. Social involvement
5. Person-to-person contagion

In their study on smoking cessation spanning over 30 years, Christakis and Fowler (2008) found that groups of people stopped smoking at the same time. People who continued to smoke slowly moved to the periphery of a social network. The level of influence various types of relationships had on an individual's likelihood of quitting is notable. If a spouse quit, it decreased an individual's likelihood of smoking by 67%. This result was 36% if the quitter was a friend and 34% if it was a co-worker in a small organization. The more education people had, the more likely they were to influence the quitting behavior of others.

Healthy behavior is not the only positive change that spreads through social networks (Fowler & Christakis, 2008). Happiness does as well. In their recent study, Fowler and Christakis (2008) found that happy people tended to be found in clusters, as did unhappy people. Their study reinforces some common sense ideas, including that individuals who are connected to many happy people tend to be happier in the future. It also demonstrated some surprises. For example, people three degrees away from an individual (e.g. a friend's sister's friend) can significantly influence the individual in question's happiness. The same result pervaded the study on smoking cessation (Christakis & Fowler, 2008). The effect is greater the closer the happy person or nonsmoker is to the individual (Fowler & Christakis, 2008; Christakis & Fowler, 2008), and speaks to the far-reaching power of increasing just one person's happiness or healthy actions. Having a tangible understanding of how people are connected in a social network provides access to interdependencies and opens up opportunities to use these social networks to mobilize people for behavior change.

The SAATCHI & SAATCHI S Model:

Increasing Individual Capacity for Change

PARTICIPATION IN PSP

My PSP is ...

DEVELOPED CAPACITIES

Coherence

Control — PSP — Challenge

Connection

SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOR CHANGES

Sample Employee Benefits
✓ Better health:
  eating and exercising
✓ Increased community
  involvement

Sample Corporate Benefits
✓ Increased Engagement
✓ Improved Performance

SAATCHI & SAATCHI S has organized the diverse content from the theories discussed above into a simple-to-remember model, the 4Cs: *Coherence, Challenge, Control and Connection*. The model identifies personal capabilities that must be activated to achieve an effective applied behavior change program for sustainability (Jaffe, Scott, & Tobe, 1994). The 4Cs also build on the literature concerning what enables people to remain healthy under stress (Kobasa, 1979), and represent capacities that, when enhanced, empower people to act upon a broad range of sustainability promoting behaviors. They also provide a framework for reporting and measuring impact.

Never Underestimate the Power of a Story

Stories are a critical pathway for information transfer and retention. People remember information contained in stories in unique ways, and they internalize the success of individuals who are similar to them. Our applied educational design leans heavily on storytelling, anecdotes, and parables. To spread transformational sustainability ideas, forums are created (online, video, and written) for people to share their personal stories related to PSP. These stories enter the social networks of organizations and become viral instigators for change, challenging others to innovate and sustain their actions.

Our experience with over 500,000 individuals participating in PSP efforts has been the laboratory for the theory and model described in this paper. To illustrate the 4Cs below, we have included stories from people on the front lines who are using PSP as a platform for personal, organizational and community change.

Coherence

Coherence refers to the "meaning making" people engage in around the work they do and the situations they face. Healthy, happy people believe that their work and actions are meaningful (Jaffe, Scott, & Tobe, 1994). They have a sense of purpose, and an awareness of what is important to them (Kobasa, 1979). With this awareness they are committed to their values, their goals and themselves. They create a personal balance, and believe in their ability to make decisions and realize their purpose.

Meaning making also occurs when individuals face challenging situations. Happy, healthy people are able to appropriately recognize and manage a challenging event when one presents itself. They have personal resources available – a belief in themselves, or problem solving skills, for example –to draw upon, and they actively use those resources (Mlonzi & Strümpfer, 1998). They are able to make sense of a challenging situation, and perceive themselves or someone they trust as being in control of the situation. In other words, they possess perceived self-efficacy and self-management resources. They see a reason to apply themselves, and they take action.

As with Dionne (see insert, below), a person with a PSP acquires a renewed sense that what they believe and act upon counts for something meaningful. The recognition and alignment of values and actions between a person's work and how he or she lives out those values facilitates the creation of meaning. Coherence can occur in personal life, work life, and community life. The process of identifying, adopting and sustaining a personal sustainability practice provides a platform for the creation and support of coherence.

Developing Coherence

Dionne is a PSP captain at her organization, and her PSPs are "healthier living, drinking more water and spending more time with [her] son and godson." Dionne has associated a healthier lifestyle with living longer and being present for her children as they grow up. Through PSP, she has increased her water intake to six cups of 34 ounces of water a day, is working out a lot more, and recently lost 15 pounds. She finds that the young people in her life teach her as much as she is teaching them; together they are conserving energy by turning off lights and not running the water when brushing their teeth.

Dionne is also "pretty passionate about PSP as a project here in the workplace, because it boosts morale...there's nothing like being in an environment where everyone's happy, everyone's having a good time enjoying what they do." As a customer service representative in a health care call center, she explains that participating in PSP has significantly enhanced the job she does with her clients – now each time she speaks to someone on the phone, she is not only is she helping them with their immediate condition, but she is able to help them "connect the dots" from taking care of themselves, to its impact on family, community and the planet. PSP has made her job go from average every day to "super." Having an outlet to live her personal values has created a deeper level of meaning in Dionne's role as a mother, godmother, co-worker, and leader.

Control

Control represents the way healthy, happy people perceive having choice in situations. The concept includes three types of control (Kobasa, 1979):

1. *Decisional control,* or a person's belief that he or she can choose from multiple courses of action.
2. *Cognitive control,* or being able to see challenges as part of life and anticipating the need to adjust.
3. *Coping skills,* or the development and application of personal resources.

Susie's story (see insert above) represents someone who made a choice on a course of action, saw and adjusted to challenges, and used the skills she developed to cope with those challenges. People who feel control in challenging situations feel empowered, whereas those who perceive there is nothing they can do feel powerless. As determined by the concept of self-efficacy, this feeling dramatically affects the degree to which people pursue a desired outcome (Bandura, 2004).

As people attempt to make change, they learn from their successes and failures (Bandura, 2006) and they can be taught by experience how to effectively manage failures and persevere. Increasing a sense of personal control frequently occurs through having experiences of mastery. Resiliency results from overcoming obstacles on a path toward change, and eventually mastery is achieved. A resilient individual knows that the effort pays off, and that they can make choices and adapt. They also have a greater ability to cope in the face of challenge, and therefore experience more control in a situation.

Many of the messages we all absorb today related to health risk and the state of the world, including climate change, lead to people feeling overwhelmed and out of control.

Their behavioral response to feeling powerless is to avoid the challenges through inaction. Using Personal Sustainability as a structural approach can provide a focus and the skills needed for people to mobilize and take action. People begin to see how every action they take engages their family, their coworkers, and their greater community. They learn that by taking care of themselves and their physical surroundings, they are contributing to a sustainable environment. Just as with Susie, they are able to see they have choices and can gain mastery in an area of their choosing. They increase their ability to skillfully navigate challenges and learn to accept that obstacles will be present in the future. However, they now experience confidence in their ability to overcome those obstacles, to control their behavioral patterns, and to succeed.

Viewing change as a challenge is yet another characteristic of happy, healthy people (Kobasa, 1979). People who view change as an opportunity for personal and professional development are more likely to take action. Field experience has also shown that PSP participants go above and beyond what is defined in their job description, particularly during times of difficulty.

Challenge

Nell (see insert, below) had desired outcomes in mind when she first engaged with PSP: to enroll everyone at her worksite with PSP and to gain control of her personal health. As she began to work toward those outcomes, she grasped the opportunity to see the changes as a challenge. PSP encourages participants to take on small changes, what we call "nano practices," and to work toward and achieve mastery.

After reaching a certain level of success, Nell identified additional changes with which to challenge herself. A successful program for sustainable behavior change must support individuals to see challenges as opportunities for growth and in so doing reinforce experiences of self-management and perceptions of self-efficacy.

In any given situation, a person typically has a desired outcome in mind. A belief that he or she can produce that outcome (i.e. self-efficacy) is another strong determinant of whether or not action is taken (Bandura, 2006).

Believing in our ability to succeed in different environments can be enhanced through four different strategies (Bandura, 2006):

1. *Drawing from past mastery experiences,* or remembering past success in overcoming obstacles
2. *Social modeling,* or seeing similar people succeed through persistent effort
3. *Social persuasion,* or being influenced by others
4. *Collective belief in capabilities,* or belief in a group or community's ability to reach desired outcomes

Through PSP we have observed all of these factors at play. Members of a community begin to make progress and are encouraged by the success of others like them. As they make progress, they also share their experiences with others in the social network and influence those people to take their own steps. Finally, a community reaches a tipping point where a shared belief in the ability to truly make a difference on big issues as a group emerges. The "ripple effect" of a single individual prepared to seize on a challenge can be enormous, but it is mediated by social connections.

Connection

The concept of connection encompasses the degree to which people can call on the help and support of others. The literature on social support demonstrates that connected individuals are more likely to believe in themselves, and to set and maintain behavioral goals (Maes & Karoly, 2005). Effective behavior change programs must stimulate and support positive connection.

Through connection, individuals engaged in positive action also improve their families and communities. They make meaning by way of service to others, aspirational goal setting, and gratitude in daily life. These patterns are critical contributors to authentic happiness. Studies show that people are in fact happier with positive family and friend relationships around them (Peterson, 2006). We gain from being connected with our communities, whether through work, religious affiliations, sports teams or some other social group.

The Personal Sustainability Project creates cause for new relationships between individuals as they work toward personal and collective goals. As they support one another they bolster the hardiness of their peers, and all are more likely to stick with behavior changes. Just as Walter did (see insert, right), people participating in PSP are forming relationships with multiple groups in their communities and helping to educate and mobilize them toward creating a more sustainable world.

Personal Sustainability

In the face of current challenges, resilient people and communities will fare best and contribute more to the solutions we need. People who are happy and healthy believe in their ability to achieve the outcomes they desire, and they can receive and give support to those around them. They create change.

Just as positive psychology was emerging as a driving force in studying human behavior, environmentalism was beginning to recognize that approaches to 'green' that focused primarily on the problem were coming up short (Werbach, 2005). Most people have felt helpless to act. They lacked a personal sense of meaning and control. The Personal Sustainability Project was developed with the idea that activating individuals around sustainability has the power to create sustainable change across many dimensions by leveraging the contributions, wisdom and support of everyone.

PSP increases coherence, control, challenge and connection to activate people to go above and beyond what is required of them. It provides them with the tools and support they need to manage challenge and to achieve the unexpected for themselves and within their sphere of influence. These activated people can then mobilize their social networks to reinforce the spread of desired behaviors. They tug on the strings of an interconnected network, and that entire network shifts.

At Saatchi & Saatchi S, we believe that authentic happiness, good health, and personal, organizational, and planetary sustainability are all possible. Our approach with PSP satisfies the conditions for positive behavior change as outlined in this paper. It supports subjective experiences, individual traits, and social institutions that are necessary structures for health and happiness. When functioning robustly, these structures lead to an empowering belief in our personal and collective capabilities to create change. Individuals who believe in themselves can set, reach, and maintain goals, capitalizing on existing skills and networks. Resilient, activated people working within supportive structures unleash our ingenuity. These happier, healthier people are our world's greatest resource.

SAATCHI & SAATCHI S is a sustainability consulting firm that helps organizations develop strategy, leverage their brands, and activate employees to be leaders in sustainability.

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Developing Connection

When Walter was first asked to be a captain in his organization's PSP program, he emphatically declined. He had decided to work at his company because he needed health insurance and had no interest in taking on additional responsibilities. His store manager, however, thought he would be ideal for the role based on his past experience as a teacher, and cajoled Walter into participation.

Coworkers, especially younger employees, had always sought Walter for answers. With the introduction of Personal Sustainability, Walter began encouraging coworkers to come together and make a difference. His facility initiated a "Walking Across America" program where they count miles walked outside of work and reflect the distance traveled on a U.S. map. Not only are the employees improving their health, they are interacting and supporting one another along the way.

Walter and his coworkers have spread the ethos of Personal Sustainability beyond the walls of the job site, and have gone to school and community events to educate young people about sustainability. Now kids say "Hello!" to PSP participants when they come to the store, and proudly tell their parents about sustainability.

On a more personal level, PSP has spread to Walter's family. Now each family member anticipates his yearly, green, paper-wrapped sustainable gift under the Christmas tree. After months of hard work, Walter received a call from a senior vice president of his organization. He was asked to teach PSP to other locations across the country. Walter jumped at the chance, and still maintains relationships with PSP leaders across the country. Together they solve sustainability issues and support one another in their endeavors.

Walter is proud of his work and feels like his efforts are supported by his extended community. He had no idea that by accepting the PSP challenge, he would change his workplace, his community, and his life.

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