

Gaël Brulé, Francis Munier (2021), *Happiness, Technology and Innovation*, New York, Springer, 120 p.

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TRENDS AND COMMENTS

Gaël Brulé, Francis Munier (2021), *Happiness, Technology and Innovation*, New York, Springer, 120 p.

One of the 21st-century challenges is the speed at which technology and innovation change and humanity's capacity to understand their impacts on people's quality of life. Gaël Brulé and Francis Munier, in their book *Happiness, Technology and Innovation* (Springer, 2021), explore in detail the positive and negative impacts that technology and innovation have on happiness and subjective well-being. At the same time, they also analyse how happiness through creativity and employee engagement can lead to innovation and technology development. The introduction presents metrics and theories to look at innovation in terms of happiness, focusing on subjective well-being (measured by life satisfaction). The main contribution of the book is a conceptual framework on what the authors call *positive innovation*. To build the argumentation towards positive innovation, they structured the book around three main themes: *Salient theoretical considerations*, *Duality of innovation*, and *Key issues and future development*. In this way, the authors argue for a nuanced look into technology and innovation, not only focused on the improvements they may bring into people's quality of life but also their undesirable consequences. Innovation is seen as a source of progress not limited to economic or technological aspects but also expanded in terms of progress in individuals and societies well-being.

The first part, *Salient theoretical considerations*, presents theoretical and empirical discussions in four chapters by reviewing the literature around the impact of innovation and technology on happiness. It starts with the question of *Does innovation bring well-being?* The authors answer that question by introducing the reader to extensive literature that analyses the relations between innovation and happiness. In particular, they analyse the negative impacts of innovation on well-being. For example, the impacts of forms of innovations that can disrupt the good life, affecting (mental) health such

as stress and anxiety, or in the case of innovation in finance, the impact of cryptocurrency on the environment due to the increase of energy use. Acknowledging that happiness could be a source of innovation, the authors discuss the role of creativity and how it can be a source of happiness, at least for those in creative occupations. The authors also consider how promoting or creating the right conditions at the city level to foster the attraction of the creative class (usually wealthy and educated) could negatively impact the well-being of those displaced in gentrification processes. They continue with the chapter *Technologies: False friends?* where they enquire about the ambivalent and dual face of technology. They go beyond the traditional views of progress associated with technological innovation by exploring the impacts on people's well-being. Informed by various disciplines and perspectives, they show how the prosperity resulting from technological progress does not necessarily translate into the happiness of individuals despite that, in some cases, it may influence well-being by meeting their needs (for example, bioengineering could improve food security by creating species of vegetable drought resistant). They continue with the chapter *ICT: Alone together?* where they study how Information and Communications Technologies such as social media or smartphones impact happiness. The title already suggests that despite the increase in ICT use (e.g., social media), some people may experience increased stress, anger, and loneliness (affecting more negatively on younger people than other population groups). Another example the authors give on why ICT may impact people differently is the possibility that ICT gave for remote working during the COVID pandemic, where mostly highly qualified workers benefited from it. They conclude the book's first part with a proposition of *Social innovation as a vector for a good life*. This new paradigm of innovation contemplates human dimensions. It is self-reflective on the potential impact of technology and innovation on people's lives when individuals are empowered and have the agency to shape their future.

In the second part, *Duality of innovation*, the authors present innovation as a process of both creation and destruction. They highlight the duality of innovation by studying the concepts of (neo)Luddism and Creative Destruction. In the first chapter, *The Luddites*, the authors explain how the emergence of machinery in the late eighteenth century and its resulting job destruction triggered discontent and rebellion from workers. Luddism also inspired a renewed critique and contestation of current and emerging technologies (e.g. robots). The second chapter employs the concept of *Creative destruction* to examine the impact of innovation on subjective well-being critically. For example, how the steam engine improved life conditions but generated unemployment and affected employees' well-being.

In the third and final part, *Key issues and future development*, the authors present their main contribution by proposing the concept of positive innovation. They build their argumentation by addressing several topics across the chapters. In Chapter 1, *Transhumanism, back to the future*, they critically examine artificial intelligence and transhumanist movements that aim to enhance humans' biological and mental capabilities. Informed by an ethics and social justice perspective, they questioned the capacity of these emerging technologies to improve all people's lives, mainly if they are not accessible to the poor or continue increasing their environmental footprint. In contrast, the authors present an alternative type of innovation in the chapter *Frugal, but happy?* Where frugal and low-cost innovation -designed considering the needs of residents in the Global South or low-income groups may positively impact happiness as they provide access to technology (e.g., communication) to a more significant number of people. They continue with a chapter on *Responsible research & innovation and innovation-care*, again informed by ethics and, in this case, adding the concept of care. They explore practices that are conscious of their impact on the happiness of individuals by anticipating and assessing potential impacts on society and also foster inclusive and sustainable research and innovation. The fourth chapter presents the concepts of *Creative goods and Resonance*, related to the capacity of individuals to be affected by and connected to another person, piece of art or object. These concepts encourage individuals to liberate themselves from a life dominated by technology and excessive consumption and invite them to find and thoroughly enjoy a good life. The last chapter, *Towards positive innovation*, meets the goal of proposing a new concept to reconcile innovation and happiness and reach sustainable subjective well-being. The authors define positive innovation as "a form of innovation that would most increase the happiness for the greatest number of people and for the longest time". They present a heuristic framework that proposes and invites the reader to find and reflect on positive relations between innovation and happiness. They identify three key elements to understand the positive and negative impact of any given innovation: "(1) the actual and potential impacts; (2) the individuals, objects, or systems affected by it; and (3) how individuals will modify their behaviour following the introduction of technology". They further identify methods that could be used to evaluate the impacts and add nuances on the limitations and the role of ethics in this process.

The book by Gaël Brulé and Francis Munier is written in an accessible language to readers from different disciplines not limited to innovation and happiness. The extensive literature review and discussions, including concrete examples and reflections on technological innovation's drawbacks, trigger new research questions for various disciplines. Not at the core of the

book, yet in several entries, the Covid-19 crisis is used to illustrate the dual impact of technology on people's life and happiness.

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