MARK PETERSON ON WEIGHTS FOR QUALITY-OF-LIFE PRIORITIES

I
n an article recently published in the Journal of Macromarketing, Mark Peterson begins with the proposition that national and international policy makers have long needed a better understanding of the relative importance of quality-of-life (QOL) dimensions in a society. He then applies conjoint analysis, a psychometric method widely used in marketing research to primary data from respondents in three countries (the United States, France, and Turkey) to explore how individuals assign importance weights across seven dimensions of QOL. The mean values for the importance weights of these QOL dimensions in each country of this study then are compared with those of an equal-weighting scheme and are found to be different in most instances. In addition, the same pattern of heterogeneity among the weights of the key QOL dimensions was observed across the three countries of this study. Since this problem is of central importance to the Social Indicators/Quality-of-Life/ISQOLS communities, Mark’s article is summarized and reviewed here.

The Problem and the Aggregate Marketing System Concept

Peterson begins by stating that purpose of his research is to advance the representation of people’s judgments in weighting key dimensions of QOL for a society. His intent is to demonstrate that most people assign heterogeneous weights to key dimensions of QOL and that such heterogeneous importance weights for key QOL dimensions will be observed in different countries of the world. He uses a common technique from consumer research—an experimental design featuring conjoint analysis—to estimate the derived importances (weights) of a core set of societal QOL dimensions. Key questions pursued in this research follow:

1. Are the mean weights for the respective QOL dimensions heterogeneous?
2. What similarity would be observed in the mean weights for the respective QOL dimensions across sample groups from different countries?

The objective of this research is to study a society’s aggregate marketing system (AGMS)—defined by the interactions of marketers, government, and consumers. Such an aggregate marketing system would include all relevant aspects of business operations (both profit and not-for-profit), related centers of government operations, and all consuming units of a society. In encouraging researchers to focus on other levels of aggregation than the individual level, the AGMS can help societies go beyond the study of technology, economies, and the material side of a society’s existence to include vibrant issues concerned with softer quality-of-life dimensions for a society.

Figure 1, on next page, depicts some of these important intangible flows in the AGMS for societal development between marketers (including both for-profit and not-for-profit marketers), consumers, and public policy makers (as representative of society’s interests). Beginning on the right side, marketers send information to consumers through promotional communication, while consumers provide information to marketers through their participation in marketing research projects. In addition, “consumer voting” through patronage and

(Continued on next page.)
purchasing sends important behavioral signals to marketers. At the bottom of Figure 1, the flows of information between consumers and public policy makers are depicted. Public policy makers can provide social indicators related to standards of living and QOL, which they can use in goal setting and evaluation of publicly initiated programs. Peterson cites as examples the Swedish Level of Living Survey conducted annually by Statistics Sweden for these purposes, the program the government of the United Kingdom has adopted for sustainable development that includes twenty “framework” indicators and forty-eight other supplementary social indicators that are used to guide strategy in sustainable development, and efforts in the United States to develop a set of key national indicators. Finally, the left side of Figure 1 depicts the flow of information between public policy makers and marketers. Peterson notes that, historically, this linkage has been characterized by tension between marketers and public policy makers, likely reflecting the unfortunate adversarial posture these two participants have traditionally taken in the AGMS. Efforts need to be expended to overcome this divide.

Findings

Peterson next reviews the objective and subjective traditions of research in QOL studies. To frame his research, Peterson indicates that his study focuses on a set of seven objective dimensions that have been identified in previous studies of subjective and objective measures of QOL. The set of seven dimensions includes (1) cost of living, (2) health, (3) economy, (4) infrastructure, (5) freedom, (6) culture and recreation, and (7) environment. The specific research protocol used in the study is given in Table 3 on the opposite page, which identifies the specific indicators and levels therein used to operationalize each of the seven dimensions.

Following these conjoint scaling protocols, individual respondents were asked to rate the relative importance of these seven dimensions to the QOL. Samples of respondents were obtained from France, Turkey, and the United States. The French and American samples are of university student and thus have model ages in the 20s, whereas the Turkey respondents more generally representative of the country. Table 6 reproduced from the article gives descriptive statistics for the samples.

The key empirical results of the article are presented in Table 7. These show an evident pattern of similarity of mean values across the three country sample groups with respect to relative importance values. The QOL dimension receiving the least weight in each group was infrastructure (United States = .049, France = .052, and Turkey = .071). But a strong effect in preference for...
the freedom dimension is evident. Freedom was the most important dimension of QOL. In fact, freedom received more than twice the value of any other dimension (United States = .330, France = .349, and Turkey = .273). As can be seen, the respondents in each sample group placed a relatively high value on the freedom dimension of QOL. Peterson notes that respondents were making extreme trade-off decisions on this dimension, with freedom being operationalized by either “freedom of speech, assembly, and religion” or “no freedom of speech, assembly, and religion.” In additional statistical tests, Peterson shows that these importance weights generally differ from those that would be assigned by an equal weighting procedure.

Comment

Mark Peterson’s article provides a nice complement to the article by Michael Hagerty and Kenneth Land that was reviewed in the May-August 2007 issue of SINET (“Constructing Summary Indices of Quality of Life: A Model for the Effect of Heterogeneous Importance Weights,” Sociological Methods and Research 35, May 2007:455-496). As noted in that review, Hagerty and Land showed mathematically and by use of simulation studies that the equal weights method—which often is used by researchers in the absence of any other sound basis for unequal weights—is what statisticians call a minimax estimator in the sense that it minimizes extreme disagreements on the importances. But, if additional, reliable empirical information on the importances is available, it may be possible to improve on the equal weights estimator. The reason is that Hagerty and Land also show mathematically that there is a unique weighting for any composite QOL index that maximizes agreement with the index over all individuals in the population. This unique weighting for the QOL index is given by the average weights calculated over all individuals in the population or a representative sample thereof.

Based on these results from the analyses of Hagerty and Land, it follows that the social indicators/QOL research community needs to devote research efforts to the development of empirical studies of importances and the estimation of average weights therefrom. Mark Peterson’s article represents a nice contribution to this line of research. Many more such studies are needed. They likely will show, as Peterson found, that the relative importance weights have great similarities across social and national contexts, but with interesting variations due to cultural and other differences. These commonalities and differences need to be systematically identified and mapped.

~ Kenneth C. Land
The 2007 ISQOLS Conference was held in December 6-9, 2007 at the San Diego Marriott Mission Valley Hotel in San Diego, California, USA. The conference was co-sponsored by Springer Publishers, German Socio-Economic Panel Study, the Quality of Life Special Interest Group of the International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual Disability, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Centro de Estudios sobre el Bienestar at Universidad de Monterrey, the Community Indicators Consortium, the Australian Centre on Quality of Life, the Center for the Study of Quality of Life and Social Development at University of the Americas, Institute for Social Research and Evaluation at the University of Northern British Columbia, the Management Institute for Quality-of-Life Studies, and the office of Quality-of-Life Measurement at Virginia Tech.

The conference attracted 200+ participants from every corner of the globe. The conference theme was “From QOL Concepts to QOL Performance Measures.” It included 64 sessions, 4 plenary session, and 2 workshops. Topics included focus on QOL of world regions (e.g., QOL in Latin America, Arctic Circle, Asia, Middle East, North America, Europe, and Russia), QOL of population segments (e.g., QOL of the poor, migrants, refugees, children, elderly, women, and the disabled), life domains issues (e.g., spiritual well-being, family well-being, social well-being, community well-being, consumption well-being, health well-being, work well-being, culture well-being, environmental well-being, and financial well-being), applied discipline issues (e.g., QOL issues in political science, urban planning and public policy, rural sociology, marketing, business ethics, education, travel and tourism, social work, pharmacology, psychology and healthcare, and recreation and land use), basic discipline issues (e.g., QOL research in personality and social psychology, economics), and methodological issues (e.g., issues in qualitative QOL research, composite QOL indices, psychometrics and quantitative methods). Additionally, there were several sessions involved with the International Wellbeing Index.

~ M. Joe Sirgy

THE ISQOLS HONOURS LIST FOR 2007

Research Fellow Award
Mary Joyce
Filomena Maggino

Distinguished Service Award
Valerie Møller

Award for the Betterment of the Human Condition
Nef - the new economics foundation

Distinguished QOL Researcher Award
Robert (Bob) Cummins

Awards for Best Papers in 2006:

Best Paper in Social Indicators Research (SIR)
Max Haller and Markus Hadler
How social relations and structures can produce happiness and unhappiness: an international comparative analysis, Social Indicators Research 2006, 75(1), pp.169-216.

Best Paper in the Journal of Happiness Studies (JOHS)
Kennon M. Sheldon and Sonja Lyubomirsky
Achieving sustainable gains in happiness: Change your actions, not your circumstances?
Journal of Happiness Studies 2006, 7, pp. 55-86

Best Paper in Applied Research in Quality of Life (ARQOL)
Rod McCrea, Tung-Kai Shyy, Robert Stimson

Best Paper in the Journal of Macromarketing (JMM) / Quality of Life Section 2007
Ronald Paul Hill, William F. Felice, and Thomas Ainscough

Best Dissertation Award
Anke C. ZIMMERMAN
Adaptation, Assets, and Aspirations. Three Essays on the Economics of Subjective Well-Being.
University of Southern California, Department of Economics, Los Angeles, USA, Promoter is Richard A. Easterlin.

Best Dissertation Honourable Mention
Mònica GONZALES
Psychological well-being in adolescence: the perspective of complexity sciences
University of Girona, Spain, Promoter is Frederic Munné at the Univ. of Barcelona
The awards evening is always the highlight of any ISQOLS conference. This year we celebrated the event with a banquet in a hall decked out with Christmas decorations. Over dessert, we were treated to a film giving us a glimpse of the rich architectural and cultural heritage that awaits us in Florence where we will meet in 2009.

ISQOLS President Valerie Møller assisted by Don Rahtz and journal editors, Alex Michalos and Bob Cummins, presented the on behalf of ISQOLS. Springer offered cheques to the recipients of the best paper awards. In his acceptance speech, Distinguished QOL Researcher, ISQOLS’ highest accolade, Bob Cummins regaled us with a brilliant account of how his career had just happened rather than been planned. Nic Marks, who accepted the Betterment of the Human Condition award on behalf of nef, the New Economics Foundation, told us that his organisation’s Happy Planet Index had been inspired by the debate at an earlier ISQOLS meeting on the makings of the ideal QOL index. Alex Michalos urged members of ISQOLS to submit their work to our new journal ARQOL.

To close, Valerie thanked the members of the various committees for their work in overseeing the nominations and selection of winners. Thanks go to Mary Joyce and Denis Huschka with assistance from Richard Estes, Andrew Clark, Graciela Tonon and Dave Webb; Filomena Maggino and Dave Webb with assistance from Kenneth Land and Joar Vittersø; Alex Michalos with assistance from Joar Vittersø, Kenneth Land, Filomena Maggino, Don Rahtz, Heinz-Herbert Noll and Ding-Jin Lee; and Bob Cummins with assistance from the editorial board of the Journal of Happiness Studies. Celebrations continued into the night under the San Diego stars.

– Valerie Møller
Dr. Mary Joyce Bio-Sketch and Announcement of ISQOLS Award

Mary Joyce died at her home early Wednesday morning December 12, 2007 after a seven-year battle with cancer. Mary lived her life with passion and with a commitment to helping others. Mary was a long time advocate for the empowerment of women and a variety of at-risk populations. She was also a dedicated teacher who sought to inspire students to realize their full potential. She is survived by her husband Dr. David Lambert, her sister Linda, two brothers Tom and John, and a niece and two nephews. She also leaves behind a number of loyal friends and colleagues who will miss her greatly.

Mary received her Ph.D. from the University of Kentucky in 1981. She was most recently Giannessi Professor of Nonprofit Marketing in the College of Business & Economics at California State University, Fullerton. Dr. Joyce’s research interests included social entrepreneurship, social marketing, and the effects of gender and aging on quality-of-life. In addition to her professorship and teaching duties, Dr. Joyce served as the Vice President of External Affairs for the International Society for Quality of Life Studies (ISQOLS) and was recently honored by ISQOLS as a Distinguished Research Fellow. Mary also served on the boards of the National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness (www.npach.org), the Tucker Wildlife Sanctuary. She also served on the Board of Directors of Goodwill Industries of Orange County and the Council on Aging of Orange County.

The Mary Joyce Scholarship Award: To honor the memory and life’s work of Dr. Joyce, at an ISQOLS Board Meeting held in San Diego on December 10, 2007, the Board voted unanimously to establish the Mary Joyce Scholarship Award. This competitive scholarship will be a bi-annual award recognizing a young, female scholar from a developing country for work in the quality-of-life area. The recipient will receive a cash stipend covering the cost of travel and attendance at the ISQOLS international conference, as well as award recognition at the conference banquet. Donations to the Mary Joyce Scholarship Award may be sent to:

The Mary Joyce Scholarship Award
The International Society for Quality of Life Studies (ISQOLS) 1800 Kraft Drive, Suite 111Blacksburg, Virginia 24060-6351, USA 540.231.5110 (office); 540.961.4162 (fax) isqols@vt.edu (e-mail); http://www.isqols.org (website)

Legislation for a New State-Level Survey of Child Well-Being Is Introduced in the U.S.

Legislation has been introduced in the United States Congress calling for a state-level survey, to be carried out by the Federal government, which would provide each state with reliable, accurate data about how their children are doing, across a wide range of indicators—education, social and emotional development, health and safety, attitudes, and family well-being. The new survey would build on the existing National Survey of Child Health.

Senators John D. Rockefeller (D-WV) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME) introduced legislation (S-1482) in the Senate on May 24, 2007, while Representative Chaka Fattah (D-PA) and Dave Camp (R-MI) introduced similar legislation (HR 2477) in the House of Representatives.

The legislation was spurred by the fact that over the past decade the federal government has shifted greater responsibility to the states for programs that benefit children and families. Unfortunately, most states today lack reliable data on the well-being of children in their jurisdiction.

Most national surveys do not include adequate sample sizes to provide an accurate picture of state-level conditions, especially for smaller states. This information would help states target their scarce resources and track whether child well-being improved when new programs were instituted.

The new survey would cost about $10 million a year, but The Annie E. Casey Foundation and other private funders have pledged to expand that funding by providing at least $1 million annually to give states, researchers, policy analysts and community groups technical assistance in understanding and using the data.

Sponsors believe a state-level survey on the well-being of children is a valuable and cost-effective investment for many reasons including:

- States will be able to determine how to get the maximum impact of federal dollars invested in children.
- States will be able to make informed decisions on a number of programs.
- Federal policymakers will have better data to guide them in allocating increasingly scarce federal resources for child well-being.
- States and federal policymakers will be better able to compare state-specific policies across state lines.

More information about the legislation is available at www.childindicators.com

SINET WORLD WIDE WEB HOMEPAGE

SINET has a homepage entry on the World Wide Web. It is located on the homepage of the Department of Sociology at Duke University and thus can be accessed by clicking on Department Publications on the address of that page, namely, http://www.soc.duke.edu or by typing in the full address http://www.soc.duke.edu/resources/sinet. The homepage for SINET contains a description of the Contents of the Current Issue as well of Previous Issues. In addition, it has Subscription Information, Editorial Information, Issue-Related Links, and a link to the homepage of ISQOLS, the International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies. The Issue-Related Links button has links to World Wide Web locations of data for the construction, study, and analysis of social and quality-of-life indicators that have been identified in previous issues of SINET.

When you are surfing the Web, surf on in to our homepage.
Call For Papers
Applied Research in Quality of Life
The Official Journal of the International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies

The aim of this journal is to publish conceptual, methodological and empirical papers dealing with quality-of-life studies in the applied areas of the natural and social sciences. As the official journal of ISQOLS, it is designed to attract papers that have some direct implications for or impact on practical applications of research on the quality-of-life. We welcome papers crafted from inter-disciplinary, inter-professional and international perspectives. This research should guide decision making in a variety of professions, industries, non-profit, and government sectors such as healthcare, travel and tourism, marketing, corporate management, community planning, social work, public administration, human resource management, among others. The goal is to help decision makers apply performance measures and outcome assessment techniques based on concepts such as well-being, human satisfaction, human development, happiness, wellness and quality of life. The Editorial Review Board is divided into specific sections indicating the broad scope of practice covered by the journal, and the section editors are distinguished scholars from many countries across the globe.

Authors interested in submitting manuscripts for publication should consult the website http://ariq.edmgr.com. Manuscripts should be directed to the relevant Section Editor of the Editorial Review Board. If an appropriate Section Editor cannot be identified, direct the manuscript to the current Editor in Chief, Michalos.
THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR QUALITY-OF-LIFE STUDIES:
HEADQUARTERS AND WWW HOMEPAGE

The International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies (ISQOLS) was formed in the mid-1990s. The objectives of ISQOLS are: 1) to stimulate interdisciplinary research in quality-of-life (QOL) studies within the managerial (policy), behavioral, social, medical, and environmental sciences; 2) to provide an organization which all academic, business, nonprofit, and government researchers who are interested in QOL studies can coordinate their efforts to advance the knowledge base and to create positive social change; and 3) to encourage closer cooperation among scholars engaged in QOL research to develop better theory, methods, measures, and intervention programs.

The year 2006 membership fees are US$75 for regular members and $50 for students or retired persons. Prof. M. JOSEPH SIRGY (Virginia Tech and State University) is Executive Director of ISQOLS. Anyone interested in knowing more about ISQOLS should contact Prof. Sirgy at the central office.

The ISQOLS central office recently moved to new physical and virtual locations. Please note the new addresses:

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SINET
Social Indicators Network News

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