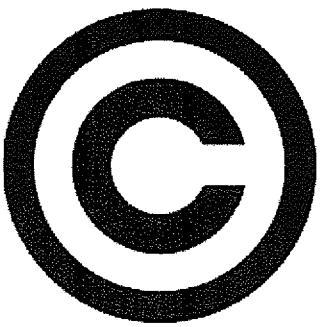
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6 Selected theories on functioning well and feeling good

Marié P. Wissing

Chapter outline

6.1 The mental health continuum model (Keyes)
- 6.1.1 The model
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- 6.1.3 Prevalence of levels of well-being

6.2 The broaden-and-build model of positive emotions (Fredrickson)
- 6.2.1 The model

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- 6.4.1 Steger's meaning model
- 6.4.2 Wong's meaning model
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- 6.4.4 A relationality meaning model

6.5 General psychological well-being: a hierarchical model

Learning objectives

After working through this chapter, you should be able to:

- describe the mental health continuum model of Keyes, indicating how it integrates hedonic and eudaimonic views
- discuss the prevalence of levels of well-being as found in research against the backdrop of Keyes's model
- describe the broaden-and-build model of positive emotions by Fredrickson, indicating examples from your own life on how the various steps in the dynamics of the approach materialised
- explicate the different components of Seligman's PERMA model of well-being
- describe and compare various models on meaning
- describe and visually construe the basic ideas from the general psychological well-being model

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◆ Indicate which of the models presented in this chapter resonates mostly with you and why you prefer it to the others.

Chapter overview

The previous chapter was about several ways in which well-being is conceptualised and described. In this chapter, several other models will be discussed, each offering a unique understanding of well-being or facets of it. Some of the concepts from these models have already been introduced in chapters 1–4. The models that will be highlighted in this chapter are Keyes' mental health continuum model, Fredrickson's broaden-and-build model of positive emotions, Seligman's PERMA well-being model, various models on meaning (those by Steger, Wong, and Wissing and Delle Fave), and the general psychological well-being model developed by several South Africans.

Key terms

acceptance and well-being
broaden-and-build
flourishing
languishing
meaning in life
meaning making
meaning management
meaning of life
meaning to life
mental health continuum
moderate mental health
PERMA
positive relationships
positivity
presence of meaning
search of meaning
sources of meaning

6.1 The mental health continuum model (C.L.M. Keyes)

Keyes (2002, 2005, 2007) proposes that psychopathology and psychological well-being are two different, negatively correlated dimensions or continua of human functioning, and suggests a specific model on the continuum of well-being or positive mental health. This mental health continuum (MHC) model, discussed in this chapter, refers to functioning on the positive health and well-being dimension,

The story continues ...

Sifiso: *So, Janice, this being a positive psychology class, how's your well-being?*

Janice: *I'm happy, enjoy my studies, and have nice friends. How about you?*

Sifiso: *Yes, me too, but I feel especially good when visiting my family. However, I'd like to study more – I suppose I need to work a bit on my self-discipline in that regard.*

Janice: *I suppose I need to work a bit more on my relationship with my family. I wonder how one can explain what well-being really is ... how it works ... is one well*

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when you have no major problems ... can you be both psychologically well and have some kind of problem or stress ... this thing of strengths shown in the unveiling of our painful history at the TRC meetings got me thinking ...

and consists of three main components, namely, psychological/personal well-being (PWB), social well-being (SWB) and emotional well-being (EWB). Well-being on the positive health and well-being dimension is also conceptualised on a continuum representing three levels or categories of well-being, namely, languishing (i.e. low levels of emotional, social and psychological well-being), moderate mental health, and flourishing (i.e. high levels of emotional, social and psychological well-being).

6.1.1 The model

Building on research by Carol Ryff and himself (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Keyes, 1998), Keyes (2002, 2005, 2007) developed an encompassing complete model of mental health. This model conceptualises well-being or mental health in terms of specific characteristics of feeling good and functioning well on individual and social levels. PWB and SWB represent a functioning-well component as viewed from an eudaimonic perspective, and EWB takes care of a feeling-good, more hedonic perspective on well-being. Integrating various perspectives and lines of research makes this model a very good and comprehensive model of well-being. Keyes also developed a scale based on this model with which the degree and levels or states of mental health and well-being can be measured (Keyes, 2006). This measure and model has been validated and supported in the South African context (Keyes et al., 2008).

In Keyes's mental health continuum model, the PWB component includes characteristics of functioning well on an individual level, namely, self-acceptance, autonomy, personal growth, positive relations, environmental mastery and purpose in life. SWB refers to functioning well on a social level, and includes the characteristics of social coherence, social actualisation, social integration, social acceptance and social contribution. EWB refers to positive emotions, interest in life and satisfaction with life. The components of this model are depicted in Figure 6.1.

6.1.1.1 Description of facets

The various facets included in Keyes's model can be described in more detail as follows: The psychological/personal well-being (PWB) component comprises the following:

- *Self-acceptance* indicates that people attempt to feel good about themselves even though they simultaneously are aware of their own limitations. People high on this facet have a positive attitude toward themselves, acknowledge and accept their own qualities including good and bad characteristics, and feel positive about their own past life.

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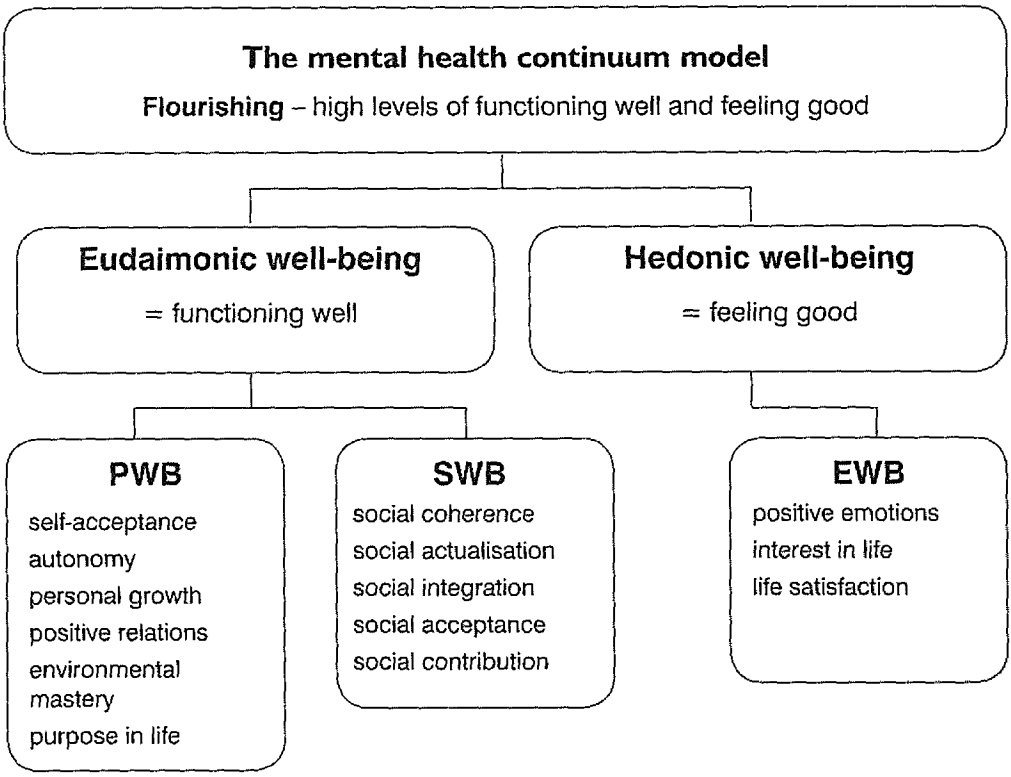


Figure 6.1 Mental health continuum model

Compiled from Keyes (2002, 2005, 2006)

- *Autonomy* refers to sustaining individuality within a larger social context. People high in autonomy are self-directed and independent, they are able to resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways, can regulate their behaviour from within, and evaluate themselves according to their own standards.
- *Personal growth* refers to making the most of one's talents and capacities. People high in personal growth feel that they are developing, see themselves as growing and expanding, are open to new experiences, realise their potential, note improvement in their behaviour and functioning over time, and change in ways that reflect deeper self-knowledge and effectiveness. Well-functioning people also seek growth through constantly developing and maintaining warm and trusting interpersonal relationships.
- People high in *positive relations* have warm, trusting and satisfying relationships with other people; are concerned about the well-being of others; show strong empathy, affection and intimacy; and understand the give-and-take of human relationships.
- *Environmental mastery* refers to the capacity to shape own environments to meet personal needs and desires. Someone with a high capacity for environmental mastery

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has a sense of competence in managing the environment, can control many and complex external activities, can make good use of resources and opportunities, and is able to select or create contexts suitable to personal values and needs. An important aspect of well-being is to experience meaning in life and in one's efforts and challenges.

- High-functioning individuals have a strong sense of *purpose in life*, which refers to a sense of directedness and through the pursuit of specific goals that are in line with beliefs and values. Such individuals also tend to experience meaning in life (see also Chapter 3).

The social well-being (SWB) component includes the following facets:

- *Social coherence* refers to interest in social life and society, and the experience that social processes are more or less comprehensible and meaningful.
- *Social actualisation* refers to beliefs that people, groups and societies have potential, and can grow and evolve positively.
- *Social integration* refers to a sense of belonging to as well as a sense of support from a community.
- *Social acceptance* refers to the degree to which a person has positive attitudes towards others while accepting individual differences and complexities.
- *Social contribution* means that an individual sees his or her own daily activities as valued by and useful to society and others.

The emotional well-being (EWB) component consists of the following:

- Having *positive emotions* (i.e. being generally cheerful, happy and calm)
- Being *interested in life* (i.e. being in good spirits and full of life)
- Experiencing *life satisfaction* (i.e. being mostly satisfied with life overall or in domains of life in particular) (Keyes, 2006, 2007)

6.1.2 Model and empirical findings

In empirical studies, Keyes (2005, 2006, 2007) showed that levels of mental health are associated with various other health outcomes and biological factors. A high level of well-being (i.e. flourishing) is shown to be a protective factor against chronic physical diseases and cardiovascular disorders; is associated with the absence of depression, anxiety and alcohol disorders; and is associated with higher life expectancy and a life free of disabilities. Flourishing people also show fewer minor illnesses and days lost from work. Languishing and moderately mentally healthy people have more chronic diseases, more days lost at work, and a general higher morbidity and mortality rate than those who are flourishing.

Keyes (2007, 2010) argued that the implication of the above evidence is that it is necessary to promote mental *health* and not merely reduce risk factors and remedy pathology. Such efforts will contribute to higher levels of public health with less cost to the economy and a better quality of life for people.

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6.1.3 Prevalence of levels of well-being

How many people are flourishing? Empirical studies showed that many people are not flourishing although they do not have any major problems. This is because the absence of negative symptoms is not the same as the presence of positive characteristics. Research in the US (Keyes, 2006, 2007) established that only 18% of adults are flourishing, 65% were moderately mentally healthy, and 17% were languishing. In the case of youth (12–18 years), Keyes found that 38% were flourishing, 56% were moderately mentally healthy, and 6% were languishing. He noted that it seems as if flourishing diminishes from adolescence to adulthood, and that the percentage of languishing people increases. This implies that flourishing should be especially facilitated and protected in youth.

In South Africa, similar but also slightly higher levels of well-being were established, with more people flourishing in a variety of groups (Wissing et al., 2008; Keyes et al., 2008; Wissing & Temane, 2013). Keyes et al. (2008) established that 20% of a large random sample of Setswana-speaking people in the North West province were flourishing, 67.8% were moderately mentally healthy, and 12.2% were languishing. These percentages are roughly in line with those reported by Keyes (2007) for adults in the US. Van Schalkwyk and Wissing (2010) found that prevalence levels for well-being in the case of a multicultural group of secondary school children between 15 and 17 years of age in the Western Cape province of South Africa more or less corresponded to those of youth in the US, namely, 42% flourishing, 53% moderately mentally healthy, and 5% languishing. Wissing et al. (2008) and Wissing and Temane (2013) showed that in other South African adult groups 21–38% people were flourishing, and 5–6% were languishing. It is also shown in the case of tertiary student samples that 60–62% were flourishing and 4–6% were languishing. Of course, students are a highly selected group with special internal and external resources.

Flourishing South African participants also show significantly higher levels of positive affect, coping self-efficacy, general self-efficacy, ego resilience, sense of coherence, satisfaction with life, self-regulation and perceived social support, and significantly fewer symptoms of depression, negative affect and physical symptoms of stress (Wissing et al., 2008).

Taken together, it is clear that Keyes's mental health continuum model and the measures based on it are very valuable in practice. Measures of this model (e.g. the Mental Health Continuum-Short Form or MHC-SF) can provide baseline information on individuals' and communities' levels of well-being, informing public policies towards the promotion of mental health. They can also be used to assess the effect of interventions to promote well-being and a higher prevalence of flourishing in groups (e.g. Van Schalkwyk & Wissing, 2013).

Activity box 6.1

Where would you guess Sifiso and Janice would be on the continuum from languishing to flourishing? Why?

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6.2 The broaden-and-build model of positive emotions (B.L. Fredrickson)

Positive emotions such as joy, gratitude and contentment are fleeting conditions and last only a few minutes, as do many other positive emotions, yet high frequencies of them are of great importance for building and sustaining well-being. We have more words for negative emotions than for positive ones, and negative emotions have been studied far more – probably also because of their survival function. Negative emotions grab our attention and prepare us for a fight-or-flight reaction or other direct action tendency. Positive emotions, however, are often diffuse, less intense, do not typically illicit specific action tendencies, and have been far less studied in the past. With the focus on positive psychology this has changed, and we are starting to drink from the fountain of this new knowledge, learning how frequent positive emotions may build resources and greater well-being in the long run. How do positive emotions operate to produce well-being and positive health over time? Fredrickson (1998, 2001, 2009) developed a ground-breaking theory on the broaden-and-build function of positive emotions. This theory is supported by many empirical studies and is widely accepted as one of the strong theories in positive psychology.

6.2.1 The model

6.2.1.1 The broadening effect

Fredrickson's broaden-and-build model (Fredrickson, 2001) posits that positive emotions open up our minds and expand our perceptual abilities (i.e. broaden our functional capacity). Positive emotions not only broaden our thinking patterns, but also facilitate creativity, generate more possibilities for tasks at hand, promote a wider perspective or overview, and facilitate the awareness of more action options. Positive emotions facilitate greater cognitive flexibility, openness to the environment, and others' and own internal processes, and thereby help to create a greater sense of meaning and coherence (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008). Sparking changes in cognitive activities, the broadened thought patterns enrich the view of action possibilities. Think about your own life and how much more open, curious, loving and capable you feel when you feel good. Typically, adults who experience positive emotions are more likely to seek new experiences and challenges, interact more with others and are more supportive to those in need. They are more verbally creative and more likely to develop new plans and activities.

Because positive emotions arise in response to vague and diffuse opportunities rather than to a specific and narrowly focused threat, positive emotions tend to broaden people's attention and thinking in the moment they exist, enabling them to draw on higher-level processes and connections, and a wider-than-usual range of ideas and perceptions.

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6.2.1.2 *The building effect*

Positive emotions not only broaden the mind, perceptual awareness and creative action possibilities, but also build more durable personal resources (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001). Positive emotions contribute over time, together with the broadening effect, to building intellectual resources such as the capacity to be mindful or to solve important life problems; social resources such as the ability to give and receive social support; physical resources such as cardiovascular health or immune resistance to ward off the common cold; and psychological resources such as resilience, purpose directedness, and the ability to maintain a sense of mastery over environmental challenges (Fredrickson et al., 2008).

The accumulation of resources can contribute to individual development and the creation of upward spirals of well-being. People with more resources are more likely to effectively take advantage of life's opportunities, and be more likely to be able to meet life's challenges and to use proactive coping strategies. They therefore may become more successful, healthy and happy over time. The frequent experiences of positive emotions and accrued personal resources are important building blocks to later increases in well-being. Fredrickson et al. (2008, p. 1045) contend that, putting it simply, "the broaden-and-build theory states that positive emotions widen people's outlooks in ways that, little by little, reshape who they are". This model is depicted in Figure 6.2.

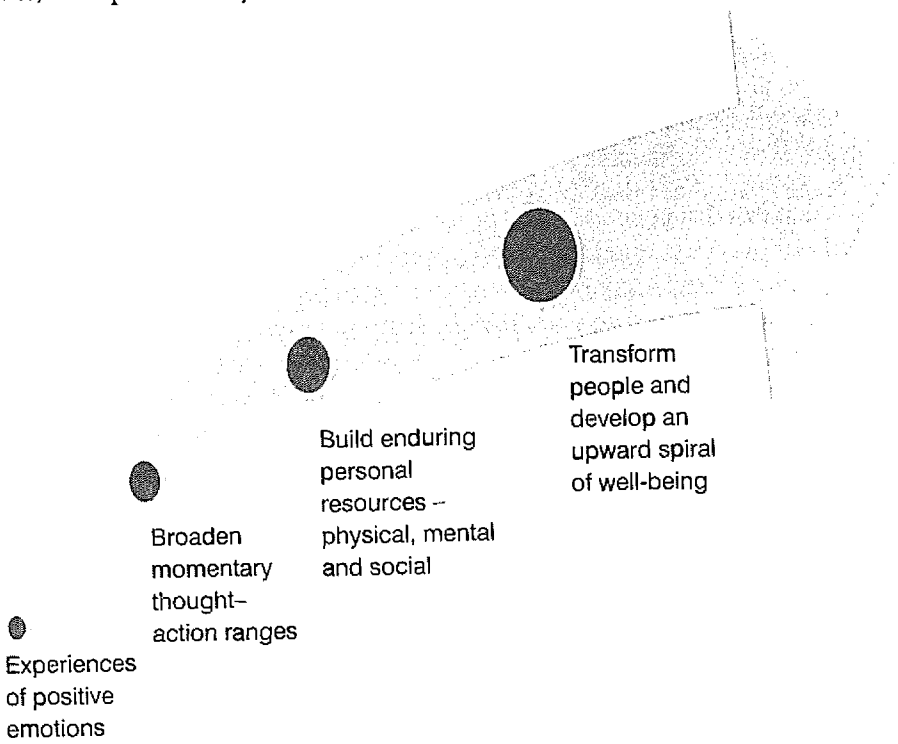


Figure 6.2 The broaden-and-build model of positive emotions
Based on Fredrickson (2001)

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6.2.1.3 Positive emotions undo negative emotions

Positive and negative emotions do not easily exist simultaneously. Fredrickson has hypothesised and shown through empirical studies that positive emotions can undo the lingering effect of negative ones. Positive emotions help the body and mind to regain balance after the impact of negative emotions. For example, laughing at yourself after making a very stress-inducing mistake may help to reduce psychological stress and stress hormones in the body.

Box 6.2 Creating the possibility of experiencing more positive emotions

The possibility of experiencing more positive emotions may be done through

- helping others
- interacting with others
- playing and amusement
- learning and curiosity
- spiritual activities
- engaging in exercise.

Source: Catalino & Fredrickson (2011)

6.2.1.4 Optimal ratio of positive and negative emotions

Fredrickson and Losada (2005) found in their research that the optimal mix of frequencies for positive and negative emotions are 2.9013:1 – generally referred to as the 3:1 ratio. Lower levels are detrimental to well-being and relationships. With a ratio of 3:1 or above, people tend to flourish in life. Other authors (e.g. Gottman & Silver, 1999) indicated that for strong marriages the ratio should be 5:1 with positive emotions outdoing negative ones manifold. It should be noted that later research by Brown, Sokal and Friedman (2013) shows errors in the calculation of the exact positivity ratio claimed by Fredrickson and Losada (2005) and cautions against reliance on mathematical models in such instances. They do, however, agree that empirical evidence shows that a higher positivity ratio typically corresponds with better outcomes and well-being in general than lower ones.

6.2.1.5 Love as the pinnacle positive emotion

Fredrickson (2011) indicated that research on positive emotions and character strengths had been too intrapersonal in the past, and that the focus should shift to a more social and interpersonal perspective. She presented a range of studies to show the benefits of *shared positive emotions*. She then built a case for love as not only one of the positive emotions, but as the pinnacle emotion that stems from any micro-moment of shared positive emotional experiences, be it joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, etc. From this perspective, new possibilities emerge to facilitate well-being by building micro-moments of positive emotional connection in daily life.

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Fredrickson (2011) defined *love* as an interpersonally situated, socially shared experience of one or more positive emotions marked by in-the-moment increases in the investment in the well-being of the other. This process is marked by bio-behavioural synchrony and mutually responsive action tendencies which, over time, build connectedness and physically and socially mirroring behaviour. Love is shared positivity. Loving people often smile, and smiles come from the inside of people. This evokes mimicry and positive states in others, and helps to tune into their thoughts and motives, and contribute to broadening and co-building *mutual responsivity*. Mutual responsivity refers to behavioural synchrony – people with mutual responsivity tend to unknowingly and unintentionally mimic each other's expressions and body postures. The more people show behavioural synchrony, the more they feel connected. Neuroscience shows that they also develop a neural synchrony – the more synchrony, the better they listen to and understand each other. We can also say that love is *positivity resonance* of behaviour and brain functioning (Davidson, 2011; Fredrickson, 2011). Love has the capacity to transcend a gap between people and provoke responsivity/conversation. It is possible to learn to self-generate positive emotion through loving kindness meditation (Fredrickson, 2011; Fredrickson et al., 2008) and thereby to also enhance health.

Box 6.3 Developing more positive emotions

1. Keep a gratitude journal – it is important how this gratitude is expressed.
2. Network and build social capital.
3. Learn to self-generate love – practise loving kindness meditation.
4. Read Fredrickson's book, *Positivity* (2009), and learn how to increase your positivity ratio.

6.2.1.6 Limits of positive emotions

It is important to remember that although positive emotions have many positive psychological, social and physical consequences, their effect is relative. They are not a miracle cure for illnesses. Life's traumas and challenges may overwhelm anyone, but positive emotions may help.

Activity box 6.4

What would social well-being entail, and how can positive emotions play a role in that regard?
Describe the dance of positive and negative emotions in comfortable situations such as a loving relationship, but also in challenging situations such as South Africa's truth and reconciliation processes.
What are some of the most important positive emotions?

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Box 6.5 Positive emotions and happiness in domains of life

In which domains of life do you experience the most happiness and the most frequent positive emotions?

In the Eudaimonic-Hedonic Happiness Investigation (EHHI) project across seven countries it was found that, across 10 life domains, the five most important ones for the experience of happiness were in the following rank order: family, interpersonal relations, health, personal growth and standard of living (Delle Fave, Brdar, Freire, Vella-Brodrick, & Wissing, 2011).

For the South African sample, the rank order of domains for most happiness was: family, interpersonal relations, personal growth, spirituality, and standard of living. For all countries, the lowest-ranking domains as sources of happiness were community and society issues. Why would that be?

6.3 The PERMA model of well-being (M.E.P. Seligman)

PERMA is the acronym for a well-being model developed by Martin Seligman. It identifies five essential components of well-being, namely, positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning and accomplishment. Seligman's (2011) well-being theory is not a theory in a strict sense as it currently stands, but more an enumeration of five components that he saw as the most important elements of well-being. In order to qualify as a component, each of these elements had to fulfil the following criteria:

- It must contribute to well-being.
- People must pursue an element for its own sake, and not as a means to another end or element.
- Each should permit to be defined and measured independently of the other elements.

6.3.1 The model

The PERMA model consists of the following five elements as the most important components of well-being:

6.3.1.1 Positive emotions (P)

According to this model, we need positive emotions as subjectively judged to experience well-being in life. This element refers to what Seligman in his "authentic happiness" view named *the pleasant life* – the message is that it is important to enjoy oneself in the here and now, as long as the other components of PERMA are also in place. Positive emotions in this model include both happiness and life satisfaction (i.e. emotional and cognitive components). Positive emotions can refer to states such as pleasure, comfort, peace, gratitude, satisfaction, inspiration, hope, curiosity and love. Research conducted

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by Barbara Fredrickson (2001) greatly contributed to a better understanding of the role and importance of positive emotions in well-being. As you may recall from the previous section, she indicated that positive emotions should be more or less 3:1 with negative emotions for a person to be well (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005), and that for a relationship between partners to be strong and loving, the expression of positive versus negative affect should be at least 5:1.

6.3.1.2 Engagement (E)

Engagement as an element of the model refers to the state where someone is completely absorbed in a task. When we are really engaged in a task, situation or project, we experience a state of what is called *flow*. In flow it seems as if time stops, we lose our sense of self and concentrate intensely on the activity in the moment (see also Chapter 3, section 3.2.6). Only afterwards we will say "That was great!" or "That was wonderful" (Seligman, 2011). The term "flow" was firstly described by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), and refers to an intrinsically motivated voluntary activity where challenges and skills more or less meet. Although people will describe flow as highly and intrinsically enjoyable, this would only be judged as an after-the-fact summary. Engagement can be experienced in a variety of activities from work to sport to art, and to deeply satisfying and meaningful conversations.

6.3.1.3 Positive relationships (R)

Positive relationships with other people are of great importance to well-being. We as human beings are "social beings", and positive relationships contribute greatly to the experience of meaningfulness in life, and form a core aspect of our well-being (Seligman, 2011). Positivity in relationships can be experienced from social support to caring, to acts of kindness towards others, to sharing love. Those who have meaningful positive relationships with others are healthier and happier than those who do not. Shelley Gable and colleagues (e.g. Algoe, Gable, & Maisel, 2010; Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006) showed the importance of the quality of interactions between partners and the importance of sharing positive experiences.

6.3.1.4 Meaning (M)

Meaning is found in belonging to and serving something greater than the self. This can be a deity, something spiritual or religious, or a cause that helps humanity in some way (Seligman, 2011). The need for meaning in our lives is universal. Meaning provides people with the sense that their lives matter and make sense. Steger (2012) contends that the cognitive component of meaning in life refers to the understanding of who we are, what the world is like, and how we fit into the greater scheme of things. The same idea is found in Antonovsky's (1993) conceptualisation of *sense of coherence* in which the meaning facet refers to an orientation that life is more or less comprehensible. According to Steger (2012), the cognitive component of meaning provides the foundation from which a person develops aspirations, purposes and directions for life. According to him, such a sense of purpose comprises the motivational component of meaning.

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6.3.1.5 Accomplishment (A)

Accomplishment refers to achievement, mastery, success and an "achieving life" (Seligman, 2011). Often we strive to better ourselves in some way or reach something that is important to us, whether it is in the mastering of a skill, achievement of a valuable goal, or winning some competitive event. As such, our accomplishments contribute to our overall experience of well-being. Angela Duckworth (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005) describes achievement as skills × effort. The *skills* part refers to the speed of learning (and talent shows in the accelerated speed of turning new learning into automatic knowledge), the capacity to slow down and use executive functions of planning, refining, creativity and checking for errors. The *effort* part refers to character components of self-control and perseverance. Effort is thus shown in time on the task. Research shows that self-discipline predicts academic outcomes better than IQ does (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005).

6.3.2 Evaluation

The components of the PERMA model are all very important in the conceptualisation of important facets of well-being, as had been shown in previous research in positive psychology. However, Seligman's model has been criticised for lacking in philosophical and theoretical depth. It does not contribute to an understanding of how things work or an explanation of the dynamics of well-being, but rather only enumerates what facets are important in the evaluation of well-being. However, this is also a model in development, and soon we may see hypotheses about the dynamics between these various components.

Activity box 6.6

- Reflect on how you ensure that you often experience positive emotions such as happiness, pleasure, contentment, peace, joy and inspiration.
- Try to minimise distraction and focus on activities in which you can experience flow.
- Reflect on how you can act with greater commitment to improve your important relationships.
- What are the most important things in your life? Why?
- Which skills and/or which character traits (self-control or perseverance) do you want to develop further in order to facilitate greater accomplishments in the areas that are important to you?

6.4 Meaning models (Steger, Wong, Park, Wissing & Delle Fave)

Meaning is central to human life, and research on meaning in life has proliferated in many divisions in psychology in recent years. In positive psychology, studies on quality of life and well-being initially focused strongly on satisfaction with life, subjective

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well-being and happiness, which are more in line with hedonic conceptualisations of well-being, but recently the focus has shifted strongly to meaningfulness and how the experience of meaning in life and well-being are associated as understood from a eudaimonic perspective, and also to how meaning and happiness hang together, differ and overlap. Questions about meaning often come to the forefront, especially in times of severe life stress, and recent research therefore also focuses particularly on *meaning-making* – that is, the process of restoration of meaning in challenging and highly stressful life circumstances and experiences.

The importance of experiencing one's life as meaningful has long been known to psychologists, and several ideas on it were offered long before positive psychology became a sub-discipline in science, for example Frankl's ideas on the *will to meaning*. Both Frankl (1963) and Antonovsky (1987) referred in their descriptions of the importance of meaning to coping with the unspeakably painful experiences of people in the Nazi concentration camps. Such painful experiences are also well known to people in the South African apartheid past – some of which were voiced at the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (cf. Wissing & Temane, 2013). Frankl believed that meaning can be found, for example, in creating something, in interpersonal relations and in enduring suffering. The will to meaning is a strong motivational force in human life, and of extreme importance in coping with life and its struggles – as humans, we need our lives to feel significant in some way – important, worthwhile and purposeful. Meaning is also one of three components in Antonovsky's (1993) conceptualisation of *sense of coherence* (i.e. a broad orientation towards life in which the world and own life in it is viewed as more or less comprehensible, manageable and meaningful).

Other early perspectives on meaning were, for example, those of Battista and Almond (1973), who indicated that meaning has to do with understanding life, pursuing important goals and feeling fulfilled. Maddi (1967) stressed the importance of finding and pursuing a purpose in life. According to Baumeister (1991, p. 15), meaning can be understood as "a mental representation of possible relationships among things, events and relationships". He indicated that meaning in life includes having a sense of purpose and understanding one's role in the greater scheme of things, based on the needs for purpose, value, efficacy and self-worth. Personal meaning is viewed by Fry and Debats (2010) as a cognitive map that helps to orient an individual in steering through the course of life. Auhagen and Holub (2006) described meaning as a personal life experience that is subjectively judged and evaluated according to own true self characteristics. They categorise meanings as provisional (i.e. related to everyday life events), personal (i.e. involving the individual's life as a whole) and ultimate meaning, which is the self-transcendent dimension. The importance of a sense of understanding and purpose is also stressed in Reker and Woo's (2011) view of meaning. They describe personal meaning as an understanding of order, coherence and purpose in life, the pursuit of worthwhile goals, and a sense of fulfilment in attaining them. A person with a high level of experienced meaningfulness has a clear sense of direction and purpose in life, goals and purpose are aligned, and the person is satisfied with past achievements while also striving to make the future meaningful. Schnell, Höge and Pollet (2013) added a relational component by indicating that the key elements of meaningfulness

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are the perceptions or experiences of *coherence, direction, significance* and *belonging* in life. Many studies have shown that experience of meaningfulness in life can buffer stress and enhance physical, psychological and mental well-being. Models of meaning mostly refer to comprehension/sense of coherence (cognitive facet) and/or purpose (motivational function), as well as an emotional (subjective evaluative) facet as the main components of meaning. In this chapter, some of the recent models of meaning are explicated.

6.4.1 Steger's meaning model

Steger refers to meaning as the catch basin of consciousness (Steger, 2011). He argues that what is important to people (identity, worldview, relationships) flows into their meaning systems, which motivate and organise their goals and behaviour, and help them to detect environmentally relevant information such as opportunities, resources and threats.

6.4.1.1 The model

In his model, Steger (2011) describes comprehension and purpose as the basic components informing meaning. Comprehension is making sense of things, building on the understanding of oneself (identity), the world (world and life view), and one's fit into the world. Purpose builds momentum towards meaning via discernment of what is important, commitment to do the right thing and acting on that commitment. Comprehension also informs purpose, which leads to particular outcomes that in turn contribute to comprehension, as indicated in Figure 6.3. See also <http://www.michaelf-steger.com>.

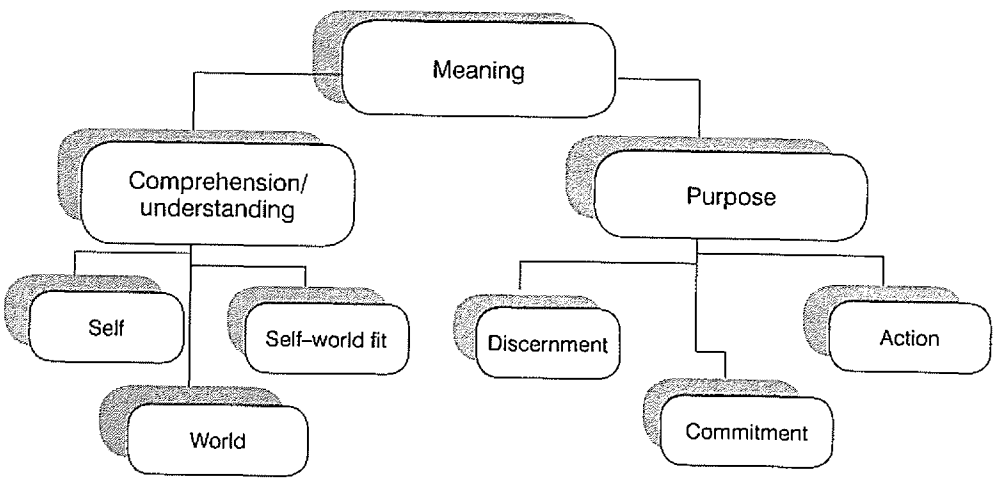


Figure 6.3 Steger's meaning model

Based on Steger (2011)

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6.4.1.2 Empirical studies

Steger and colleagues distinguish between the *presence of meaning* and the *search for meaning*, showing that the presence of meaning is related to positive emotions, optimism, extraversion and agreeableness as personality traits; positive adjustment and self-regulation, self-management and constructive coping (Steger, 2011; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006; Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorents, 2008; Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009; Steger, Oishi, & Kesebir, 2011).

6.4.2 Wong's meaning model

Wong (1998, 2011) defines personal meaning as an individually constructed cognitive system that incorporates motivational and affective aspects, and which bestows on life a sense of personal significance.

6.4.2.1 Sources of meaning

Wong (2010, 2011) identified the following sources of meaning: happiness, achievement, intimacy, relationships, self-transcendence, self-acceptance and fairness. More perspectives on sources of meaning can be found in the literature (see also Chapter 3, section 3.2.9, and Box 6.7).

6.4.2.2 The structure and function of meaning

The main structural components of meaning are purpose (P), understanding (U), responsible action (R) and enjoyment/evaluation (E) (= PURE). These components contribute functionally to the experience of meaning, meaning making and well-being through psychological processes that may be *motivational* (linked to purpose), *cognitive* (linked to understanding), *moral/spiritual* (linked to responsibility) and *affective/evaluative* (linked to enjoyment). Wong (2010, 2011) further qualifies PURE as follows:

Purposefulness or purpose directedness in life

A meaningful life has a purpose, an overall direction based on core values. Purpose has a central, self-organising function in life and is at a deeper level linked with values and what really matters in life for an individual. At its deepest level, purpose is linked to meaning making in devotion to something larger than the self.

Understanding and a sense of coherence

The experience of meaning is facilitated by a sense of coherence – that is, an understanding of the self, the world in which we live, our place in it and our ability to cope with it. A meaningful life requires a sense of self-identity and self-knowledge, a capacity to appraise situations and the ability to cope with them, and a view on life and death and of one's own place in the larger scheme of things. Understanding and meaning making in navigating everyday life are also contextually imbedded – social, cul-

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tural and historical factors influence the understanding of self, the world, and what is deemed meaningful.

Responsible action

Meaning is experienced and expressed in doing what is considered right or good according to one's values. To act responsibly, good cognitive decisions that are in line with ethical requirements need to be made. Responsible action requires practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is shown in decisions and behaviours that take into account and balance own interests (intrapersonal), the interests of others (interpersonal) and the environment (extra-personal) towards the greater good. To act responsibly requires one to have the right purpose, a proper understanding of the situation, and a consideration of the consequences for self, others and the environment.

Enjoyment and evaluation

Affective evaluation helps to determine whether one's life is on the right track and in line with one's highest purpose, understanding and values. Doing the right thing in this sense results in feeling good, which indicates that one's life is on track as desired. When problems arise or dissatisfaction is experienced, corrections need to be made in the life course. In this sense, discontentment may help an unhappy person to self-regulate and make changes towards a more positive life trajectory.

6.4.2.3 *Acceptance and well-being*

Wong (2012a) also developed a *meaning management model* in which acceptance is the cornerstone. He suggested that in order to experience meaning and well-being in life, one needs to accept what life brings. Pathways to meaning management and well-being are unconditional acceptance of the self, of others, of death and the inevitable things in life, of unavoidable stress, and also of the here and now.

- *Self-acceptance* is a necessary precondition for any positive change. It requires awareness and a mindful reflection on own uniqueness and intrinsic value in spite of own weaknesses. With acceptance the true authentic self develops.
- *Accepting others* is based on empathy and the realisation that we are all human beings in the same boat of life, sharing suffering, joy and opportunities. Acceptance of others contributes to mutual trust and understanding, and to mindful interactions.
- *Acceptance of death* means that we must recognise the fragility and finitude of life, learn how to live with our limitations and existential anxiety, making the most of our brief life by living authentically and passionately. Anxiety about death can be overcome through faith, meaning and deep relationships.
- *Accepting unavoidable stress* requires wisdom, flexibility, creativity and prayer. To accept what cannot be changed brings peace and saves energy.
- *Acceptance of the here and now* is a mindset of openness, compassion, empathy, acceptance and non-judgement. This facilitates self-awareness, makes us more

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aware of others, reduces stress, helps with self-regulation and relaxation, and increases serenity and well-being.

Box 6.7 Sources of meaning

Westerhof, Bohlmeijer and Valenkamp (2004) suggest that sources of meaning can be found (i) within a person; (ii) in interpersonal relationships; (iii) in physical integrity; health and functioning; (iv) in daily activities; and (v) in material possessions. Leontiev (2007) distinguished three main categories of meaning: growth and self-realisation, contribution and family. Schnell (2010, 2011) grouped sources of meaning into four basic dimensions, namely, vertical self-transcendence, horizontal self-transcendence, self-actualisation, order and well-being/relatedness. She showed empirically that commitment to numerous, diverse and, in particular, self-transcendent sources of meaning enhances the chances of living a meaningful life.

Box 6.8 Meaning and happiness orientations and characteristics

Wong (2011) pointed to some differences between meaning and happiness orientations, for example:

- In a *meaning orientation,* **responsibility** is more important than feeling. It is high in compassion and altruism, endurance and perseverance, transcendence and spirituality; and there is sacrifice of own interest for that of family or friends, and delay of gratification.
- In a *happiness orientation*, **feeling** is more important than responsibility. There is low compassion and altruism, a tendency to immediate gratification, self-interest is above that of family and friends, and there is high self-confidence and feelings of self-efficacy.

6.4.3 A model of meaning making

Park and Folkman (1997) integrated perspectives on adaptation to life stressors in a proposed meaning-making model. The basic tenets of this model are (i) an individual has a global meaning system or cognitive framework that helps to interpret experiences, and also serves to motivate behaviour; (ii) in stressful situations that have the potential to challenge a person's global meaning system, an appraisal of the situation is made and meaning assigned to it; (iii) distress is experienced to the extent that there is a discrepancy between the appraised meaning of the situation and the person's global meaning; (iv) the experienced distress which is caused by the discrepancy initiates a process of meaning making; (v) the meaning-making efforts help to reduce the discrepancy and help to facilitate a sense of life as meaningful and of own life as worthwhile; and (vi) if this process is successful, it leads to better adjustment to the stressful situation.

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Box 6.9 Givers and takers

Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker and Garbinsky (2013) indicate that happiness and meaningfulness in life can overlap and feed into each other, but they also differ in several respects: people higher in *happiness* than meaning are mostly present orientated and takers, whereas people higher in *meaningfulness* than happiness are also concerned with thinking about the past and future, and tend to be givers rather than takers. Happiness is to a great extent about getting what we want and need, whereas meaningfulness is more about expressing and reflecting on ourselves, and in particular in doing positive things for others – even though meaningful involvements can increase stress and worries.

6.4.4 A relationality-meaning model

The relationality-meaning model (Wissing, 2014; Wissing & Delle Fave, 2013) is based on theories and empirical findings which show that meaning, at its core, is about connections and relations, and that both the experience of meaning and positive relationships are core components of (eudaimonic) well-being. Relations refer to human bonds as content, whereas connections refer to links and processes between and among facets and with context. Empirical research has established that relationships are the most important source of meaning in life, and that positive relationships and meaning are strongly associated with many indices of well-being in various cultural contexts. The relationality meaning model is thus based on previous hypotheses about the importance of meaning and positive relationships in human functioning, and empirical findings that showed links between meaning, positive relationships, well-being and context. In the next section is an explanation of the theoretical and empirical backdrop for the development of the relationality meaning model, and a brief overview of the model.

6.4.4.1 Theoretical perspectives on meaning, relationships and well-being

Scientific interest in *meaning* has come a long way (e.g. Frankl, 1963; Battista & Almond, 1973; Antonovsky, 1987; Fry & Debats, 2010), and several specific perspectives on meaning have been proposed over time (e.g. Auhagen & Holub, 2006; Park, 2010; Schnell, 2009, 2011; Steger, 2011, 2012; Wong, 2012a, 2012b). In recent times, meaning has become a core construct in positive psychology, as can be seen in Chapter 3. In general, "meaning" refers to people's sense that their lives and the world in which they live are more or less coherent and that there are possibilities to experience fulfilment in line with important values and opportunities for connectedness. This implies an understanding of themselves, the world in which they live, and their own place or fit in it, as well as purposes and how they may actively pursue them (cf. Steger and Wong's models mentioned above). Wissing and Delle Fave (2013) and Wissing (2014) suggest that we can distinguish between the meaning *of* life (i.e. being anchored in something ultimately valuable), the meaning *in* life (where and when in particular we experience

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meaning in life) and the meaning we give *to* our lives (what we do to realise our values and how that is expressed in our activities and realisation of relational purposes).

Many sub-disciplines in psychology recognise the importance *of positive relationships* for healthy development and well-being, for example developmental science, personality studies, social psychology, marital and family studies, relationship science, psychopathology, and so forth. Specific examples from developmental psychology that you might already know are attachment theory and Erikson's psycho-social developmental theory. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988; Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Hazan & Shaver, 1994) hypothesises that mental models of relationships are formed in infancy through the quality of interactions with primary caregivers, and that these mental schemata determine the quality of relationships in adulthood, and whether a person would attach in a secure, preoccupied or avoidant style with others. Erikson's (1959) psychosocial development theory indicates that the most important development task in adulthood is interpersonal in nature – that is, forming close and intimate relations with others, as well as caring about and guiding others.

As far as close relationships are concerned, Reis (2007) and Gable and Reis (2010) suggest that perceived partner responsiveness is at the heart of positive relationships. For example, if an individual shares some good news (capitalisation attempt) in a relationship and the other (partner, friend) responds with an active constructive response which is noted by the "sender", the latter will also react with appreciation and a reciprocal positive response. In this way, the relationship grows in an upward positive cycle, and the individual well-being of partners is also enhanced. Aron and Aron (1986, 2012) carried out a lot of research on relationships and also developed a self-expansion model which embraces the inclusion-of-the-other-in-the-self principle – that is, expansion of the self through close relationships (experiencing their resources, identities and perspectives to an extent as one's own). They contend that relationships play a major role in people's experience of meaningfulness in life.

Positive relationships in wider social contexts are also linked to well-being and meaning in theoretical perspectives, for example in the altruism model of Soosai-Nathan and Delle Fave (2014). This so-called "spiral model of interconnectedness" refers to a seamless interconnectedness of the individual, the family, society, country, world and cosmos (cf. also Delle Fave & Soosai-Nathan, 2014). Altruism is seen as a general mindset characterised by a concern for others' welfare, readiness to engage in other-oriented behaviours, bringing welfare to the individual self without violating any other connections, and contributing to a meaningful life.

Several *well-being theories* (especially from the eudaimonic stream of thought) propose that the experience of meaning and of positive relationships is at the heart of well-being, for example Ryff's well-being model (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 1998). In this model it is indicated that the core components of well-being are (i) having a purpose in life (i.e. the belief that one's life has a purpose and is meaningful as is reflected in meaningful activities); and (ii) quality connections to others (i.e. deep and meaningful relationships with others including caring, sharing and loving). Other components are autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth and self-acceptance.

It is also assumed in Keyes's model of well-being (see above) that purpose/meaning and positive relationships are core components of well-being, but he also adds the

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social well-being component. In self-determination theory (see Chapter 5, section 5.4), it is assumed that meaning is an inseparable outcome of eudaimonic living, and that meaningful living is characterised by the pursuit of intrinsic goals and values (including relationships and community). Satisfaction of the basic needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy are core ideas in this model (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008).

As may be seen above in section 6.3, Seligman's (2011) PERMA well-being model consists of five essential components, among which are positive relationships and meaning. He contends that meaning is a universal human need in life, and is found in belongingness and in serving something larger than the self – a deity, something religious or spiritual, or another worthwhile human cause. Even in Fredrickson's (2001, 2011) broaden-and-build model of positive emotion (see section 6.2 above), which is usually viewed as more strongly linked to a hedonic way of thinking (because of the focus on positive emotions), it is hypothesised that positive emotions unlock cognitive capacity and an other-focused thinking style by which the good of the other is also included in the self. Love is viewed, in her most recent thinking (Fredrickson, 2009, 2013), as the most important component of interpersonal well-being. However, she does not link relational well-being explicitly to the experience of meaning.

It is thus clear that both the experience of meaning and positive relationships figure strongly as facets in most perspectives on well-being, and that positive relationships can be viewed as core sources of meaningfulness in life. Empirical findings support these assumptions, and also show that functioning well (as in high levels of experienced meaning and positive relatedness) is often associated also with feeling good – that is, subjective well-being and happiness (see Chapter 4).

6.4.4.2 Empirical findings on meaning, relationships, well-being and context

Empirical studies show a relationship between *meaning* and *well-being*. The experience of meaningfulness in life buffers stress and promotes psychological and social well-being – attesting to the centrality of the experience of meaningfulness in human functioning. The findings of a link between meaning and well-being were obtained in a variety of groups, in all life stages, and as measured with various indicators of well-being – for example satisfaction with life, positive affect, quality of life, global happiness, adjustment, ego-resilience (Steger, 2012; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006; Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorents, 2008; Steger, Kashdan, & Oishi, 2008; Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009). For example, Steger, Kashdan and Oishi (2008) empirically found that daily eudaimonic activities – such as "volunteered my time", "expressed my gratitude", "listened carefully to another's point of view" – predicted well-being more strongly than hedonic activities. The authors noted that the interpersonal nature of the items may be the mechanism for explaining the link between eudaimonic activities and meaning. As another example, Ryff's studies showed extensively that well-being – defined, among others things, by positive relations with others and purpose in life – is linked to various biological parameters and health outcomes (cardiovascular, neuroendocrine, immune systems) and longevity (Ryff, 2012, 2013; Ryff & Singer, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2008).

Empirical studies also show the link between positive relations and well-being. For example, Baumeister (1991), and Baumeister and Leary (1995) showed that fulfilment

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of needs for relatedness contributes to greater satisfaction with life, happiness and a sense of meaning and purpose – thus suggesting the association between positive relationships and well-being, including meaning as a eudaimonic component of well-being. When the need for belongingness is not fulfilled, it has detrimental effects on adjustment, health and well-being. Gable and colleagues showed empirical evidence for the intrapersonal and interpersonal salubrious effects of perceived partner responsiveness – that is, individuals sharing a positive event or personal good fortune with a partner, and perceiving the other as responding enthusiastically and actively, constructively experience an increase in well-being (Algoe, Gable, & Maisel, 2010; Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006; Gable & Impett, 2012; Gable & Reis, 2010). Altruistic behaviour and orientedness towards an other are also associated with positive outcomes for the self, the other and the community (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Lyubomirsky 2007; Joshanloo, 2013; Soosai-Nathan & Delle Fave, 2014; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010).

The relationality meaning model is specifically derived from empirical findings that showed connections among meaning, positive relationships and well-being. Empirical findings across cultures show that when laypeople are asked what the most important things in their lives are, they most frequently refer not only to close interpersonal relations (partners, family, close friends), but also to spirituality (the latter is strongly the case in the South African context). People with high scores in the relationships domain of life typically also scored high on various other indicators of well-being (Delle Fave et al., 2011; Delle Fave, Wissing, Brdar, Vella-Brodrick, & Freire, 2013; Lambert et al., 2010). In her research, Schnell (2009, 2011) found that the most important predictor for the experience of meaningfulness in life was generativity – that is, a relational giving attitude. Other empirical studies are, for example, those of Lambert et al. (2010), who illustrated in five studies that family relationships are the most important sources of meaning for young adults; Baumeister et al. (2013), who found that meaning was associated with giving to others, while happiness was more linked to doing things for the self; and Seligman (2011), who showed empirically that those who have meaningful positive relationships with others are happier and healthier than those with less positive relationships.

Empirical studies also showed a strong link between meaning and spirituality. For example, Steger (2012) reviewed evidence that meaning in life is associated with general spiritual experiences, intrinsic religiosity, religious activity, and a connectedness with what is deemed sacred or transcendent. Joshanloo (2011) showed that both spirituality and religiosity are significantly associated with well-being defined and operationalised hedonically and eudaimonically. In a daily diary study, Kashdan and Nezlek (2012) found that spirituality is significantly associated with self-esteem, meaning in life and positive affect.

Context is found to be important in the manifestation of well-being. Meaningfulness and positive relationships are empirically linked to well-being within a variety of cultural contexts and life stages; however, context may influence the preferred relationship types and meanings made, as can be noted across Western, Asian and African contexts (Haybron, 2011; Ho, Cheung, & Cheung, 2010; Karasawa et al., 2011; Reker & Woo, 2011; Reker & Wong, 2012; Steger, 2012, 2013; Ryff, 2013; Stroink & DeCicco, 2011; Temane & Wissing, 2006; Uchida & Kitayama, 2009; Uchida & Ogihara, 2012; Ungar, 2012; Wissing & Temane, 2013).

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It can therefore be concluded that extensive empirical studies showed connections between the quality of relationships, meaningfulness and well-being, as well as that these may be influenced by context. The main findings in these empirical studies on which the relational-meaning model is based are that positive relationships with others, society and the Other, and harmony among facets of self, are the core sources for the experience of meaning in life, and that positive relations and meaning are strong indicators of well-being in various contexts.

6.4.4.3 Core assumptions of the relationality-meaning model

Core assumptions of the relationality-meaning model are the following:

- Relationships and connectedness are at the heart of meaning in life – positive relationships are a core source for the experience of meaningfulness.
- Horizontal and vertical relationships are deeply intertwined – what is ultimately valuable determines where meaning is sought and how it is expressed in behaviour.
- It can be distinguished between meaning *of* life (ultimate values), meaning *in* life (harmonious intra-, inter- and transpersonal relations in all domains of life) and meaning *to* life (activities to realise values in relational contexts).
- Meaning and positive relationships are core defining features of well-being.
- Meaning making, relationships and manifestations of well-being are influenced by context.

6.4.4.4 The relationality-meaning model of well-being

The relationality-meaning model is depicted in Figure 6.4.

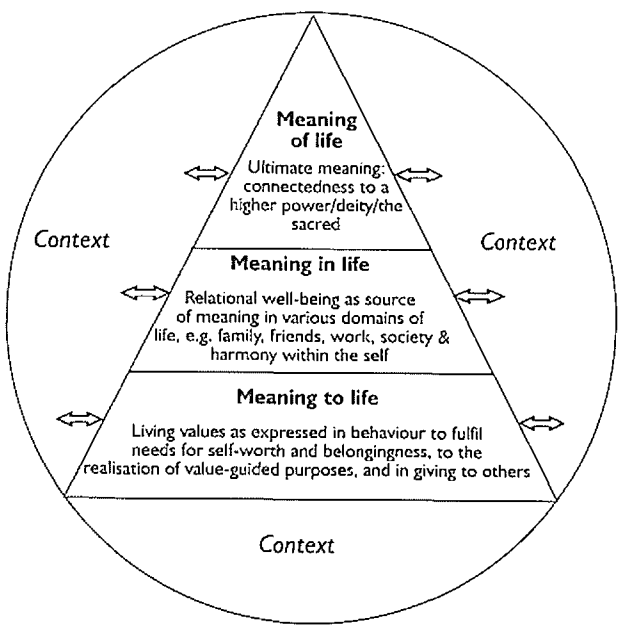


Figure 6.4 The relationality-meaning model
Source: Wissing & Delle Fave (2013)

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In Figure 6.4, the circle symbolises the context (physical, cultural, social and historical) and the triangle within an individual's experience of meaning on various levels through relational imbeddedness. General well-being is experienced in the degree to which these relationships and connections are positive and sources for the experience of meaning. Meaning *of* life, located at the apex of this hierarchical model depicted in Figure 6.4, refers to ultimate meanings and worldviews that inform where and how the realisation of values will be sought and expressed. Meaning *in* life at the intermediate level of the model comprises relationships in all life domains, which are experienced as the most important sources of meaning. Meaning *to* life is expressed via actions to fulfil the need for self-worth, relatedness and belongingness, and show the realisation of purposes and values. Horizontal and vertical relatedness are reciprocally linked and intertwined, as shown by the vertical arrows in the model. Meanings at all levels are influenced by context, as shown by the horizontal arrows. The two-headed arrows indicate that influences are reciprocal and meanings co-create. Within this model, it is assumed that the ultimate meaning *of* life facilitates and enables the construction of meaning *in* life. Motives, needs and related actions, in their turn, facilitate the *detection* of meaning in life domains.

Meaning of life

The meaning *of* life as experienced by individuals is informed by what is ultimately valued, and from which the belief is derived that life has a purpose and meaning. In other words, the meaning of life is experienced in connectedness to and nourishing of what is valuable and that transcends the self, such as others, the divine or divinities, however defined. Values direct the search and experience of sources of meaning in life, and inform the actions taken to give meaning to life.

Meaning in life

Meaning *in* life emerges primarily from relationships in various domains of life. It is experienced not only in belongingness and relatedness to other people – in close connections or on a societal level, and in spirituality or cosmic, something larger than the self – but also in harmonious relations among various facets of the self, for example harmony between reason and feelings or as expressed in self-compassion or the experience of self-worth. The interconnectedness of the self with others, the environment and the Other is the bedrock for the experience of meaning in life, which is an important or core component of eudaimonic well-being.

Meaning to life

Individuals give meaning *to* life through ways of being and engagement in activities that foster internal, interpersonal and transpersonal harmony via realisations of values. This is expressed in committed living and active engagement in projects and activities in line with values. These activities may take effort or even self-sacrifice, but are gladly done. Such activities include expressions of love – self-love, love for others, building flourishing relationships, and an attitude of giving rather than the procurement of resources for the self.

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Dynamics in context

The ultimate meaning *of* life enables the construction of relational meaning *in* life, and guides actions to give meaning *to* life via the realisation of ethically informed relational values. Individuals understand themselves and the world in which they live relationally on the basis of engagement within a shared social, cultural, physical and historical context. Humans are influenced by the meanings and values shared in their specific life worlds that they experience and also co-create, therefore the manifestation of well-being should always be understood within context.

Box 6.10 What is the meaning of meaning to you?

What are the three most important things for you? Why?
What are the similarities and differences between the various meaning models?
Evaluate the different meaning models and indicate which one resonates more with you. Why?

6.5 General psychological well-being: a hierarchical model

You may wonder what well-being in South Africa looks like, and how it is conceptualised in models developed in a multicultural context. One such model is the hierarchical model of well-being by Wissing and Temane (2008), which was based on empirical findings in the South African context, and which also links to earlier findings by Wissing and Van Eeden (2002) on a general well-being component. Khumalo then developed and validated a measure of general well-being (Khumalo, Temane, & Wissing, 2010, 2011a, 2011b).

Wissing and Van Eeden (2002) empirically explored the manifestations of psychological well-being in different gender, cultural and age groups. They identified a general psychological well-being factor, and concluded that psychological well-being is multidimensional in nature and includes components of affect, cognition and behaviour manifesting in various domains of life such as intra- and interpersonal, social and contextual, and love and work. A sense of coherence (typically associated with a eudaimonic perspective) and satisfaction with life and affect balance (typically associated with a hedonic perspective) overlapped in this general psychological well-being component, and measures of these facets were all strong indicators of general psychological well-being.

After this, several South African studies explored the overlap in constructs of well-being in various cultural and multicultural groups (e.g. Wissing, Wissing, & Temane, 2004; Wissing, Wissing, Du Toit, & Temane, 2006; Wissing & Temane, 2008). After the analyses of the manifestation of well-being (including measures of affective, cognitive, conative, spiritual, interpersonal and social well-being facets), as reported by 2024 participants from separate cultural as well as multicultural contexts, Wissing and Temane (2008) suggested a hierarchical model of well-being including eudaimonic as well as hedonic components, and taking into account cultural context. Their empirical find-

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ings showed the existence of a general psychological well-being (GPW) component, as well as additional secondary unique patterns of well-being in relatively individualist and collectivist cultural contexts.

The empirical evidence of a general or higher-order GPW structure, as well as unique factors that in turn include loadings from various specific constructs, suggested to Wissing and Temane (2008) that the phenomenon of psychological well-being may be hierarchically organised on at least two, but probably three or more levels. They then hypothesised a three-level model. The first or lower level is described in terms of specific constructs (referring to specific strengths or facets of cognitive, conative, affective, interpersonal, social, contextual and spiritual psychological well-being). The third or hierarchically highest level of psychological well-being refers to the GPW component, integrating hedonic and eudaimonic facets, and reflecting the degree of resilience an individual manifests in challenging circumstances. The second or intermediate level was suggested to be structured according to the autonomy (intrapsychological), competence (self-efficacy/behavioural readiness/future directedness) and relatedness (social satisfaction and belonging) clusters, in line with the self-determination theory of Deci and Ryan (2000), although other structures are also possible, such as agency and communion as major middle-level components, or intra-, inter- and contextual transpersonal components (see Figure 6.5). The authors contend that in such a hierarchical model of psychological well-being, cultural components will probably play a stronger role in the manifestation of well-being on the intermediate level, and suggest that the pattern of components on this level be further explored.

In follow-up research, a scale to measure general psychological well-being (the general psychological well-being scale or GPWS) was developed (Khumalo, Temane, & Wissing, 2010), and has been further validated (Khumalo et al., 2011a, 2011b). Further development of measures is necessary to operationalise (i.e. to make measurable) the hierarchical model that also includes the unique, more individualist (agency) and collectivist (communion) facets of well-being together with a general well-being facet index.

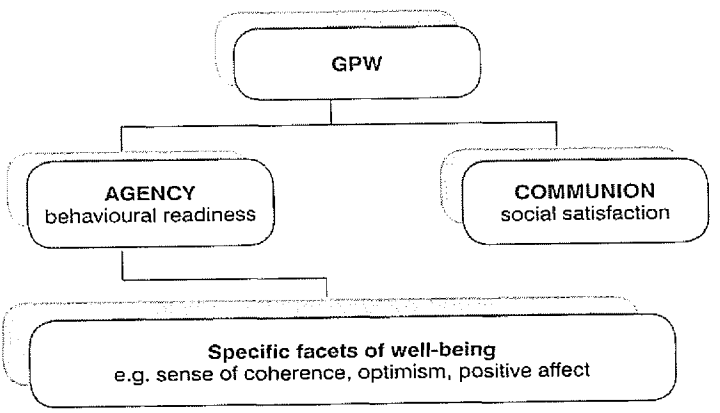


Figure 6.5 The general psychological well-being (GPW) model

Source: Wissing, Wissing, & Temane (2004)

Note: the second level of agency and communion can also be replaced by three components, namely, autonomy, competence and relatedness, or intrapersonal (various facets), interpersonal (close relations) and contextual (spiritual, social and environmental) components.

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Summary

This chapter highlighted various models that conceptualise psychosocial well-being or its facets, and also indicated studies in the African context with regard to these models, evaluation of their main constructs, and implications for interventions. These models were the mental health continuum model of Keyes, the broaden-and-build model of positive emotions by Fredrickson, the PERMA model of Seligman, and various models on meaning (those by Steger, Wong, Park, and Wissing & Delle Fave) as well as the specific general psychological well-being (GPW) model developed by several South Africans.

Content and application questions

1. To which theory of well-being do you relate? Why?
2. What would you advise to Sifiso and Janice in response to their discussion? (See "The story continues ..." above.)
3. Go to Fredrickson's website and monitor your positivity ratio by regularly completing her scale and getting immediate feedback. Is your positive–negative ratio 3:1 or higher?
4. Ask five people what the most meaningful things in their lives are, and why. Write their answers down and reflect on them. What do you understand about meaning from those answers?
5. Take each of the theories in this chapter and use it as a lens to describe a facet, incident or snapshot from Mandela's life (there are many videos, quotes, books you can use, and also documentaries, for example the one made by the SABC in 2008 to commemorate his 90th birthday and rebroadcast on 14 July 2013 on SABC2 just before his 95th birthday).

Box 6.11 An amazing example of psychosocial well-being

An amazing example of general psychological well-being is that of South Africa's former president and international hero, the late Nelson Mandela. After so many years in prison for his political beliefs and his fight for human rights, he came out and was able to show leadership that facilitated reconciliation among warring parties and steer the country away from the brink of civil war to a new democratic dispensation. In this process he showed high levels of both agency (goal directedness and translating vision into action) and communion (a deep caring for people), as well as high levels of many character strengths reflecting a strong value system (see Chapter 5). One of the many visionary things he did to foster reconciliation and human psychosocial well-being was to establish the Truth and Reconciliation Committee for South Africa.

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Positivity portfolio

Now you are ready to add some further reflections to your positivity portfolio. Looking back at the theories you studied in this chapter, which one resonates with you the most? Why? After making a few notes on the above, write down the three most important things for you in your current life as they come to mind, and also note why each of them is important to you. Then ask three other people what the three most important things for them are and the reasons. After noting it all, reflect on what you have learnt about the sources of meaning.

Still curious?

Movies and websites

Lincoln – a very moving movie about a meaningful but unhappy life.

Happy – a movie reflecting positive emotions and making meaning in dire circumstances.

A very useful measure to monitor your positivity index: <http://www.positivityratio.com> http://michaelfsteger.com

See reference list

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