

# Wellness elements: PERMA

## 1. Positive emotions

Feeling positive emotions has important effects on many life aspects (Tarragona, 2012). We experience positive emotions when we feel interest, enthusiasm, pride, mindfulness, strength, inspiration, or determination; these emotions contrast with negative emotions such as sadness, fear, resentment, repulsion, and others (Fredrickson, 2009.)

It is a key element of the theory of wellbeing. A pleasant life refers to the ability to enjoy all life pleasures and thrive. For some people, this vision aligns with the hedonists whose idea of a pleasant life is a superficial type of happiness. An aspect related to positivity are positive emotions.

Unlike positive emotions, negative emotions have physiological repercussions that can be detected, such as blood pressure, headaches, body temperature, perspiration, which can reflect a primitive part of humans that prepared them for fights or dangers. However, positive emotions do not have a survival function. The question arises, what are they for?

“Unlike positive emotions, negative emotions have physiological repercussions that can be detected: **blood pressure, headaches, body temperature...**”

Dr. Barbara Fredrickson has conducted experiments in which she induces positive emotions to the participants using various rewards, afterwards they are asked to accomplish some cognitive tasks.

Findings show that people who experience positive emotions are more attentive, have better memory, and can verbally express themselves with more ease.

One of the most important results by Fredrickson and colleagues is that a share of positivity is necessary for people to perform properly.





The positivity rate is 3 to 1, which means that we must experience three positive emotion for each negative. This claim has been questioned for the data analysis method; however, Fredrickson confirms the advantages of experiencing positive emotions, although not necessarily to this rate.

## Do you want to know your positivity index?

Fredrickson has developed an instrument to measure our positivity levels, and can be found online at [www.PositivityRatio.com](http://www.PositivityRatio.com)

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## 2. Engagement

The second element of wellbeing is **engagement**, which in positive psychology refers to the ability to be present in a task. Positive emotions and engagement are to subjective elements of the wellness theory, and they can only be measured by what people report and experience.



A factor that contributes to happiness and life satisfaction is getting involved in activities of our interest in which we can be engaged; activities that are challenging to use our **knowledge, abilities, and skills**.

Csikszentmihalyi (1998) describes the optimal experience as a sensation that our own abilities are adequate to face the challenges of any activity oriented to goals and regulated by norms. The concentration is so intense that our attention cannot be on other things.

The consciousness of oneself disappears and the sense of time distorts. An activity that produces such experience is so pleasant that people feel the desire to make it, even when it is difficult or dangerous.

Some examples of optimal experiences are; musical and literary creation, drawing, climbing, navigation, chess, and others. These activities can lead to an optimal experience because they have rules, require skills, provide feedback, and make it possible to control, concentrate and create engagement (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998).

### 3. Positive Relationships

Peterson (2006) sums positive psychology in three words:



## Other people matter

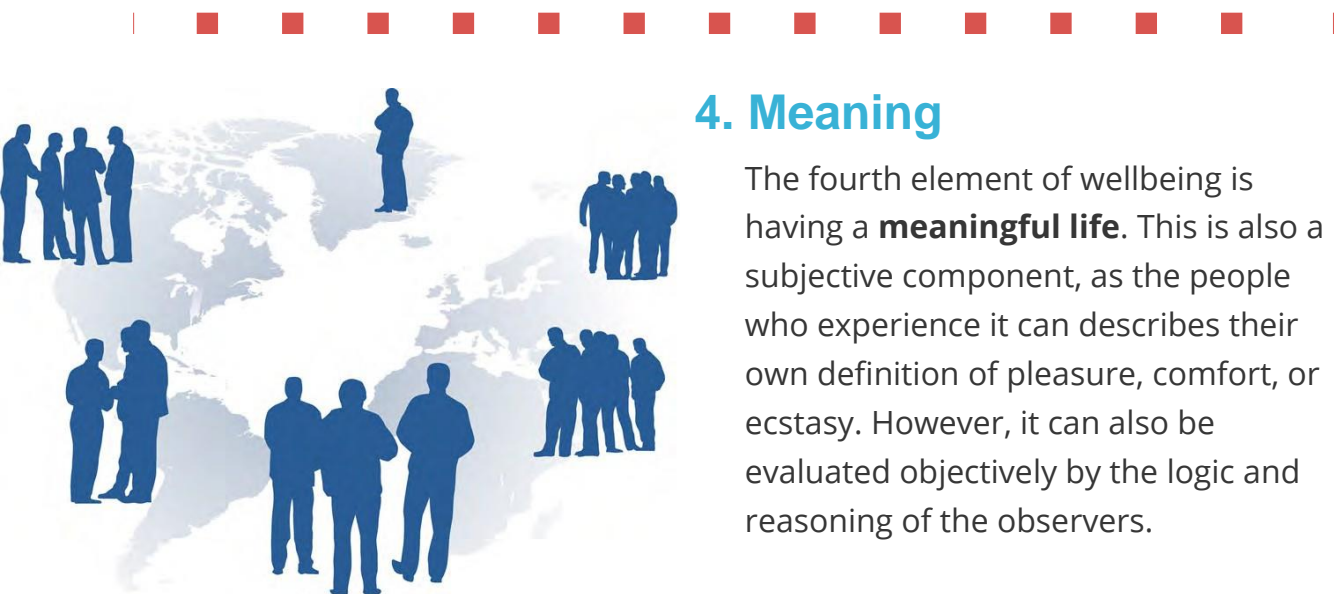
Most things that makes us experience wellness involve other people. Interpersonal relationships can be given under work contexts, where people reciprocally share interests or points of view.



In social groups, there are positive attitudes towards other members; in families, there are loving ties; and in a relationship, there are shared goals, aspirations and affect.

All types of relationships constitute a social support for people in times of adversity.

Positive social relationships are associated with optimal physical and emotional health; they particularly contribute for people to be part of the context in which they are involved, and to feel satisfaction.



## 4. Meaning

The fourth element of wellbeing is having a **meaningful life**. This is also a subjective component, as the people who experience it can describe their own definition of pleasure, comfort, or ecstasy. However, it can also be evaluated objectively by the logic and reasoning of the observers.



Meaningfulness consists of using the cognitive and emotional abilities to accomplish activities that positively contribute to the development of a group of people, a community, or a country. These activities can be: **educational responsibilities, fighting poverty, preservation of natural resources, politics,** and others.

This wellness element has been an object of multiple researches. The common factor in the results is that these activities produce high life satisfaction. Gratitude is a positive emotion that is strongly related to meaning. When people focus on gratefulness, they feel more satisfied with their lives.



## 5. Achievement

People enjoy **achievements**, accomplish **goals**, winning, and control their action according to their interests and motivation. Accomplishing oneself can be motivating, even when it is not associated to positive emotions or relationships.

Seligman included this element in the theory of wellbeing, following the recommendation of Senia Maymin, who was his graduate student in the Master of Positive Psychology at University of Pennsylvania in 2011.



Howard Gardner (2008) conducted a study of the life of people who have remarkable accomplishments, such as Einstein, Picasso, Stravinsky, and others; Gardner developed a four-category typology to be extraordinary.

- 1 Be expert in a specific domain of achievements
- 2 Be the designer of a product or unexplored area
- 3 Be a person with intense introspection to explore internal aspect of life
- 4 Be an influent leader



The last component of the wellness model of the PERMA is the domain over any activity that interests other people.