

# Re-evaluating our Conception of Well-Being in an Organisational Setting

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## Abstract

Employee well-being is generally captured by assessments of mental health, work satisfaction and level of affect, reflecting a Hedonistic approach to understanding Subjective Well-Being (SWB). In contrast, from their own gerontological research, Ryff (1989) and Ryff & Keyes (1995) proposed a Eudaimonic model of Psychological Well-Being (PWB) consisting of 6 dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Whilst SWB focuses on subjective assessment of affect and satisfaction, PWB considers the patterns of healthy living that are associated with measures of healthy human functioning. There are serious limitations to using SWB models alone in assessing well-being given the role of heredity in pre-determining levels of affect, the degree of affect reactivity, and the difficulty in promoting long-term stable change in affect level. By contrast, PWB has been demonstrated to be a stable construct that appears to reduce affective reactivity. Factor Analysis of Ryff's 6-factor structure of PWB scale found support for one-factor and three-factor models. Further analysis indicated that PWB and SWB are correlated, but distinct constructs with a five-factor model separating PWB and SWB components.

## Introduction

Well-being has been the subject of considerable debate as 'positive psychology' has begun to emerge more prominently in the research literature, though controversy exists in defining optimal levels of functioning and what constitutes 'the good life' (Ryan & Deci, 2001). For instance, there are differences between affective and cognitive components of well-being. More specifically, research into the affective domain recognises a distinction between positive and negative affect. Also, increasingly researchers have recognised that well-being is more than the absence of mental illness and negative affect, and have begun to investigate areas such as personal growth and wellness (Deci, 1975). Regardless of the approach taken, research into well-being, mental health, wellness,

happiness and other related constructs, demonstrate areas of considerable interest to psychologists in a number of psychological areas.

In an overview of well-being research, Ryan and Deci (2001) identified that well-being research derived from two general perspectives: a) the 'hedonic' approach - which focuses on affect, defining well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance; and b) the 'eudaimonic' approach - which focuses on meaning and self-realization, defining well-being in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functioning.

## The Hedonic Approach

With roots in the philosophy of Aristippus and Bentham, hedonic well-being focuses on three well-being components: life satisfaction; positive mood; and negative mood (Diener & Lucas, 1999). Increasingly, the well-being literature refers to this concept as subjective well-being (SWB). By defining well-being in these terms a clear differentiation between these constructs has led to a voluminous amount of SWB research (Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996; Bradburn, 1969). Primary measures of SWB assess an individual's level of affectivity, level of non-psychiatric mental health, and degree of general or contextual satisfaction.

However, this operationalisation of 'well-being' has been challenged as a restrictive view, overlooking other important constructs of well-being like mindfulness, personal growth and development (Waterman, 1993). Recently, an alternative model of well-being, psychological well-being (PWB) has begun to figure more prominently (Ryan & Deci, 2001). For PWB theorists, the eudaimonic conception of well-being suggests that people should live in accordance with their true state, a state Waterman (1993) termed personal expressiveness (PE). Empirically, measures of hedonic enjoyment and PE are strongly correlated, but indicative of distinct types of experience.

## The Eudaimonic Approach

With eudaimonic foundations, PWB asks whether individuals live their lives according to their true nature or 'daimon' (May, 1950). Eudaimonic well-being proponents are critical of the focus on hedonism, arguing that momentary pleasure does not directly lead to growth and wellness (Fromm, 1989), especially as increasing evidence indicates the influence of hereditary factors on the temporal stability of affect reports (Headey & Wearing, 1992).

However, unlike the clearly delineated constructs of SWB, the vague definitions of PWB components have inhibited PWB researchers from developing well-validated measures of PWB. However, one empirical approach to the study of PWB (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) has incorporated a multidimensional approach that taps six conceptually different domains of psychological functioning and include: *Self Acceptance* - the positive appraisal of oneself and one's past life; *Environmental Mastery* - the ability to manage one's life and environment; *Positive Relations With Others* - high quality relationships with others; *Purpose in Life* - leading a purposeful and meaningful life; *Personal Growth* - a continuing sense of growth and development as a person; and *Autonomy* - being self-determined.

A related approach includes Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci 2001) which focuses on three basic psychological needs: autonomy; competence; and relatedness. Fulfillment of these needs is essential for psychological growth. SDT research suggests that satisfaction of these basic psychological needs fosters both SWB and PWB. For example, Nix, Ryan, Manly, & Deci (1999) showed that succeeding at an activity while feeling pressured to do so resulted in happiness (SWB), but not in vitality (PWB). Success in a similar activity when not pressured to do so, resulted in both happiness and vitality, suggesting there are limitations to measuring well-being from only a SWB frame of reference, as conditions that improve SWB may not necessarily promote PWB.

Although measuring separate aspects of well-being, neither model is conceptually 'better' than the other, nor are they mutually exclusive. However, researchers tend to adopt either a hedonic or eudaimonic model. Several reports have employed factor analysis (Compton, Smith, Cornish, & Qualls, 1996; McGregor & Little, 1998; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002) to assess the relationship between these two approaches. Two factors are frequently identified: happiness (SWB) and meaning (PWB). As the eudaimonic approach considers happiness a consequence of meaningful life activities, one approach to integrating

these two fields of research would be to posit that SWB is an outcome of realizing one's 'daimon', though the relationship between PWB and SWB appears to be moderated by a number of variables including age, gender, personality, degree of physical health and educational status (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002).

## Employee Well-Being

Traditionally, the organisational stress/employee well-being literature has employed SWB as a major outcome variable (Ryff & Singer 1998). It was following from Bradburn's (1969) distinction between satisfaction, positive and negative components of well-being, that frequently used measures, such as Watson, Clark & Tellegen's (1988) Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS), Beck's Depression Inventory, Goldberg's General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) (Goldberg, 1978) and Diener's satisfaction scales (Diener, 1984), have been used to assess employee well-being.

Measures of PWB have yet to inform measures of employee well-being, yet Ryff's (1989) 6-factor model has frequently been used in a number of contexts. Despite its appealing simplification of eudaimonic principles, the validity of its structure has frequently been challenged. Using several large and heterogeneous samples, a variety of model specifications, and various sets of PWB items, Springer, Hauser, and Freese (2006) found very high factor correlations among the dimensions of PWB, especially personal growth, purpose in life, self-acceptance, and environmental mastery. This supports a significant number of studies which indicate 1 factor and 3 factor models as most suitable (Kafka & Kozma 2002; Abbott, Ploubidis, Huppert, Kuh, Wadsworth & Croudace, 2006; Springer & Hauser 2006). Whilst the one factor model comprises items from all six dimensions, findings of the three factor model suggest that whilst Autonomy and Positive Relations load onto two separate factors, the other dimensions (personal growth, purpose in life, self-acceptance, and environmental mastery) load onto a higher second order factor. It has been suggested by Abbott et al. (2006) that this three factor model is similar to SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2001) which also identifies autonomy and relatedness as important characteristics of well-being, and whereby the second-order factor bears a relationship to the SDT concept of competence.

## Purpose of This Study

Well-being theorists have increasingly suggested that PWB and SWB models are related yet distinct constructs. The aim of this study is to clarify the associations

between measures of PWB and SWB in an organisational setting.

## Method

### Participants

Participants (N = 377) were drawn from two independent samples that were identified for a doctoral thesis. The first sample (N = 160) included a sample of teachers from International Schools worldwide. The second sample (N = 217) included a sample of local and international undergraduate students within the Department of Psychology at the University of Southern Queensland.

### Questionnaires

Two scales were used to measure SWB and PWB. Both samples completed the 20-item PANAS (Watson et al., 1988) scale which consisted of twenty items measuring Positive Affect (PA), a state characterised by pleasant emotions such as enthusiasm, energy and mental alertness, and Negative Affect (NA), a state characterised by negative emotional states such as anger, anxiety, and guilt. These constructs are conceptually different and do not reflect separate ends of a continuum of emotion. Participants indicated the extent to which they had experienced these emotions over the past month on a five point rating, from (1) *‘Very Slightly or Not at All’* to (5) *‘Extremely’*.

PWB was assessed in the first sample using the 54-item PWB scale (Ryff, 1989) with 9 items per dimension. In the second sample, PWB was assessed using the 84-item scale (Ryff, 1989), with 14 items per dimension. When analysing the samples as a whole, the 54-item scale was extracted from the second sample for a combined analysis with the first sample. Participants were required to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements on six point rating, from (1) *‘Strongly Disagree’* to (6) *‘Strongly Agree’*.

### Procedure

Participants in sample one were identified from international education sources and contacted by email. Participants in sample two, volunteered in order to fulfil the credit requirements of their research methods courses. The University of Southern Queensland’s Office of Research and Higher Degrees’ ethical requirements were adhered to: participants were assured of anonymity and all participants indicated that they gave consent to participate. Participants accessed the questionnaires online with a secure university website.

## Results

Analysis was first undertaken on each sample separately and then as one combined sample. Results were consistent between the samples and when they were combined. All analyses reported below are with the combined sample.

Reported Cronbach Alpha levels demonstrate high internal reliability for the individual components of the PWB and SWB scales (Table 1).

Table 1: Reported Cronbach Alpha levels for PWB and SWB scales

Scale	Factor Scale Symbol	Alpha	# of items
Environmental Mastery	EGPS	.812	9
Personal Growth		.791	9
Purpose In Life		.796	9
Self-Acceptance		.857	9
Autonomy	A	.817	9
Positive Relations	PR	.802	9
Positive Affect	PA	.899	10
Negative Affect	NA	.890	10

A parallel analysis (Ncases = 377; Nvars = 74; Ndatsets = 100; Percent = 95) was undertaken on all PWB and SWB items, and established an objective benchmark on which to choose the number of factors that would be extracted for a factor analysis. The first 8 eigenvalues reported in the parallel analysis, were higher than the mean and 95<sup>th</sup> percentile.

A principal axis factor analysis extracted 8 factors, using a direct oblimin (Delta = 0) rotation method, but failed to converge in 25 iterations. Both 7 and 6 factor models were extracted, but did not generate an expected model in line with the identified scales. Although items clearly loaded onto PA, NA, and A, it was not possible to distinguish between the other scale variables. A five factor model more clearly delineated the scales as expected, but there were some instances of items loading onto the wrong scale variables, or loading onto more than one factor. Consequently, several items were removed leaving 27 PWB items and 20 SWB items. The remaining items clearly loaded onto the proposed variables: PA, NA, A, PR, and a higher second order factor, EPGS.

Reducing the model to less than 5 factors led to far too many items cross-weighting across PWB and SWB scales to warrant further investigation. Whilst the five factor model suggests items do delineate between the different well-being constructs, an examination of the correlations

suggests that the PWB and SWB scales may still be overlapping to some extent (Table 2).

Table 2: Correlation between PWB and SWB Factor Scores.

	EGPS	A	PR	PA
A	.414	-	-	-
PR	.248	.192	-	-
PA	.509	.340	.191	-
NA	-.346	-.349	-.417	-.186

All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), N = 377.

Therefore, we examined the extent to which the SWB scales could be predicted from the PWB scales. A multiple regression analysis showed that the PWB scales predicted 27.6% of the variance in PA and 26.8% of the variance in NA (Table 3).

Table 3: Multiple Regression of PA and NA on the three PWB factors.

DV	IVs	Adj. R Square	F statistic*	Sig. F Change
PA	EGPS	.258	131.459	.000
	EGPS + A	.276	72.631	.001
NA	PR	.172	78.992	.000
	PR + A	.245	62.125	.000
	PR + A + EGPS	.268	46.925	.000

## Discussion

Despite growing interest in eudaimonic notions of well-being, the assessment of employees' PWB has been limited. In support of previous well-being research, this study clearly demonstrates that PWB and SWB items do measure related yet distinct well-being constructs and suggests that inclusion of PWB measures may inform organisational research.

Whilst modest correlations between the factor scores is indicative of some overlap between these constructs, the degree to which PWB predicted SWB was relatively low indicating that there are certainly other important predictors of SWB. Research to date suggests PWB may play a more important role in determining the extent of SWB reactivity to external stressors (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Within an organisational context, we expect that further research should investigate the extent to which PWB may moderate or mediate the relationship between organisational climate and employees' SWB.

A number of findings may be derived from this study. Firstly, it may highlight the need to include measures of PWB in future organisational well-being research. Secondly, in line with Ryan and Deci's (2001) earlier hypothesis, PWB may determine employees' affective reactivity to external stressors. The importance of this for organisational psychologists is that it provides a direction for Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) which can focus on developing specific facets of employee PWB. Such programs may instil longer-lasting attitudinal changes in employees that engender feelings of vigour and lessen emotional reactivity to environmental triggers.

Well-Being Therapy (WBT), bears similarities with more established counselling services such as CBT and Client-Centred approaches, but has only recently been scrutinized, with some initial positive success (Fava, 1999). Evolving from Ryff's model of PWB, initial WBT research suggests a combined CBT and WBT approach is more effective than CBT-alone, in improving client well-being immediately post-intervention and in decreasing relapse rates in clients with depression and anxiety (Fava, 1999). Fava suggests that the importance of WBT and PWB is that it provides a clear framework on which to develop individuals' skills.

Whilst further research into the application of WBT is being developed, within an organisational context, EAP may be informed by WBT processes which seek to improve facets of employee PWB, such as Environmental Mastery, Relatedness, or Autonomy. Given the relative short-term changes in those strategies that seek to increase PA and decrease NA, leadership styles and management processes may also learn from such research by focusing organisational responses that directly relate to PWB facets instead of employee affect.

## Conclusion

Recently, a very public debate between Ryff and Singer (2006), Springer and Hauser (2006), and Springer et al. (2006) centred on the validity of PWB constructs. Whilst Ryff's initial 6-factor model is intuitively appealing, factor analytical studies suggest a much more complex relationship between its components. This study supported those findings which identify a hierarchical structure to well-being (Abbot et al. 2006) whereby Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Purpose In Life, Self-Acceptance load onto one second order factor (EGPS) whilst Autonomy and Positive Relations remain separate. Furthermore, Factor Analysis at item-level supported a distinction between PWB and SWB notions of well-being, yet Factor Analysis and correlations suggest that at the variable level, these constructs of Well-

Being are related. This supports Keyes et al.'s (2002) assertion that these constructs are distinct, but related. The value of PWB, and WBT, appears to lie in its focus, not on changing employee affect, nor in creating those conditions which facilitate positive and alleviate negative affect, but rather in providing the employee a sense of control, competence, autonomy and relatedness. Implications for organisational/employee well-being research need to be considered.

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