

MEASURING EUDAIMONIC COMPONENTS OF SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING: UPDATED EVIDENCE TO INFORM NATIONAL DATA COLLECTIONS

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Overview

This working paper was commissioned by the OECD Centre on Well-being Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity (WISE), and was authored by Saamah Abdallah (Hot or Cool Institute). The views expressed herein are his own, and do not represent the official views of the OECD or of its member countries.

This working paper serves as an input to the WISE Centre's planned activities to update and expand the OECD's 2013 *Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*. The revision process will take into account developments in the subjective well-being literature since the original report was published – including both academic and data production considerations. A [2023 WISE working paper](#) provided a priority list of key focal areas to be updated, including: (1) reviewing affective measurement recommendations, (2) clarifying and reviewing eudaimonic measurement recommendations, (3) exploring more globally inclusive approaches to subjective well-being measurement and (4) drafting recommendations specific to children and young people.

To inform this work, expert consultants have prepared working papers in each of the selected focal areas. This paper addresses the workstream on re-examining existing OECD recommendations on how to measure eudaimonic aspects of subjective well-being. Consultants were asked to consider:

- Definitional approaches to eudaimonia, and a stock-take of how each has been operationalised as indicators integrated into official household surveys conducted by national statistical offices.
- The recommended indicator in the original *Guidelines* – one's life having meaning or purpose – and whether this sufficiently encompasses the entirety of the concept of eudaimonia, or whether it should be supplemented with (or replaced by) additional eudaimonic indicators.
- A review of additional or alternative eudaimonic concepts that might be included in an updated *Guidelines*.

This working paper will be reviewed by an informal expert advisory group (IAG) convened by the WISE Centre, comprising experts in subjective well-being from a variety of fields including official data producers from national statistical offices, policy makers who use these indicators in their work and researchers. The Secretariat will consider the recommendations put forth in this working paper, alongside feedback and comments from both the IAG and delegates from the OECD's Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy (CSSP), when drafting the 2025 update to the official OECD *Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*.

Acknowledgements

This working paper is dedicated to Professor Felicia Huppert, who passed away on 6th August 2024. Felicia was one of the key figures involved in encouraging policy makers to take the measurement of subjective well-being seriously, and to recognise its multi-dimensionality. Having worked with her directly on several projects, I found her a great inspiration, and also a wonderful and kind soul. Her work and input strongly influenced the OECD's original recommendations regarding the measurement of eudaimonia, and her intellectual legacy will remain for many years to come.

I would like to thank Jessica Mahoney, Carrie Exton, Lara Fleischer and the team at the WISE Centre for putting their trust in the Hot or Cool Institute with this working paper, and for their guidance throughout the drafting process. Thank you to my colleagues at Hot or Cool, particularly Alexander Hoffman who provided support with reviewing literature. Thanks also to the Informal Advisory Group, the CSSP and all the external reviewers who provided excellent comments on the first draft of the paper. Particular thanks to Eleanor Rees, Joar Vittersø, Mark Fabian and Frank Martela for their on-going input.

Abstract

The OECD *Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being* recommended measuring three aspects of subjective well-being: evaluative, affective and eudaimonic. However, recommendations regarding eudaimonia were tentative and reflected the lack of consensus on the concept in the literature at that time. This working paper considers different theories of eudaimonia and draws on recent advances in the field of subjective well-being to propose new working definitions for eudaimonia and eudaimonic feelings. It brings together evidence on how eudaimonic feelings lead to other desirable outcomes including long-term health and pro-social behaviour, and presents new analysis on how different aspects of eudaimonia are predicted by policy-relevant variables. It then suggests 12 elements of eudaimonia to be measured, of which four form a core set, and identifies suitable survey items to measure each. These recommendations will be submitted for consideration as a part of planned work to update the 2013 OECD *Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*.

Résumé

Les lignes directrices de l'OCDE sur la mesure du bien-être subjectif recommandaient de mesurer trois aspects du bien-être subjectif : évaluatif, affectif et eudaimonique. Toutefois, les recommandations concernant l'eudaimonie étaient provisoires et reflétaient l'absence de consensus sur le concept dans la littérature de l'époque. Ce document de travail examine les différentes théories de l'eudaimonie et s'appuie sur les avancées récentes dans le domaine du bien-être subjectif pour proposer de nouvelles définitions de l'eudaimonie et des sentiments eudaimoniques. Il rassemble des données sur la manière dont les sentiments eudaimoniques conduisent à d'autres résultats souhaitables, notamment la santé à long terme et les comportements prosociaux, et présente une nouvelle analyse de la manière dont les différents aspects de l'eudaimonie sont prédits par des variables pertinentes pour les politiques. Il propose ensuite 12 éléments d'eudaimonie à mesurer, dont quatre forment un ensemble de base, et identifie des éléments d'enquête appropriés pour mesurer chacun d'entre eux. Ces recommandations seront soumises pour examen dans le cadre des travaux prévus pour mettre à jour les lignes directrices de l'OCDE de 2013 sur la mesure du bien-être subjectif.

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1 Introduction and context

1.1 Recommendations to date

In 2013, the OECD published *Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being* (OECD, 2013), with recommendations on how national statistical offices (NSOs) should measure subjective well-being (SWB). The *Guidelines* were based on a framework which divided SWB measures into three measurement concepts: evaluative, affect and eudaimonic. The five recommended core questions were designed to cover all three concepts (Figure 1.1), alongside extended modules covering each concept in more detail (see Figure 1.2 for the module on eudaimonia). The *Guidelines* have made an important contribution to the promotion and harmonisation of SWB measurement. 90% of OECD countries now collect data on life satisfaction in a format compatible with the OECD's recommendations, and uptake of the measurement of affective states and eudaimonia has also increased (Mahoney, 2023).

Figure 1.1. Core module in original *Guidelines*

Box B.1. Core questions	
<i>The following question asks how satisfied you feel, on a scale from 0 to 10. Zero means you feel "not at all satisfied" and 10 means you feel "completely satisfied".</i>	
A1. Overall, how satisfied are you with life as a whole these days?	[0-10]
<i>The following question asks how worthwhile you feel the things you do in your life are, on a scale from 0 to 10. Zero means you feel the things you do in your life are "not at all worthwhile", and 10 means "completely worthwhile".</i>	
A2. Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?	[0-10]
<i>The following questions ask about how you felt yesterday on a scale from 0 to 10. Zero means you did not experience the feeling "at all" yesterday while 10 means you experienced the feeling "all of the time" yesterday. I will now read out a list of ways you might have felt yesterday.</i>	
A3. How about happy?	[0-10]
A4. How about worried?	[0-10]
A5. How about depressed?	[0-10]

Source: OECD (2013), *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264191655-en>.

The *Guidelines* were frank in noting that the conceptual structure for eudaimonia was less well fleshed out than those for evaluative and hedonic well-being. As such, it is perhaps not surprising that there has been less uptake of the eudaimonic measurement recommendations than the other two aspects of SWB (Mahoney, 2023). Furthermore, what uptake there has been, has been less consistent. According to a stocktaking review conducted by the OECD in 2023, although all except four OECD members had measured some form of the core eudaimonia question (question A2 in Figure 1.1), at the time it was

only asked on a regular basis in six countries. Even amongst the countries that had asked a question, there was some variation in question wording.

Figure 1.2. Module for measuring eudaimonia in original *Guidelines*

Box B.4. Eudaimonic questions	
<i>I now want to ask you some questions about how you feel about yourself and your life.</i>	
<i>Please use a scale from 0 to 10 to indicate how you felt. Zero means you “disagree completely” and 10 means “agree completely”.</i>	
D1. In general, I feel very positive about myself	[0-10]
D2. I'm always optimistic about my future	[0-10]
D3. I am free to decide for myself how to live my life	[0-10]
D4. I generally feel that what I do in my life is worthwhile	[0-10]
D5. Most days I get a sense of accomplishment from what I do	[0-10]
D6. When things go wrong in my life it generally takes me a long time to get back to normal	[0-10]
<i>I am now going to read out a list of ways you might have felt during the past week. On a scale from 0 to 10, where zero means you felt that way “not at all” during the past week and 10 means you felt that way “all the time” yesterday, can you please tell me how much of the time yesterday...</i>	
D7. ... you had a lot of energy?	[0-10]
D8. ... you felt calm?	[0-10]
D9. ... you felt lonely?	[0-10]

Source: OECD (2013), *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264191655-en>.

Beyond the eudaimonia question included in the core module, it appears there had been little uptake of the eudaimonia module (Figure 1.2). Although the review did not comprehensively review data collection for the questions in the extended module, it was telling that only one country was identified as collecting data on hope or self-esteem in a comparable way to that of the OECD recommendations (questions D1 and D2 in Figure 1.2). However, elements considered within the umbrella of eudaimonia *were* often measured in various mental health or mental well-being instruments. These usually had different wording to the indicators recommended by the OECD (Mahoney, 2023).

1.2 The case for measuring eudaimonia

This working paper has been prepared to inform the OECD's forthcoming update of the *Guidelines* on measuring SWB, with a specific interest in reviewing and updating the recommendations related to eudaimonic aspects of SWB. At the time of the original *Guidelines*, theories and concepts regarding the measurement of eudaimonia were still in their infancy, and there was little consensus in the field. The intention this time is to revisit the literature and identify a possible common perspective to inform future recommendations.

The OECD has identified the measurement of eudaimonia as a priority. One reason is the now comprehensive evidence that eudaimonia is a strong predictor of many outcomes that are already considered to be important, including health, educational attainment and other elements of SWB (Keyes & Simoes, 2012; Martela & Ryan, 2023; Ryff et al., 2004; Ryff, 2014, 2023). The effects on health outcomes alone imply potential huge cost savings for national health systems. Meanwhile, given its

‘upstream’ causal role vis-à-vis other hedonic and evaluative subjective well-being outcomes, it is valuable to monitor eudaimonia even if one’s philosophical model sees these other elements of well-being as the ultimate goal, as doing so can help predict *future* changes in these desirable outcomes and avoid a focus on short-term well-being (Ryan et al., 2008).¹ This evidence will be considered in Section 4, with a particular view to determining *which* elements of eudaimonia are most strongly related to these other outcomes.

Meanwhile, a more philosophical argument has been made for measuring eudaimonia, specifically in opposition to the tendency to consider hedonic or evaluative well-being as the ultimate measure of human good. Humans have goals other than just being happy (Benjamin et al., 2012; Huppert & So, 2013a; Nussbaum, 2008; Ryff, 1989b; Seligman, 2012; Vittersø, forthcoming). As Nietzsche famously said, “*Man does not strive for happiness; only the Englishman does that*” (quoted in Nussbaum, 2008). This argument is increasingly also being made by those with a cross-cultural perspective, who argue that non-Western cultures place less focus on happiness (Krys et al., 2024; Lomas, Ishikawa, et al., 2022; Lomas & VanderWeele, 2023; Oishi et al., 2013). Whilst this critique is usually made more forcefully in relation to hedonic well-being measures, it has also been levelled at the use of life satisfaction (e.g. Krys et al., 2024). Such a focus can lead to a neglect of important aspects of positive psychology (Ryff, 1989). Eudaimonists in particular suggest that the process of *how* one lives is more important than the emotional experiences that emerge as a result of living well (Besser-Jones, 2015; Fabian, 2022).

However, even if one does consider happiness or life satisfaction as the ultimate goal, measuring eudaimonia provides a *theory* of well-being (Fabian, 2022) and information on the key building blocks required to achieve such goals. Treating eudaimonic dimensions as mediator variables provides clearer clues in terms of the kinds of policies that might help – for example, a demographic group with low levels of autonomy probably requires different interventions to a group with low levels of meaning and purpose (Martela & Ryan, 2023).

1.3 Outline of current report

This report will begin (Section 2) by reviewing current definitions of eudaimonia, as well as ‘allied’ concepts such as flourishing. This review will consider both ‘conceptual definitions’ (in terms of how eudaimonia is framed overall) and the elements that different theories consider to be part of the overall construct.

Section 3 will draw a distinction between eudaimonia and eudaimonic feelings and propose working definitions for both, noting that the two terms are not identical. Within the framework of the measurement of SWB, we will focus on eudaimonic feelings. The section concludes with a long-list of possible elements to measure, and explores some rarely considered dimensions of eudaimonia, including hope, and balance and harmony. The subsequent sections then assess the long-list against a range of criteria including evidence of their effects on other valuable outcomes and additional explanatory value vis-à-vis life satisfaction (Section 4), and existing practice amongst NSOs (Section 5).

In Section 6, we will propose a set of elements and questions to measure eudaimonia, and conclude with remarks providing the case for NSOs to measure eudaimonia and recommendations for future research and analysis.

¹ By analogy, public health officials understand that one should monitor healthy behaviours such as physical activity and healthy eating, even though officials may *primarily* be interested in these behaviours because they tend to lead to better health outcomes in the long-term.

2 Existing definitions and theories of eudaimonia

As has been mentioned in many reviews (Heintzelman, 2018; Huta & Waterman, 2014; Martela & Sheldon, 2019; Vittersø, 2016), there has been plenty of inconsistency in terms of how eudaimonia is defined and measured. Indeed, there has also been inconsistency in terms of the type of definition that is highlighted, with some definitions focusing on creating a list of elements, rather than defining the overall concept. As Martela & Sheldon (2019) argue, addressing this latter question first is critical to being able to adjudicate between the various elements that have been proposed as part of the concept.

This section shall therefore first consider such conceptual definitions (including clarifying overarching concepts such as well-being and subjective well-being, see Box 2.1). The section then identifies components of eudaimonia that appear in the nine most prominent approaches in the field, followed by three allied frameworks that— although they do not explicitly refer to eudaimonia – are nonetheless very relevant. The section then concludes by summarising the most influential lists of elements that have been proposed.

Box 2.1. Definitions of well-being, subjective well-being and personal well-being

Before defining eudaimonia, some clarity on some other concepts is necessary. The OECD defines well-being and subjective well-being as follows:

Well-being: encompasses the outcomes that matter to people, the planet and future generations. It is a multi-dimensional construct that spans material conditions, quality of life and relational aspects, and comprises both objective, material components and subjective, psychological facets.

Subjective well-being: good mental states, including all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives and the affective reactions of people to their experiences.

In effect, this report will not refer much to well-being in general, but rather to ‘personal well-being’, which can be understood as broader than subjective well-being, but narrower than well-being:

Personal well-being: those aspects of well-being that describe the individual themselves, as opposed to their environment, and that are not culture-specific. That includes subjective well-being, health and social connections, consistent with the UK’s 2010 definition of well-being as a “positive physical, social and mental state” (Department of Health, 2010). It is also not far from the Cambridge Dictionary definition of well-being (state of feeling happy and healthy), and analogous to the WHO’s references to mental, physical and social well-being.

Sources: OECD (2020), *How's Life? 2020: Measuring Well-being*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9870c393-en>; OECD (2013), *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264191655-en>; Cambridge Online Dictionary (n.d.), <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/well-being> (accessed 12 November 2024).

2.1 Conceptual definitions

The concept of eudaimonia is often associated with Aristotle, who defined it as “activity of the soul in accordance with virtue” (Aristotle, 1908). As this definition is rather opaque for modern readers, it has been interpreted in many ways. For example, Carol Ryff interprets Aristotle as defining eudaimonia as “the highest human good, achieved through the realization of one’s true potential and the exercise of virtue” (Ryff, 1989). Richard Ryan and colleagues see Aristotle’s definition to be “a character of persons living in accordance with reason and moderation, and aiming toward excellence and the realisation of a complete human life” (Ryan et al., 2008). Seligman and colleagues interpret Aristotle’s definition to mean “identifying one’s virtues, cultivating them, and living in accordance with them” (Peterson et al., 2005). As can be seen, even the ontological nature of the concept is different in the three interpretations, with Ryff identifying Aristotle’s eudaimonia as an outcome, whereas Ryan et al. and Peterson et al. identify it as a trait. It is therefore not surprising that there is still no consistency in definitions of eudaimonia, with the mixing of behaviours, emotions and traits still commonplace (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Martela & Sheldon, 2019).

Eudaimonia can be conceived of as an answer to two different questions (Haybron, 2016). One question is about ethics – what describes an ethically ‘good’ life? The other is a question about what is a good life *for* the person living that life. Aristotle treated the two questions as almost identical, but most recent thinking (and this report) seeks to address the second question.

Reviewing the non-exhaustive list of definitions in Table 2.1 reveals a general consistency in the idea that eudaimonia is about how people live, rather than strictly about how they feel, consistent with what Michaelson *et al.* (2009) call ‘doing well’ as opposed to ‘feeling well’.² This is also reflected in the use of the word ‘functioning’ by some authors almost as a synonym of eudaimonia (Huppert & So, 2013a; Joshanloo, 2018; Ruggeri et al., 2020). However, there are two important features on which definitions vary: the category of phenomena being assessed and the criteria for assessing which phenomena can be considered part of eudaimonia.

Category of phenomena being assessed

For Aristotle, eudaimonia was about behaviour, and could be assessed objectively by an external observer. Modern definitions that have leaned primarily into this perspective include Nussbaum’s (2008) “*a kind of living that is active, inclusive of all that has intrinsic value, and complete*”, Ryff & Singer’s (2008) “*striving toward excellence based on one’s unique potential*”, Ryan et al.’s (2008) “*way of living that is focused on what is intrinsically worthwhile to human beings*” and Fowers et al.’s (2010) “*being involved in constitutive activity, actions which constitute rather than cause the goal*”. Following this logic, the feelings associated with eudaimonic behaviours can be seen, like John Stuart Mill saw happiness (Ryff & Singer, 1998), simply as a by-product.

However, a few definitions focus on experiences or feelings. For example, Waterman’s (1984) definition, “*The feelings accompanying behavior in the direction of self-realization.*” By focussing on feelings, such definitions necessitate subjective measurement to understand eudaimonia.

Other definitions move more up-stream in the causal pathway and focus primarily on motivations and orientations. This includes Peterson et al.’s (2005) focus on orientation towards meaning in life, Huta & Waterman’s (2014) emphasis on “*Striving to use and develop the best in oneself*” (emphasis added) and the first elements in Martela & Sheldon’s (2019) definition “*Well-being conducive values, motivations, goals and practices*”.

² The one definition here, which places feelings at its heart, refers to feelings *accompanying* behaviours.

Table 2.1. List of conceptual definitions of eudaimonia and eudaimonic feelings

		Motivations	Behaviour	Feelings / experiences
Waterman (1984b, p. 332)	"The feelings accompanying behavior in the direction of self-realization, i.e., behavior consistent with one's true potentials."		X	XX
Ryff & Singer (2008, p. 14)	"striving toward excellence based on one's unique potential"		XX	
Annas (1993)	"the fulfillment of one's nature"			
Peterson, Park and Seligman (2005)	An orientation towards meaning in life.	XX		
Keyes (2006); Keyes (2016)	Psychological well-being (as defined by Ryff), plus social well-being ("how well an individual functions as a citizen and member of a collective or community").		XX	X
Nussbaum (2008, p. S90)	"Flourishing human living, a kind of living that is active, inclusive of all that has intrinsic value, and complete, meaning lacking in nothing that would make it richer or better."		XX	
Ryan, Huta and Deci (2008, p. 147)	"Way of living that is focused on what is intrinsically worthwhile to human beings."		XX	
Fowers, Mollica and Procacci (2010, p. 142)	"Being involved in constitutive activity, actions which constitute rather than cause the goal."	X	XX	
Huta and Waterman (2014, p. 1446)	"Striving to use and develop the best in oneself, in ways that are congruent with one's values and true self."	XX	X	
Besser-Jones (2015, p. 187)	[making] "optimal use of one's capacities."		XX	
Steger (2016, p. 179)	"Efforts directed at making an enduring positive impact on one's self as well as others" (slow thinking).		XX	
Martela & Sheldon (2019)	"Well-being conducive values, motivations, goals and practices" ^{**}	XX	XX	
Martela and Ryan (2023)	"The universally required psychological factors that humans need to do well in life and to feel well—psychological experiences deemed as central to human well-being, well-doing, and thriving." ^{***}	XX	XX	XX
Fabian (2022, p. 126)	"process rather than an outcome" and "derives from human nature"			
Vittersø (forthcoming)	"Improvements that are regulated by a will to be a good human being."	XX	X	XX

Note: 'Motivations' is shorthand for motivations, orientations, attitudes, psychological traits or values that determine behaviour (e.g. optimism or materialism). 'Behaviour' refers to observable behaviour. 'Feelings / Experiences' refers to psychological experiences at the individual level, typically measured through self-report (e.g. *feeling* a sense of meaning, or feeling hopeful). XX – central to definition, X – associated with definition. Some definitions, however, do not allow a categorisation. * Like most researchers in this field, the authors' understanding of 'well-being' here focuses on the personal and psychological aspects of well-being, rather than the OECD's broader definition (see Box 2.1). ** Again, the authors' understanding of 'well-being' here focuses on the personal and psychological aspects of well-being.

Some authors, particularly Huta & Waterman (2014) argue that the term eudaimonic can be applied to phenomena across the spectrum, i.e. one can have eudaimonic (vs. hedonic) motivations, can engage in eudaimonic (vs. hedonic) behaviours, and can experience eudaimonic (vs. hedonic) feelings,³ and present these two possibilities as symmetric. Others (e.g. Martela & Sheldon, 2019) also allow space for eudaimonia to be a subjective experience, but they place it prior to overall SWB measures such as life satisfaction, positive and negative affect. In other words, whereas Huta & Waterman (2014) see

³ Huta & Waterman also include a category of functioning, although it is in practice hard to distinguish this from either behaviours, on the one hand, or experiences, on the other, as in practice functioning is typically measured based on self-reported experiences.

'eudaimonic experiences' as equivalent ontologically with hedonic experiences such as happiness, Martela & Sheldon (2019) see the former (potentially) leading to the latter.

Criteria for assessing phenomena

Regardless of whether a definition focusses on motivations, behaviour or experiences, it needs to include some criteria for judging whether that phenomenon is eudaimonic or not. For Aristotle, who was advancing an ethical theory of eudaimonia, there was a moral judgement being made: what are the ways one *ought* to live one's life (Waterman, 2008). Aristotle's position was primarily informed by logic and culturally defined standards of what was deemed right and wrong to the ancient Greeks. Today, however, most people are wary of assuming universal definitions of right and wrong, making this definition hard to apply across multiple cultures (Fabian, 2022).

One way of understanding Aristotle's focus on virtue is that he believed virtue (and reason) to be the defining features of what makes us human. In that sense, living virtuously and with reason represented living in accordance with human nature. It is this concept (living in accordance with human nature or with one's nature) that can be seen as a common thread in more recent definitions of eudaimonia (Fabian, 2022). What differentiates theories is how one defines accordance with nature.

For Waterman (1984), the answer to this question is individual. He suggests that eudaimonia is a result of individuals behaving in ways that are consistent with their 'true values' or 'true potential'. This frames eudaimonia as a process of self-discovery, a result of understanding one's own values and acting in accordance with them. It also implies that eudaimonia may look different for different people, to the extent that different people may have different values and potential, making it hard to define universal measures.

Most theories, however, seek to identify something which can be conceived as universally human. The dominant approach to defining that is through an evolutionary perspective – identifying those ways of thinking or behaviours that would have been adaptive during our evolutionary history (Fabian, 2022). This has been part of the approach of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which argues that humans have a small set of psychological needs which need to be satisfied for their well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008). As well as inviting an investigation of early human lifestyles, this perspective lends itself to an empirical approach, whereby, "the criteria for judging a theory of eudaimonia rest in its ability to predict ... outcomes that people value deeply and that can be said to represent wellness" (Ryan, Huta and Deci, 2008, p.140). For Martela & Sheldon (2019), this wellness is long-term SWB.

Vittersø (forthcoming) introduces a further element to defining what counts as human nature. He stresses the importance of communities, arguing that caring for others, and being cared for by others, is a universal need that has an evolutionary basis. As such impacts on others should also be considered an element of what it means to live eudaimonically.

This is consistent with various other perspectives that highlight the importance of considering impacts on others, starting with Aristotle's equation of eudaimonia with a virtuous life. For example, Seligman's understanding of eudaimonia (which we have drawn from his work with Christopher Peterson) equates eudaimonia with meaning (Peterson et al., 2005). According to that paper, conceptions of eudaimonia/meaning are based on "*the premise that people should develop what is best within themselves and then use these skills and talents in the service of greater goods – including in particular*

the welfare of other people or humankind writ large" (Peterson et al., 2005, p. 26). Seligman's *Life of Meaning* scale includes questions that specifically ask about helping other people and society.⁴

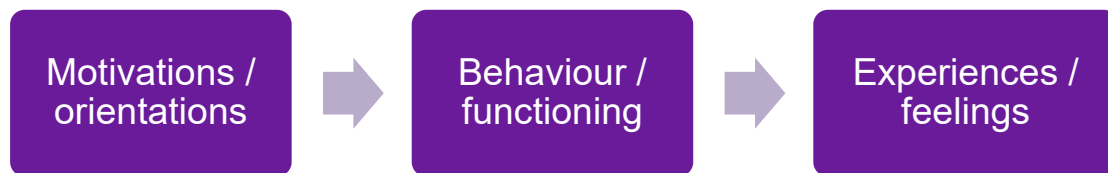
Keyes' definition of eudaimonia includes social well-being, which he considers to be at least partly about how we interact with others in our community, and how we behave as citizens. For example, he has described eudaimonia as being about "striving toward excellence or a good life as an individual and a citizen" (Keyes and Simoes, 2012). Meanwhile, Michael Steger contrasts eudaimonia with hedonia in that eudaimonia involves a focus of efforts directed at making a positive impact on others as well as oneself.

The relevance of these perspectives will be discussed later in Section 3.1.

Summary

In summary, eudaimonia is typically defined in terms of how someone lives their life, with differing degrees of emphasis placed on i) motivations, ii) behaviours and iii) experiences/feelings (Figure 2.1). Different criteria are used to judge whether a particular motivation, behaviour or experience can be considered eudaimonic, with the most common focussing on the idea that such behaviour should be in accordance with human nature, or one's individual nature. In the former case, this can be ascertained from an evolutionary perspective, and empirical data on predictors of other positive outcomes (e.g. SWB). For some theories, positive outcomes include behaviours that have an impact on other people.

Figure 2.1. Possible phenomena that could be defined as eudaimonic



2.2 Components of eudaimonia

It is only after considering the conceptual definitions of eudaimonia listed above that it makes sense to consider what elements might fit within these definitions. In doing so, we move closer to an operational definition. In this section we will briefly consider nine of the most prominent approaches to eudaimonia, summarising what elements they propose constitute eudaimonia and why. We will then compare the different approaches to identify commonalities and differences.

Carol Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing

Referring to eudaimonia from the outset, Ryff (1989b) identifies six key components of what she calls psychological wellbeing (PWB): self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy and positive relationships with others. These dimensions emerged from a review of literature seeking to define positive psychological functioning, with a focus on theories of aging well

⁴ It should be noted that for Seligman, meaning (eudaimonia) is just one of five elements of well-being. He uses the word "eudaimonia" very little in his own writing (it does not appear in the text of his landmark book, *Flourish*, Seligman, 2012).

(Ryff, 1989a). Although Ryff views all six dimensions as aspects of eudaimonia, purpose in life and personal growth are seen as ‘the two most eudaimonic aspects of well-being’ (Ryff & Singer, 2008, p. 27). Ryff’s theory has been criticised (e.g. Steger, 2016; Vittersø, forthcoming) for lacking a conceptual underpinning. Specifically what justifies these six exact elements being considered as PWB and nothing else (Diener et al., 1998)?

The original 120-item PWB scale has since been condensed to a 42-item scale (Morozink et al., 2010). Although Ryff defines eudaimonia as the ‘feelings’ associated with eudaimonic behaviour, this scale includes a mix of questions covering orientations (e.g. “I live life one day at a time and don’t really think about the future”), behaviours (e.g. “I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions”) as well as experiences which one can see as the outcome of good functioning (e.g. “In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live”).

Corey Keyes’ Psychological and Social Well-being

Keyes, whose first work on eudaimonia was in collaboration with Ryff, augmented her approach by arguing that social well-being is also an integral part of eudaimonia (Keyes, 1998). Defining social well-being initially as an “*appraisal of one’s circumstances and functioning in society*”, he reviews literature in the fields of philosophy, social psychology and cultural analysis to identify social ‘challenges’ that determine our social well-being. He thereby proposes five dimensions of social well-being: social integration (a sense of belonging to society and community), social acceptance (a positive portrayal of society), social contribution (evaluation of one’s contribution to society), social actualisation (which can be interpreted as hope about society’s trajectory) and social coherence (caring about and understanding the world). Aside from making the case that social well-being is an integral part of functioning well, there is – at least initially – no argumentation or overall logic for why these five specific concepts should be considered the dimensions of social well-being.

In terms of the distinction between orientations/motivations, behaviour and experiences, social integration can be understood as an experience (e.g. “I feel close to other people in my community”), and social acceptance and social actualisation are more orientations (or rather an attitude, e.g. “I believe that people are kind”). Social contribution and social coherence are somewhat harder to place within these categorisations – social contribution is a self-assessment of one’s contributions to society, whereas social coherence is an assessment of whether one feels that one understands the world.

Eudaimonia in Self-Determination Theory

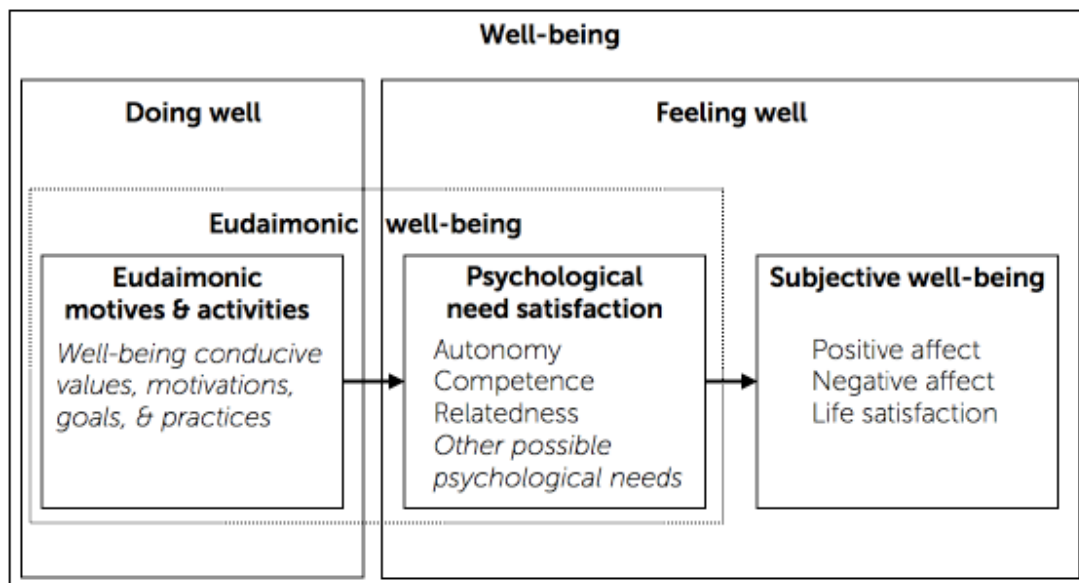
Self-determination theory (SDT) was originally developed as a theory of human motivation (see Deci and Ryan, 2000; Ryan and Deci, 2000). Based on decades of research, it identifies three basic and universal psychological needs that motivate human behaviour – autonomy, competence and relatedness, and claims that the satisfaction of these needs is fundamental to human well-being and ‘effective functioning’. These three needs are relatively self-explanatory, but it is worth noting that autonomy is not simply freedom to do what one wants, but rather refers to the need to feel agency in one’s actions, to feel that one’s activities are self-chosen and self-endorsed.

In 2001, Richard Ryan and Ed Deci wrote an explicit elaboration of SDT’s approach to eudaimonia (Ryan & Deci, 2001). In it, they define eudaimonic well-being as “*the degree to which a person is fully functioning*” (p. 141), i.e. satisfying these three needs.

There has since been some unclarity in SDT as to whether need satisfaction defines eudaimonic well-being, or simply *causes* well-being (Vittersø, forthcoming), with much recent writing suggesting the latter. However, if that is the case, what exactly eudaimonic well-being *is* has not been well elaborated, with meaning and vitality (Ryan & Deci, 2008) amongst the concepts sometimes mentioned.

For our purposes, we will take as representative of the SDT position one of the latest papers written within this framework (Martela & Sheldon, 2019), which sets out to clarify the concepts of eudaimonic and SWB. According to this paper (see Figure 2.2), eudaimonic well-being consists of two distinct elements – psychological need satisfaction (building on Ryan & Deci, 2001), and a set of eudaimonic motives and activities, including values, motivations, goals and practices. The identification of need satisfaction as the best way of instantiating eudaimonia has been endorsed beyond the SDT community, for example by philosopher Mark Fabian (Fabian, 2022), who describes the approach as “the most influential of the psychological accounts of eudaimonia” (p. 126).

Figure 2.2. Martela & Sheldon’s understanding of eudaimonic well-being



Source: Martela, F., & Sheldon, K. M. (2019). “Clarifying the Concept of Well-Being: Psychological Need Satisfaction as the Common Core Connecting Eudaimonic and Subjective Well-Being”, *Review of General Psychology*, Vol. 23(4), pp. 458-474, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1089268019880886>.

At least two multi-item scales for measuring the satisfaction of the three needs have been developed (B. Chen et al., 2015; Gagne, 2003). Both scales have the advantage of purely assessing outcomes (e.g. “I feel like I am free to decide for myself how to live my life” and “I feel that the people I care about also care about me”). Recognising space limitations in surveys, Martela and Ryan (2023) identify a set of three questions which can be used to measure the satisfaction of the three needs (see Section 6).

Veronika Huta and Richard Ryan – Hedonic and Eudaimonic Motives for Activities

The left-hand box in Figure 2.2 is not specified in detail by Martela and Sheldon (2019), but other researchers working in the field of SDT have created a scale for measuring hedonic and eudaimonic motives (Huta & Ryan, 2010) that captures the motivations aspect of this box. These authors focus on eudaimonia as a set of *motives*. Whether the outcomes in terms of feelings can be considered

eudaimonic or hedonic can then be determined empirically (based on whether they are more associated with hedonic motives or eudaimonic motives).⁵

Presumably drawing on the authors' earlier definition of eudaimonia as a "way of living that is focused on what is intrinsically worthwhile to human beings" (Ryan et al., 2008, p. 147), four motives are defined as eudaimonic here – seeking to pursue excellence or a personal ideal; seeking to use the best in yourself; seeking to develop a skill, learn or gain insight into something; and seeking to do what you believe in. However, little reason is given for selecting precisely these motives.

Alan Waterman's Eudaimonia

Alongside Ryff and SDT, Waterman's approach to eudaimonia is one of the most influential approaches (Waterman, 1981, 1984; Waterman et al., 2010). Waterman's theory is inspired by the philosopher David Norton and defines eudaimonia as "*the feelings accompanying behavior in the direction of self-realization, i.e., behavior consistent with one's true potentials.*" (Waterman, 1984b, p. 332). This concept is closely related to what Ryff means by personal growth, whilst the reference to behaving consistent with one's true potentials has some similarities to SDT's concept of autonomy (although SDT talks more about intrinsic motivations, rather than true potentials).

However, beyond that, Waterman's original theory leaves eudaimonia quite open and individual – as if one person's true potential can be about helping others, whereas another's might be about making as much money as possible. Indeed, this lack of specificity is not surprising, given that the philosophy Waterman built upon is rooted in individualism and the idea that self-interest is good for society (Waterman, 1981).

Waterman operationalised his approach to eudaimonia with the Questionnaire for Eudaimonic Well-Being (Waterman et al., 2010) which is intended to measure six inter-related constructs which can be fairly intuitively linked to his overall definition: self-discovery, perceived development of one's best potentials, a sense of purpose and meaning in life, investment of significant effort in pursuit of excellence, intense involvement in activities (similar to flow) and enjoyment of activities as personally expressive. Despite covering a large range of constructs, the 21-question scale is found to be unifactorial. The questions are a mix of attitudes/orientations (e.g. "It is more important that I really enjoy what I do than that other people are impressed by it") and outcomes (e.g. "I find I get intensively involved in many of the things I do each day").

Michael Steger's Eudaimonic Behaviours

Steger focuses on behaviour and the motivations behind them in his definition of eudaimonia (and hedonia). For Steger, eudaimonic behaviours are "*efforts directed at making an enduring positive impact on one's self as well as others*" (Steger, 2016, p. 179). This definition includes three important elements.

Firstly, it refers to 'efforts directed', which means that the definition is about behaviour, specifically *intentional* behaviour. For Steger, sense of meaning – which is one of his primary research areas – emerges partly from pursuing such behaviour.

The second and third elements define how eudaimonic behaviour is distinct from hedonic behaviour. Firstly, it is about making an enduring impact, rather than a short-term impact. Secondly, it is about

⁵ This is consistent with later work by Veronika Huta (e.g. Huta and Waterman, 2014) mentioned earlier, which stresses that the distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic can be made in reference to different categories of phenomena, from motivations to behaviour to outcomes.

making an impact on the lives of others, not just the self. This makes explicit the implication in much writing on eudaimonia, that living eudaimonically means living less egoistically.

Elsewhere, Steger et al. (2013) also highlight that eudaimonic behaviour should be consistent with one's values, autonomy and self-insight, broader goals and purpose, good-relationships and self-development.

Steger does not propose a specific scale for measuring eudaimonic behaviours. In an earlier study a set of 14 behaviours were classified as eudaimonic or hedonic (Steger et al., 2008), but these were quite context specific (designed for undergraduate students), and there is not claim that these should be used as a definitive set. It is worth noting, however, that the behaviours included a mix of pro-social behaviours, future-directed behaviours and meaningful interpersonal interactions, which is consistent with his later definition of eudaimonic behaviour. A eudaimonic life should lead to high levels of meaning, which can be measured using Steger's meaning in life questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006).

Blaine Fowers' Constitutive Activity

Blaine Fowers and colleagues also focus their attention on behaviours (Fowers et al., 2010), defining eudaimonia as participating in 'constitutive' activities, which are those for which the activity "constitute[s] rather than cause[s] the goal" (p. 142).⁶ The authors then operationalise eudaimonic *well-being* using three of Ryff's components (personal growth, purpose in life and personal relationships), and vitality.

Felicia Huppert's Flourishing Account

Huppert's ambition with the flourishing account is to define well-being in general, not just eudaimonia. Wishing to move beyond unidimensional measures of life satisfaction or affect, she defines flourishing as "feeling good and functioning effectively" (Huppert & So, 2013), with functioning equated with eudaimonia. She operationalises flourishing as the opposite of standard definitions of the most common mental disorders (depression and anxiety), which leads to ten elements: meaning, positive relationships, competence, engagement, vitality, emotional stability, self-esteem, resilience, optimism and happiness. Each is measured with one question.

A clear distinction is not made between what counts as feeling (affect) and functioning (eudaimonia) – for the purposes of this review, we will only exclude the two components that are more explicitly emotional – emotional stability and happiness.

Huppert's flourishing account has been operationalised in the European Social Survey and strongly influenced the OECD 2013 *Guidelines* measurement recommendations for eudaimonia.

Joar Vittersø's Humanistic Theory of Well-being

Vittersø's early work on eudaimonia focussed on two elements – an orientation towards personal growth and emotional interest as an experience associated with eudaimonic activities (Vittersø et al., 2010). More recently however, he has proposed an alternative new humanistic theory of well-being (Vittersø, forthcoming). His starting point is to argue that biological life is fundamentally value-laden. Thus, one cannot entirely separate the empirical and scientific from the normative. From the moment the first

⁶ The idea of constitutive goals is, as the authors recognise, conceptually similar to the concept of intrinsic goals in SDT. However, whereas SDT defines which goals are intrinsic (for example personal growth or interpersonal intimacy) and extrinsic (for example success or wealth), for Bowers and colleagues this distinction is dependent on the individual.

single-cell organisms began to reproduce, they defined a normative framework for themselves, in that ‘good’ is anything which allows them to reproduce faster. In terms of defining what counts as a ‘good’ life for a human, he describes how these primitive valuation mechanisms have evolved to become complex, culture-based and multidimensional value structures that constitute the basis for the feelings and judgments we make. Referring to Aristotle’s understanding of goodness as the fulfilment of one’s *telos* (or purpose), he argues as follows: the purpose of a knife is to cut, so a good knife is one that cuts well. By that logic, a good human life is one that fulfils human purpose well. Our complex culture-based and multidimensional value structures have evolved and developed to help us navigate towards this purpose.

Vittersø rejects the idea that being happy in the purely hedonic sense is the sole purpose or aim of humans, as that doesn’t explain behaviour very well, and happiness is after all only one of several responses to our lives and environment. Vittersø is also careful to stress that human purpose cannot be defined purely biologically, as culture also shapes our understanding of what it means to lead a good human life.

Vittersø identifies three universal needs to achieve a good human life: stability, change and care, and argues that we feel well when these needs are fulfilled. All living organisms need to balance the needs for stability and change, and Vittersø notes that different physiological experiences are associated with the two needs, highlighting why it is important for us to value and appreciate both of them as and when they are needed. The need for care refers to the need to be cared for, but also the need *to* care, which Vittersø argues stems from our inherently collective natures.

The normative framework referred to in his definition of a good life consists of three universal values: respecting basic human rights, avoiding preventable harm and accepting an ethics of care. The theory argues that these values are part of what make us human, so someone who is happy (i.e. they are enjoying their life) while violating these values, cannot be seen as living well. His definition of well-being – “to like one’s life *for the right reasons*” (emphasis added) – reinforces this.

Vittersø situates eudaimonic well-being alongside hedonic well-being in his model. For him, eudaimonic well-being is particularly related to the need for change and development. The three components he identifies can be seen as integral to that need: 1) opportunity feelings (e.g. interest, engagement and wonder), 2) reflective judgement (wisdom and morality), and 3) betterment orientations (e.g. orientation for personal growth, search for meaning, and the will to be a good human being). Feelings related to the need for care (e.g. compassion, empathy and love) straddle both eudaimonic and hedonic well-being. As can be seen, this model thus implies a definition of eudaimonic well-being that combines feelings, judgements and attitudes.

Vittersø and colleagues have proposed various scales for measuring different elements of eudaimonia (e.g. Kopperud & Vittersø, 2008; Thorsteinsen & Vittersø, 2020).

2.3 Allied frameworks

Three other frameworks are relevant in relation to eudaimonia – Seligman’s PERMA model, Diener’s flourishing approach and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale. None of these three approaches are presented as measures of eudaimonia but they share the eudaimonists’ critique of standard SWB measurement as being too unidimensional. Furthermore, there is a lot of overlap in terms of the components measured, such that operationally it is not easy to distinguish the eudaimonic approaches from these other frameworks.

Martin Seligman's Flourishing Account

Seligman's perspective on SWB is most comprehensively described in his book *Flourish* (Seligman, 2012). In a departure from his early thinking, he argues *against* seeing life satisfaction as the ultimate arbiter of what is SWB, and argues instead that SWB is multidimensional. He defines three criteria for whether something can be considered one of the dimensions of SWB:

- It contributes to SWB
- Many people pursue it for its own sake, not merely to get any of the other elements
- It is defined and measured independently of the other elements (exclusivity)

Whilst the first criterion is somewhat circular, the other two provide a standard by which to judge his ultimate selection of five dimensions which are known as the PERMA framework: Positive emotions, Engagement, positive Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment. Note that personal growth and autonomy, two of the fundamental features of many definitions of eudaimonia, are not included in this list.

Seligman does not use the term eudaimonia at all in his account of flourishing. Nevertheless, a 2005 paper co-authored by Seligman does include a definition of eudaimonia as “*an orientation towards meaning in life*” (Peterson et al., 2005), which suggests that Seligman sees eudaimonia as relevant to just one of the five elements of flourishing. As for how Seligman defines meaning: “*Belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self*” (Seligman, 2012). This aligns Seligman with Steger and Vittersø in terms of seeing eudaimonia as being about an orientation to behaviour whose goals are beyond the individual.

Ed Diener's Flourishing Account

Diener's 8-item Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2010) is a well-cited approach to measuring SWB. Although the term ‘eudaimonia’ is not used in the paper introducing the scale, Diener does build on work by Ryff and Ryan & Deci. The scale measures eight elements: purpose & meaning, supportive relationships, competence, engagement, optimism, contribution to others, being respected by others and ‘leading a good life’. An interesting argument is made in favour of including contribution to others, based on research which shows that helping others is more important to health than receiving help.

Beyond that, however, little attempt is made to justify the selection of these eight elements – they are simply identified as being important based on extant literature.

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale

Also popular is the 14-item Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS, Tennant *et al.*, 2007), which comes more from the sphere of public health, rather than positive psychology.⁷ Like Diener's Flourishing Scale, little theoretical justification is provided for the items selected. The scale was developed based on an earlier scale called the Affectometer 2. Unlike Diener's scale, WEMWBS is intended to cover both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. An explicit distinction is not drawn in the scale, but the following constructs measured in the scale are core to most of the definitions of eudaimonia we have reviewed: meaning, autonomy, feeling close to other people and feeling loved, feeling useful and interest in new things. The scale also measures resilience, optimism, thinking clearly, self-esteem, vitality, feeling calm and interest in other people.

⁷ This reflects the observation made in the OECD's report on *Measuring Population Mental Health* (OECD, 2023) that some measures of eudaimonia were developed to capture positive mental health.

2.4 Comparison of elements

Martela and Sheldon (2019) noted that at least 63 elements have been considered by one author or another to be part of eudaimonia. Table 2.2 presents those elements that have been incorporated into the nine theories or operationalisations of eudaimonia that we have reviewed. Concepts are grouped in columns. The first column, for example, includes concepts related to meaning and purpose. Further allied frameworks (discussed in Section 2.3) are also included in the table, as are the question recommendations for measuring eudaimonia in the original OECD *Guidelines*. No element is included in every single framework, however three elements are included in all except one: **meaning / purpose**, **autonomy / authenticity** and **personal growth / self-actualisation**.

Meaning is interesting because, although it was only excluded in one of the frameworks reviewed here (SDT), this was done quite intentionally. Furthermore, philosophical perspectives on eudaimonia (which we have not reviewed here) also tend to exclude meaning (e.g. Fabian, 2022), seeing it as important but distinct. These disagreements will be briefly discussed later in this section.

The interest in **autonomy and authenticity** can be traced to two independent sources: Waterman's interpretation of Aristotelian thinking and the idea that eudaimonia is about being true to your 'daimon' (inner spirit), but also SDT's focus on the importance of internalised motivation and autonomous behaviour. Some have suggested that autonomy may not be a universal requirement for well-being, saying that it reflects a Western perspective (Huppert & So, 2013). However, as Haybron (2016) argues, autonomy in eudaimonia is not about freedom in an individualistic sense, but rather about feeling that your behaviours are authentic to you, that you somehow endorse those behaviours. Fabian (2022) describes autonomy as about feeling 'volitional, self-congruent and integrated' (p. 131). Even in collectivist societies, it is argued, well-being depends on feeling that you endorse how you are living, even if the way of living chosen is to live and make decisions more collectively. This is supported by findings that autonomy predicts other outcomes (including well-being and educational attainment) just as much in collectivist East Asian societies as it does in individualist North America (see Martela & Ryan, 2023).

Personal growth is the only one of the top three most commonly occurring concepts that is quite specifically future-orientated. Whereas a sense of meaning and purpose and a sense of autonomy and authenticity are relevant and valuable in the moment they are experienced, personal growth implies improving well-being in the long-term.

The next most common element is **inter-personal relationships**, which appeared in all except two frameworks. Here the focus is on the benefit to the individual within those relationships. In other words, people need to *feel* loved, or cared for, for their well-being. The impacts on the others in these relationships will be discussed later. In the fifth column concepts such as **competence**, **environmental mastery** and **accomplishment** are grouped together although they are not identical. SDT's sense of competence is about feeling able to make progress towards valued goals. Environmental mastery is not far off that. Accomplishment, however, is more about the experience of achieving those goals. Nevertheless, the three can be seen as related.

These five concepts – meaning, personal growth, relatedness, autonomy and competence are incorporated into more than half of the operationalisations of eudaimonia we have reviewed.

Table 2.2. Comparing models of eudaimonia

Overall theme	Meaning / Purpose	Autonomy / Authenticity	Personal growth / Self-development	Inter-personal relationships	Competence / Environmental mastery / Accomplishment	Pro-social behaviour	Self-esteem	Involvement / Flow	Vitality	Resilience
Carol Ryff	Life purpose	Autonomy	Personal growth	Positive relationships	Environmental mastery		Self-acceptance			
Corey Keyes	Life purpose	Autonomy	Personal growth	Positive relationships	Environmental mastery	Social well-being	Self-acceptance			
Self-Determination Theory		Autonomy		Relatedness	Competence					
Veronika Huta & Richard Ryan (HEMA, 2010)	Orientation to meaning	Orientation to Authenticity	Orientation to growth		Orientation to excellence					
Alan Waterman (QEWB, 2010)	Purpose & meaning	Self-discovery / Behaviour consistent w. true potential	Development of best potentials / Effort in pursuing excellence					Involvement		
Steger's Eudaimonic Behaviours	Behavior consistent with purpose	Behaviour consistent with values & autonomy	Self-development through behaviour	Behavior leading to good relationships		Impact on others				
Fowers et al. (2010)	Purpose	Personal Expression	Self-actualisation / Personal growth	Positive Relationships					Vitality	
Flourishing (Huppert & So)	Meaning		Engagement	Positive relationships	Competence		Self-esteem		Vitality	Resilience
Vittersø (forthcoming)	Search for meaning	Organismic living	Personal growth / Betterment orientations	Love	Opportunity feelings	Will to be a good human / Morality		Interest & Engagement		
PERMA (Seligman)*	Meaning			Positive relationships	Accomplishment			Engagement		
OECD (2013) (core + extended module)	Worthwhile	Autonomy		Loneliness	Accomplishment		Self-esteem		Vitality	Resilience
Flourishing (Diener)	Purpose & meaning			Supportive relationships	Competence	Contribution to others		Engagement		
WEMWBS		Autonomy	Personal Development		Competence		Self-Acceptance		Energy	Resilience

Source: *Seligman views eudaimonia as synonymous with meaning only, yet positive relationships, accomplishment and engagement are related to other eudaimonic concepts and thus are included here.

The sixth column groups together various ways of framing **pro-social behaviour**. As we have discussed, the idea that eudaimonia involves some positive contribution to others is a feature of several definitions. It is explicitly listed here as a component in three definitions.

Self-acceptance (which features in Ryff's model) has been combined here with **self-esteem**. Although the two concepts are closely related, self-acceptance has been described as being more unconditional, whereas self-esteem may vary over time in response to other people's evaluations of the self but only correlate moderately (MacInnes, 2006). In that sense self-acceptance sits more clearly as a way of thinking, whereas self-esteem can be seen more as an outcome.

Involvement or **flow** is the intense feeling characterised by a state of total involvement in an activity, in which there is a balance between skills and challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). People experiencing flow are absorbed in the moment. The place of involvement or flow in eudaimonia is contested. Whereas Waterman (2010) includes involvement in his model, and Vittersø (unpublished) includes engagement and interest, Seligman considers flow/engagement to be distinct to eudaimonia. For him, flow is more about the present, and has less of a developmental nature. It also has no explicitly pro-social component. As we will see in Section 4, we have not identified evidence of flow leading to long-term improvements in well-being, making it unlikely to emerge as a strong candidate for the measurement of eudaimonic feelings.

The last two columns are **vitality** and **resilience** which are only included in two and one model, respectively. However, both have been integrated into the OECD's *Guidelines*. We shall discuss resilience further in Section 3.3.

A note on meaning

As was alluded to in the above discussion, meaning is an element included in almost all modern approaches to eudaimonia. However, SDT and Steger's approach see it as an *outcome* of eudaimonia, rather than an element of it per se. Aristotle himself did not talk about meaning either, nor do most philosophers working on eudaimonia (e.g. Besser-Jones, 2015). Meanwhile, Fabian (2022), who builds on SDT for his overall theory of SWB, sees meaning as part of a third pillar of SWB (*alongside* hedonic experience and eudaimonia).

In SDT terms, a sense of meaning in life could arguably be seen as a fourth need. In any case, philosophers such as Nietzsche believed that the need to attribute meaning and significance to one's own life is distinctly human (Fabian, 2022). This also would theoretically permit the inclusion of the search for meaning into any definition of eudaimonia that sees the concept as about living in accordance with human nature.

Regardless of definitional concerns, meaning is seen by everyone working on eudaimonia to be critical, and may well be of particular concern in the modern world. Drawing on existential philosophy, Fabian (2022) notes that the decline of religion over the last centuries has left a gap in our lives in terms of defining meaning. Those who have studied meaning have identified three components – purpose (the feeling that one's life is guided by personally valued goals), significance (the feeling that one's life will have a lasting impact on the world) and coherence (the feeling that one's life makes sense) (Fabian, 2022; King & Hicks, 2021). Fabian (2022) notes that, pre-enlightenment, religions would have provided the answers for all three of these components for most people. He argues that the challenge for many in the modern world is to find purpose, significance and coherence without recourse to religion. This search has been linked to many of our current challenges, including nationalism and other totalitarian ideologies (Fabian, 2022) and over-consumption (Oetting, n.d.).

As such, given its contemporary relevance, a measurement of at least some form of meaning would appear to be critical to a eudaimonic approach to measuring SWB.

3

Working definitions of eudaimonia and eudaimonic feelings

3.1 Overall conceptual definition

We propose having three levels of definition. Firstly, a **broad definition**, similar to Ruggeri et al., (2020) and Martela and Ryan (2023), is of use: **“living well” (or functioning well)**. Of course, aside from highlighting that eudaimonia is primarily about how one *lives* or what one *does*, rather than how one *feels*, such a definition leaves plenty open to interpretation, particularly in terms of what it means to live well.

Therefore, the second level of this definition of **eudaimonia** is that living well means **behaving and thinking in ways that are typically conducive to long-term personal well-being and the well-being of others**. The term ‘personal well-being’ used here can be understood to refer to those aspects of well-being that describe the individual themselves, as opposed to their environment, and that are not culture-specific (see Box 2.1). We shall use the word ‘orientation’ to refer to both ways of behaving and thinking.

In defining eudaimonia in this way, we follow the majority of eudaimonia theorists who centre the behavioural and motivational elements (e.g. Peterson, Park and Seligman, 2005; Nussbaum, 2008; Ryan, Huta and Deci, 2008; Fowers, Mollica and Procacci, 2010; Huta and Waterman, 2014; Steger, 2016; Martela and Ryan, 2023)⁸ rather than feelings and emotions. However, as we have seen, most approaches to *measuring* eudaimonia focus on outcomes or experiences (such as sense of meaning or sense of autonomy). One way to deal with this mismatch is to distinguish between eudaimonia, as defined above, and **eudaimonic feelings**, which can be defined as **the set of universally desirable feelings or experiences associated with eudaimonia**. ‘Feelings’ implies an emotional experience here, but these can be assessed through more evaluative questions (e.g. the question “do you feel that your life has meaning” is more an evaluative question than an affect-based one). It is these feelings and assessments, rather than eudaimonia itself, that can be understood to be a component of SWB.

None of these definitions explicitly specify which of the multiple elements such as personal growth or sense of competence should be considered part of eudaimonia or a eudaimonic feeling. This is intentional. The definition itself should make it possible for multiple candidates to be considered a eudaimonic feeling or part of eudaimonia, with empirical evidence helping inform the selection. Furthermore, whilst this definition refers to universally desirable feelings in terms of what counts as eudaimonic, it recognises that different *orientations* may be conducive to the personal well-being of self and others in different cultures, even if general patterns can be observed. What is important – and this is a point also stressed by Martela & Sheldon (2019) – is that the definition of eudaimonia provides a set of criteria with which to adjudicate between different candidate orientations and ultimately feelings. This avoids the risk of eudaimonia being defined as a list of things generally perceived to be worthwhile.

⁸ The definition proposed here is probably closest to Steger’s (2016) *“efforts directed at making an enduring positive impact on one’s self as well as others.”*

The suggestion that eudaimonia is about understanding what leads to long-term individual well-being is at the core of SDT (Ryan et al., 2008; Martela & Sheldon, 2019; Martela & Ryan, 2023) and other conceptions of the topic (Steger, 2016). Martela & Sheldon (2019) define one of the criteria for identifying psychological needs as being that they should “lead to long-term benefits in health, growth and adaptation”. They also stress an evolutionary perspective, arguing that the desire to acquire the feelings associated with eudaimonia is adaptive because it helps motivate human behaviours that contribute to survival and success. In Section 4, we will review evidence of the long-term benefits of eudaimonia.

However, it should not be assumed that eudaimonia ‘automatically’ leads to other positive outcomes, especially if one were to focus on the motivational elements of eudaimonia. Contextual or environmental factors are also critical: an individual that lives eudaimonically will nevertheless struggle to achieve well-being in the context of a famine, or living in a prison cell. As such, personal well-being can be understood as emerging for the dynamic interaction between eudaimonia and the living context (Michaelson, 2014).

Impacts on the well-being of others

The definition above includes a reference to impacts on ‘the well-being of others’. This runs somewhat counter to dominant thinking around definitions of SWB and happiness, which argue that someone’s level of SWB can be assessed solely and exclusively from their psychological states (Phillips et al, 2014). In other words, it does not matter what a person does, or does to other people – if they feel happy, they are happy. This is best exemplified with Daniel Gilbert’s thought experiment:

Happiness is a word that we generally use to indicate an experience and not the actions that give rise to it. Does it make any sense to say, "After a day spent killing his parents, Frank was happy"? Indeed it does. We hope there never is such a person, but the sentence is grammatical, well-formed, and easily understood. (Gilbert, 2006, p. 36-37)

Although some have questioned this logic (Baker, 2011; Phillips et al., 2017), arguing that Frank cannot truly be a happy person if he enjoys killing his parents, such critiques based on light psychoanalysis have not had much influence on the definitions of SWB or happiness. Even if it were true that deeply disturbed people like Frank are never truly happy over the long-term, more subtle examples are less easy to dismiss. Haybron (2007) suggests the example of a wealthy slaveholder in the American South who very likely was happy despite violating the dignity of and causing pain to his slaves. In short, although happiness and being good to other people (or being good to other animals and nature in general) may be correlated, they are not inevitably linked.

However, the debate is somewhat different when it comes to the relationship between eudaimonia and impact on other people. Eudaimonia is defined as living well, not feeling well. This invalidates Phillips et al.’s argument (2014). It may be that subjective assessments can inform an assessment of eudaimonia, but they cannot claim primacy in the way that they do in relation to happiness or SWB. If we are defining living well in terms of its impacts on other outcomes (including the well-being of the individual themselves), there is no logical reason to reject extending this to impact on the well-being of other people.

Secondly, as Vittersø (forthcoming) argues, eudaimonia is about having a ‘good’ life, which means fulfilling the purpose of being a human well. And that is partially culturally defined. Following developmental psychologist and anthropologist Michael Tomasello, Vittersø argues that being cooperative, caring and concerned about others’ well-being is part of what it means to be human. The idea that ‘social interest’, i.e. striving to improve the welfare of others, is fundamental to being human has also been supported by empirical research (Klar & Kasser, 2009). Meanwhile, an experiment in the USA that calculated relative marginal utilities for different outcomes found that ‘being a good moral person and living according to your personal values’ was the fourth most important outcome for participants, behind the health and happiness of self and family, but ahead of 108 other aspects including financial security, autonomy and self-respect

(Benjamin et al., 2012). With that in mind, it is entirely logical to consider such behaviour as part of a definition of eudaimonia.

In other words, Frank may be happy in the narrow sense, but he is certainly not living well and not performing his 'humanness' well.

Note that the definition restricts the focus of the impacts of eudaimonia on the individual to *personal* well-being, but allows a broader definition of well-being when it comes to the impact on *others*. This is because the two links function differently. Behaving and thinking eudaimonically is adaptive for the individual and therefore we can expect evolution to have built in psychological mechanisms to encourage us to do so, mechanisms that lead to personal (particularly subjective) well-being. Positive impacts on the personal well-being of others, on the other hand, are likely to often be mediated by positive impacts on their living conditions, i.e. their broader well-being. So for example, someone who volunteers to pack donated clothes for refugees may not have a direct impact on the SWB of the refugees, but they do have an impact on their material conditions, which should in turn impact their personal well-being.

Feelings, behaviours or orientations?

By defining eudaimonic feelings (as opposed to eudaimonia) as 'the universally desirable feelings and experiences associated with eudaimonia' we are acknowledging the reality that most work in this field has measured subjective states rather than behaviours. Often, scales that are intended to measure orientations, such as an orientation towards personal growth, can also be understood as measures of feelings (i.e. an evaluation of success in terms of achieving personal growth).

This definition again avoids defining specific feelings or states, but sets up criteria for adjudicating which feelings can and should be included: i) they must be desirable (though not necessarily intrinsically desirable); ii) they must be universally desirable (i.e. relevant across cultures); and iii) they must be associated with eudaimonic orientations.

Note that the feelings associated with eudaimonia are not necessarily deterministically produced by pursuing eudaimonia. One can pursue meaning, for example, but not feel a sense of meaning. Environmental factors, person-environment interactions and other dispositional factors determine whether one's eudaimonic orientations lead to eudaimonic feelings.

A couple of key factors avoid the risk of circular definitions (i.e. defining eudaimonia as that which leads us to positive experiences and defining positive experiences as what we get from eudaimonia). Firstly, eudaimonia is defined as orientations that lead to overall personal well-being (including health), and not just eudaimonic feelings. Secondly, it is defined as leading to *long-term* personal well-being. Thirdly, impacts on other people are considered.

So, the possibly pleasant feeling from getting drunk and feeling carefree, even if it were universally desirable, would not count as a eudaimonic feeling because getting drunk – given that it has no long-term positive impact on personal well-being – is not an element of eudaimonia. Similarly, the feeling of satisfaction from having power over another individual is not a eudaimonic feeling because it involves harming the well-being of others.

3.2 Identifying elements of eudaimonia and eudaimonic feelings

Criteria

Armed with these definitions, the remaining sections of this report will assess potential candidate elements for the OECD measurement recommendations. Although our goal is to identify eudaimonic *feelings* for measurement, this process is mostly about the assessment of elements of eudaimonia itself (i.e.

orientations), as it is *these* which are primarily purported to be of value, both intrinsically and because they influence other aspects of well-being. In other words, theoretically a two-step process is necessary: 1) what are the elements of eudaimonia that best meet our criteria? 2) what are the feelings that are associated with those elements of eudaimonia? In reality, because the measurement of eudaimonia and eudaimonic feelings is not always easily untangled, the two steps are somewhat intertwined. The following criteria will be assessed:

1. **Consistency with literature:** Has this candidate element already been considered part of eudaimonia?
2. **Conceptual fit:** In the case of eudaimonic feelings, can this candidate be conceptually linked to a particular way of behaving or thinking?
3. **Association with long-term well-being:** Is there evidence that this candidate element of eudaimonia (or the eudaimonic feelings associated with it) determines long-term outcomes (including personal well-being but also other broader well-being outcomes)?
4. **Association with well-being of others:** Is there evidence that this candidate element of eudaimonia (or the eudaimonic feelings associated with it) is associated with pro-social or pro-environmental outcomes?
5. **Distinct predictors:** Does this candidate element of eudaimonia (or the eudaimonic feelings associated with it) have *predictors* that are distinct from the predictors of evaluative and hedonic well-being?
6. **Existing data collection:** Are measures of this candidate eudaimonic feeling already being collected in OECD countries?
7. **Continuity:** Was this candidate eudaimonic feeling already included in the original OECD *Guidelines*?

For criteria 3-5, we are particularly interested in candidate elements that provide information additional to standard measures of evaluative and hedonic well-being. Criteria 3 is relevant both in terms of the definition of eudaimonia (as leading to long-term personal well-being) and for its relevance to policy (in terms of predicting other desirable aspects of well-being such as productivity at work).

Long-list

Figure 3.1 lists possible elements of eudaimonia and eudaimonic feelings drawing primarily from Table 2.2, but including a few further candidates (which will be discussed in Section 3.3). In most cases, the links between eudaimonia and eudaimonic feelings are self-explanatory. However, some explanations are needed.

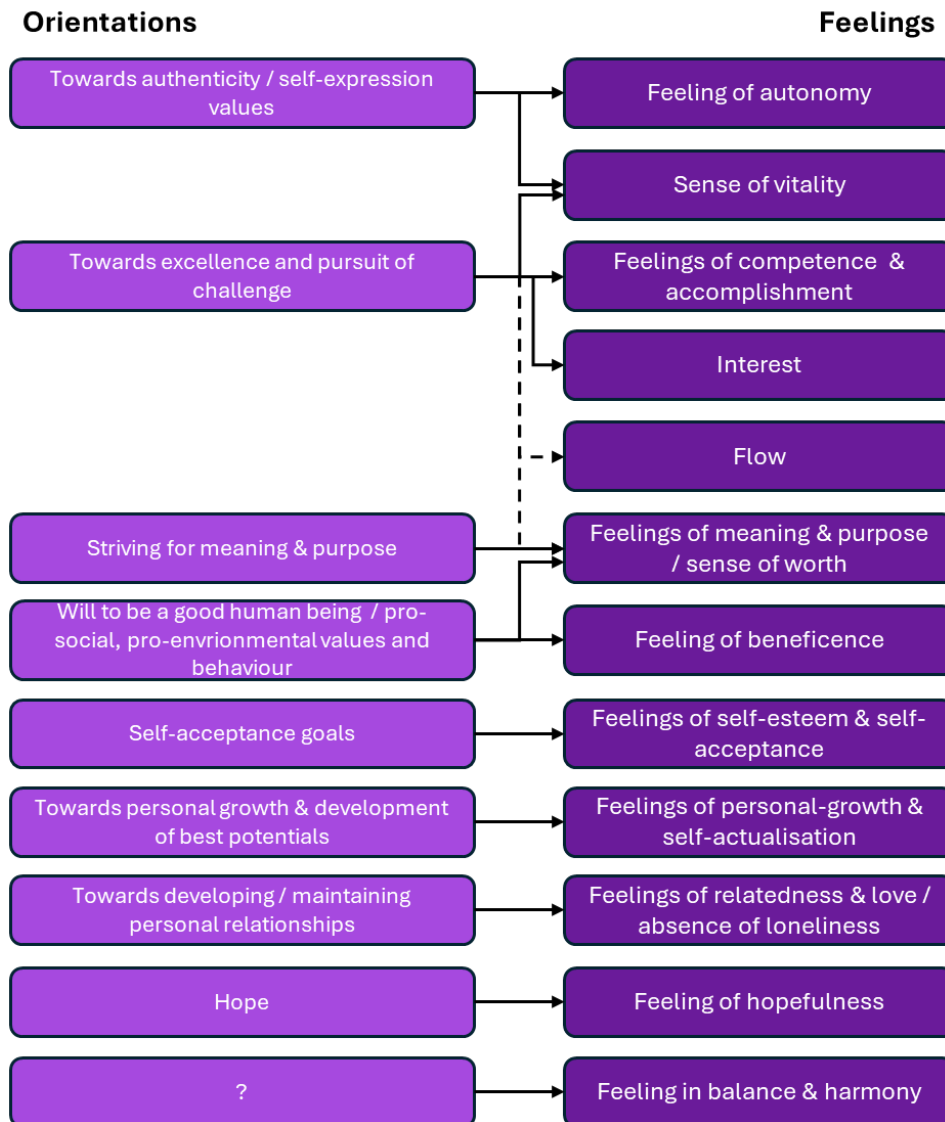
For example, as noted in the section on SDT, vitality is claimed to be strongly dependent on the satisfaction of the three psychological needs. However, evidence reviewed in Ryan & Deci (2008) suggests this is particularly the case for autonomy and competence, but less so relatedness. As such, we have linked sense of vitality (as a eudaimonic feeling) to the two orientations associated with autonomy and competence. It may be that vitality only emerges *after* a sense of autonomy and competence, and not directly from the orientations, but this distinction is not relevant for the purposes of this exercise.

Interest has been associated with pursuit of challenge (e.g. Vittersø, unpublished). Both flow (see Section 3.3) and sense of meaning may also emerge from pursuit of challenge, but we have not identified literature making this claim. Because of this, these links are marked with dashed lines. Recent research has identified a sense of beneficence as an outcome of pro-social behaviour (Martela & Ryan, 2016). However, we have also connected this behaviour to a sense of meaning, as discussed in Section 3.1.

Several of the elements listed include more than one specific concept – for example meaning *and* purpose, or competence *and* accomplishment. The implication is that these concepts are closely related, although

not identical. Naturally, when it comes to choosing questions for measuring these elements, decisions would need to be made as to whether all the concepts within that element should be measured, or whether one concept can be seen as representative of it. This will be discussed in Section 6.2.

Figure 3.1. Long-list of possible elements of eudaimonic orientations and eudaimonic feelings



3.3 Possible further dimensions

Figure 3.1 introduces two further potential elements that were not included in Table 2.2: hope and hopefulness, and balance and harmony. Indeed balance and harmony was not found to be included in any definition of eudaimonia by Martela & Sheldon (2019). In the final portion of this section, these two elements shall be evaluated in terms of their conceptual fit with the eudaimonic framework. Do they constitute ways of thinking, behaviours or outcomes and, if they are outcomes, can they be linked to specific ways of thinking or behaviours that could be considered as candidate elements of eudaimonia? Evidence on the links between these two elements and long-term well-being of self and others will be reviewed in Section 4,

alongside that related to the more established elements of eudaimonia. We also discuss resilience here, as it was only included in one model of eudaimonia discussed in Section 2.

Hope

Hope is defined as “a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)” (Snyder *et al.*, 1991, p. 287). It is the sense of agency that distinguishes hope from optimism. Being optimistic simply means expecting things to work out for the better. Being hopeful implies having a sense of agency in getting things to work out for the better.

This definition makes it clear that it is a candidate for a eudaimonic ‘way of thinking’, not just an outcome (the outcome could be understood as hopefulness). Nevertheless, hope has been all but ignored in research on eudaimonia with only one passing mention in Martela & Sheldon’s 2019 review and no mentions in Huta & Waterman’s 2014 review. Nevertheless, it is included as a strength/virtue in the Values in Action scale (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Also, optimism is included in all the frameworks we identified as being related to eudaimonia in Section 2.4. This might be the result of the influence of mental health frameworks, which typically identify hopelessness as a symptom of depression. It may be that the distinction between optimism and hope was not considered in the genesis of these frameworks.

Balance and harmony

Balance and harmony have been largely absent from academic considerations of SWB, which have tended to rely on Western thinking (Lomas, Ishikawa, *et al.*, 2022). In contrast, Eastern approaches to well-being, particularly Buddhist approaches (Wallace & Shapiro, 2006), see these concepts as central. Various recent papers have begun to explore this difference (Lomas, Ishikawa, *et al.*, 2022; Lomas *et al.*, 2024; Von Kriegstein, 2020; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006; Wang *et al.*, 2015).

Lomas *et al.* (2022) define balance as a state where “the various elements which constitute a phenomenon, and/or the various forces acting upon it, are in proportionality and/or equilibrium, often with an implication of stability, evenness, and poise” (p. 4) and harmony as a state where “various elements which constitute a phenomenon, and/or the various forces acting upon it, cohere and complement one another, leading to an overall configuration which is appraised positively” (p. 4). They note that there is a strong connection between the two concepts (indeed they use the overarching acronym B/H to describe them), but note that harmony is more unambiguously positive and has a ‘warmer’ feel to it.

In terms of well-being, balance and harmony have been proposed to be relevant in relation to four pairs or sets of elements: i) various dimensions of the person (e.g. physical, mental, social and spiritual); ii) self and other; iii) people and environment; and iv) present vs. future (Lomas *et al.*, 2024). The argument is that flourishing involves an individual maintaining balance and harmony across all these four dimensions.

This is an intuitively appealing notion, but should it be considered part of eudaimonia or something else? Lomas and VanderWeele’s (2023) taxonomy of happiness treats eudaimonia and balance/harmony as two different concepts, but they explicitly note that they are using a narrow definition of eudaimonia related to personal development. Our broader definition theoretically leaves space for balance/harmony related behaviours or ways of thinking that contribute to long-term personal well-being and/or the well-being of others.

To do so, three questions need to be addressed. One of these is the empirical question that is relevant to all elements of eudaimonia – whether balance and harmony lead to long-term personal well-being and/or the well-being of others – and will be addressed in Section 4. The other two are more conceptual and will be addressed here.

Firstly, are there elements of balance and harmony that are not already covered by other concepts? For example, harmony in relationships with others is an important part of the concept – but positive relationships are already within most eudaimonic frameworks. Whether harmony should be considered part of the definition of positive relationships is another matter. Secondly, whilst Lomas and colleagues and others have concentrated on measuring balance and harmony as outcomes, there has not been any work to define the behaviours and ways of thinking that are associated with balance/harmony. This lacuna is reflected by the question mark in the box linked to balance and harmony in Figure 3.1. If the experience of balance and harmony remains detached from specific behaviours (the core of eudaimonia), then it is best understood more as an evaluative measure. Indeed, this is the suggestion put forward by Lomas and VanderWeele (2023), who note that life satisfaction is a cognitive evaluation that prioritises high arousal happiness, whereas harmony is a cognitive evaluation that prioritises low arousal happiness.⁹ We will nevertheless not dismiss balance and harmony at this stage.

Resilience

Although resilience was included in Table 2.2, it was not discussed in detail in Section 2. The American Psychological Association defines resilience as “*the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands*”.¹⁰ It also identifies a number of factors that contribute to this adaptation, including attitudes and the use of coping strategies. In some ways, this definition is consistent with our conceptual framework for eudaimonia. It suggests that certain ways of thinking and behaviours lead to an outcome which is positive for personal well-being, presumably in the long-term.

However, there are a couple of conceptual arguments against including resilience as an element of eudaimonia. Firstly, resilience can only be manifested in the context of difficult or challenging life experiences. When a person has an easy life without facing major challenges, then resilience is not measurable. Secondly, the outcome specified in this definition is not a feeling or emotional experience and therefore cannot be considered a ‘eudaimonic feeling’. Questions measuring resilience tend to ask respondents to assess their ability to deal with difficulties. In a sense this is a subjective assessment of an objective reality, and therefore differs ontologically from all the other eudaimonic feelings considered in this study, which ask people to subjectively report their subjective experiences. Because of this we shall not consider resilience further in this paper.

3.4 Conclusion

Following the review of the main approaches to eudaimonia in Section 2, and the consideration of other phenomena that could be considered eudaimonic, the 12 eudaimonic feelings and 9 elements of eudaimonia outlined in Figure 3.1 will be taken forward for consideration in the remaining sections of the report.

⁹ Vittersø (forthcoming) considers harmony to be more closely related to hedonic well-being than eudaimonic well-being, based on his distinction that eudaimonic well-being is about the need for change whereas hedonic well-being is more about the need for stability.

¹⁰ Accessed from <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience> on 1 October 2024.

4 Relationship between eudaimonia and other well-being outcomes

In Section 3, a causal impact on long-term personal well-being was set as a criterion for identifying elements of eudaimonia. In short, ways of thinking or behaving that *do not* lead to long-term improvements in the personal well-being of the individual should not be considered eudaimonic. The main goal of this section is to review evidence for such effects with a view to informing the selection of the highest priority elements of eudaimonia for measurement. The section also provides evidence to support the claim made in the introduction, that measuring eudaimonia in general is valuable because it leads to long-term improvement in other desirable outcomes.

Furthermore, the definition put forward in this report stresses that eudaimonia should also lead to improvements in the well-being of others. Evidence for relationships between elements of eudaimonia and pro-social and pro-environmental behaviours or outcomes is therefore important. This should be of particular interest to policy makers, who of course are interested in improving the well-being of the entire population, not just individuals. In general, an element of eudaimonia that leads to well-being improvements for many people will be of more value than an element that only leads to well-being improvements for the individual whose eudaimonia has increased.

In this section, we will briefly review the evidence of relationships between eudaimonia (or candidate elements of eudaimonia) and a range of other variables including evaluative and hedonic well-being, mental health, physical health, education and pro-social and pro-environmental behaviours. Attention will be particularly given to evidence that eudaimonia provides additional predictive value vis-à-vis hedonic or evaluative measures (i.e. where there is evidence that eudaimonia predicts an outcome *more* than life satisfaction does). Combined, the evidence supports the argument that eudaimonia predicts outcomes are of value to policy makers. Where there is evidence related to specific elements of eudaimonia, or specific eudaimonic feelings, the element involved will be bolded.

After considering the ways in which eudaimonia predicts other outcomes, the section will explore how the *predictors* of elements of eudaimonia differ from those of evaluative well-being (specifically life satisfaction). The question here is how the distributions of some aspects of eudaimonia across the population differ from the distribution of life satisfaction. For example, life satisfaction is typically found to be higher amongst females than males in Western societies. Is that the same for all elements of eudaimonia? Where there are differences, they highlight the additional value of measuring eudaimonia across the population alongside life satisfaction.

Note that in this review of existing empirical evidence it is not always straightforward to distinguish between eudaimonia and eudaimonic feelings because, as noted in Section 2, most existing scales conflate the two combining measures of attitudes, behaviours and experiences or feelings. Given that most research talks about eudaimonia (or eudaimonic well-being) rather than eudaimonic feelings, and given that eudaimonic feelings can be understood as a proxy measure of eudaimonia, we shall generally use the term eudaimonia in this section, unless feelings are explicitly relevant.

4.1 Evaluative and hedonic well-being and mental health

Recent formulations of SDT argue that a link to SWB (both in the short-term and in the long-term) is a necessary criterion for something to be considered part of the concept of eudaimonia (Martela & Ryan, 2023; Martela & Sheldon, 2019). Ryff also stresses the importance of psychological wellbeing (PWB) for avoiding mental ill-health (Ryff, 2014).

There is now a wealth of evidence from reviews and meta-analyses that SDT need satisfaction (**autonomy**, **competence** and **relatedness**) is associated with better evaluative or hedonic well-being outcomes and reduced risk of depression (Martela & Ryan, 2023). Satisfaction of all three needs independently predicts other SWB outcomes in a range of cultures (B. Chen et al., 2015). A meta-analysis confirmed that **autonomy**-supporting environments in the context of health care and health promotion lead to better mental health outcomes, and this effect was mediated by psychological need satisfaction (Ng et al., 2012). A further meta-analysis confirmed that feelings of **autonomy** correlate with SWB, even in collectivist East Asian contexts (Yu et al., 2018). Environmental mastery (which is related to sense of **competence**) is protective against depression (see Ryff, 2014), as is sense of **purpose / meaning** (Chen et al., 2019; Steptoe & Fancourt, 2019).

Of particular importance is evidence that eudaimonia (measured in various ways, including **meaning and purpose**) predicts *long-term* life satisfaction and mental health in general populations (Joshnloo, 2018; Joshnloo & Blasco-Belled, 2023), and a wealth of studies show how eudaimonic feelings (in the form of need satisfaction) mediate the long-term relationships between values and motivations on the one hand and SWB and depression on the other (see Martela & Sheldon, 2019 for a review).

Some work has focussed specifically on eudaimonic *behaviours*, and found them to predict hedonic and evaluative well-being over the long-term, whereas hedonic-focussed behaviours only predicted short-term hedonic well-being (Ryan et al., 2008).

Considering specifically **pro-social** eudaimonic behaviours, a meta-analysis including longitudinal and experimental studies found them to be associated with higher SWB (including higher hedonic well-being) (Hui et al., 2020). Although this relationship is partially mediated by increases in **beneficence** (Martela & Ryan, 2016), this feeling plays a lesser role in ensuring SWB than the three psychological needs in SDT (Martela & Ryan, 2020).

With regards to eudaimonic motivations or ways of thinking, an intervention encouraging an orientation towards eudaimonia was associated with higher hedonic well-being three months later, whereas an orientation towards hedonia was only associated with those improvements in hedonic well-being in the short-term (Huta & Ryan, 2010). Meanwhile, seeking **meaning and purpose** has been found to predict life satisfaction (Peterson et al., 2005).

Considering the additional dimensions introduced in Section 3.3, some of the richest evidence relates to hope. As well as cross-sectional studies (Dursun, 2021; Harzer, 2016), **hope** has been found to predict *increases* in life satisfaction (Graham & Mujcic, 2024; Murphy, 2023). Meanwhile love (which can be linked to **relatedness**) protects against depression, particularly amongst older adults (Kahana et al., 2021). Whilst **balance and harmony** are hypothesised to be important to SWB, it was only possible to identify cross-sectional evidence supporting a relationship (Lomas, Lai, et al., 2022).

4.2 Physical health

There has been a wealth of research showing the positive impacts of eudaimonia on health, particularly based on Ryff's PWB scale. Because the scale mixes feelings and orientations, it is not always easy to distinguish the two. Nevertheless, the overall patterns are clear. Eudaimonia, broadly understood, increases longevity and reduces all-cause mortality. This can be seen in studies using the complete PWB

scale (e.g. Keyes & Simoes, 2012) but also studies focussing on the **purpose in life** component of that scale (Alimujiang et al., 2019; Boyle et al., 2009; Cohen et al., 2016; Hill & Turiano, 2014; Martela et al., 2024). A further study found that lacking a sense of **meaning** predicted the onset of chronic conditions four years later (Steptoe & Fancourt, 2019). Specific conditions which have been associated with low levels of **purpose in life / meaning** include heart-related conditions (Cohen et al., 2016; Kim, Sun, Park, Kubzansky, et al., 2013; Kim, Sun, Park, & Peterson, 2013), sleep disturbances (Kim et al., 2015; Steptoe & Fancourt, 2019), reduced physical functionality amongst older adults (Kim et al., 2017; Steptoe & Fancourt, 2019), and obesity (Steptoe & Fancourt, 2019). Various studies have explored the biological and neurological mechanisms that may contribute to these effects (see Ryff, 2023 for a review).

Some studies have specifically compared the effects of eudaimonia and hedonic well-being and found the former to be more important, for example in terms of lowering levels of cardiovascular risk and cortisol (Ryff et al., 2004) or in terms of the decreased expression of proinflammatory genes and increased expression of antibody synthesis genes (Fredrickson et al., 2013). Martela et al. (2024) found the effect of an orientation towards **purpose in life** to predict longevity better than life satisfaction does.

As well as biological and neurological mechanisms, behavioural pathways have also been found that mediate the relationship between eudaimonia and health. **Purpose in life** predicts use of preventative health care (Chen et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2014) whilst sense of **meaning** predicts increases in physical activity and healthy eating, and decreases in alcohol consumption, four years later (Steptoe & Fancourt, 2019). A meta-analysis has also demonstrated the importance of need satisfaction in the context of health care and health promotion (Ng et al., 2012).

Hope also predicts health outcomes, with a longitudinal study showing that people higher in levels of hope live longer and healthier lives (Graham & Mujcic, 2024). There has also been extensive research on the relationship between **hope** and positive outcomes in medical groups: posttraumatic growth amongst cancer patients,¹¹ psychological adjustment amongst burn victims (Dursun, 2021) and reduced depression among leukaemia patients (Tremolada et al., 2020).

Lastly, a meta-analysis including longitudinal and experimental studies found a positive relationship between **pro-social behaviour** and physical health outcomes (Hui et al., 2020).

4.3 Education and other personal outcomes

Much of the early research on SDT considered the impacts of need satisfaction on educational outcomes. A recent literature review found that satisfaction of the psychological needs for **competence**, **autonomy** and **relatedness** is related to autonomous motivation to learn, which in turn leads to better educational outcomes, that this need satisfaction can be fostered through specific **autonomy**-supportive practices and interventions (Guay, 2022). For example, elementary school children who perceive themselves to be **competent** at school attain a higher educational degree 10 years later (Guay et al., 2004). Meanwhile, a Korean study found that high-school students engage more in class when they perceive their teachers to be more **autonomy** supportive, and engage less when they find them controlling (Jang et al., 2016). This longitudinal finding also highlights the relevance of autonomy for cultures that are considered to be less orientated towards individualism.

Productivity at work is also related to eudaimonia, including to overall psychological well-being (Keyes & Grzywacz, 2005), sense of **meaning** at work (Martikainen et al., 2022), **hope** (Graham & Mujcic, 2024), and the opportunities to develop skills (which can be seen as a component of **personal growth**, Patterson et al., 2004). Pride in one's organisation, which can be seen as related to **meaning** at work, has been

¹¹ In this case hope predicted 16 times more variation than optimism.

found to predict lower rates of turnover and intention to quit (Abdallah, 2017). Meanwhile a range of variables related to eudaimonia at work (including **relationships** with colleagues, sense of **autonomy**, use of strengths, and sense of **purpose**) have been found to be related to job satisfaction or happiness at work (which in turn is known to predict higher productivity and lower turnover (Harter & Arora, 2010; Warr, 2007).

Lastly, the aforementioned longitudinal study looking at **hope** has also found that it reduces risk of incarceration and was associated with having more friends, highlighting multiple benefits to the individual (Graham & Mujcic, 2024). Sense of **meaning** has also been found to reduce the risk of divorce and lead to closer social relationships and more interaction with friends (Steptoe & Fancourt, 2019).

4.4 Pro-social and pro-environmental behaviour

As we have noted, perhaps the most interesting thing about eudaimonia is that it not only extends benefits from the short-term to the long-term, but also beyond the individual to others. This extension distinguishes eudaimonia from hedonic and evaluative well-being (Pearce et al., 2021). We have proposed defining eudaimonia to include behaviours and ways of thinking that contribute to the well-being of others, so this evidence base is particularly important.

One idea that is central to this is Waterman's motto "love yourself so you can love others". Waterman cites research showing a positive association between self-acceptance and acceptance of others, and between self-esteem and helping behaviours (Waterman, 1981). Work within the SDT framework has found that eudaimonic orientations, even expressed with a focus on the self, are associated with a broad scope of concern, including both pro-social and pro-environmental behaviours (Pearce et al., 2021). Huta et al. (2012) found a positive association with eudaimonic orientations and the SWB of close others. Sense of **purpose / meaning** was associated with volunteering both amongst younger people (Chen et al., 2019) and older adults (Steptoe & Fancourt, 2019).

Using the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation distinction within SDT, there has also been research linking extrinsic motivations to increased overconsumption and other behaviours that are harmful for the environment (Hurst et al., 2013).

It is worth noting that there has been less evidence that eudaimonic *feelings* (as opposed to orientations) cause pro-social or pro-environmental behaviour. One exception is a study which found that the effect of **autonomy** orientation on pro-social behaviour was mediated by the satisfaction of the need for autonomy (Gagne, 2003). However, this mediation was only partial, and the effect sizes suggest that the orientation was more important than the experience.

At the societal level, **hope** has been found to be an essential ingredient for political activism in a range of contexts including Black rights in the USA (Phoenix, 2019), conflict in the Middle East (Leshem, 2019) and climate activism (Geiger et al., 2023). People with low levels of hope have been found to be more prone to misinformation (Graham et al., 2024). Other studies have considered how hope predicts collective action across multiple political contexts (Cohen-Chen & Van Zomeren, 2018; Klar & Kasser, 2009).

4.5 Summary of the effects of eudaimonia on other outcomes

There is ample evidence of relationships between eudaimonia in general and multiple desirable outcomes, including increased SWB, reduced risk of depression, better health and education outcomes, productivity and pro-social and pro-environmental behaviour. Much of this evidence is longitudinal, some is even experimental, providing support for a causal effect. In some cases, research has demonstrated that these effects are larger, or at least, different, to the effects of hedonic or evaluative well-being, demonstrating that improving eudaimonia has instrumental value to policy makers.

Evidence that helps untangle the different elements of eudaimonia, however is scarcer, although autonomy, competence, and meaning and purpose have all been singled out on some occasions. Of the ‘additional’ dimensions that were introduced in Section 3.3, evidence of causal effects is strongest for hope.

One question which has not been addressed in this section is whether one can identify certain elements of eudaimonia as ‘needed’ for personal well-being as opposed to simply contributing to personal well-being, which is a distinction that SDT makes.

4.6 Distinct patterns of eudaimonia

Whether eudaimonia is of interest purely for its instrumental value, or intrinsically, it is useful to understand what predicts it, and in particular how the predictors of different aspects of eudaimonia differ from the predictors of life satisfaction. This knowledge can help shape policy and identify population groups that may be in need of intervention.

A direct comparison of effects of various predictors on life satisfaction and a sense of purpose in the UK found that effects on life satisfaction were generally stronger, but that work-related variables were often more important for sense of **purpose** (What Works Centre for Well-being, 2021). For example, the effects of being in employment, of job satisfaction and of having a managerial position were stronger on sense of purpose than on life satisfaction. Self-employment, working in a small organisation, working part-time and working in the public or third sector were only found to have positive effects on sense of purpose and not on life satisfaction. People whose main activity was looking after the home also had a higher sense of purpose than those in employment, but not higher life satisfaction. Meanwhile volunteering and being a student had stronger impacts on sense of purpose than life satisfaction. Lastly, whilst being a migrant was associated with higher life satisfaction, it was associated with a lower sense of purpose.¹²

Additional analysis of the European Social Survey

The European Social Survey (ESS) well-being module includes a large number of questions that measure candidate elements of eudaimonia. The most recent round of the ESS to include the well-being module was fielded in 2012. In this section, we present results from a simple set of regressions, with life satisfaction and 12 items that could be seen as measuring eudaimonic feelings as dependent variables, and a set of 24 independent variables. The list of dependent and independent variables, as well as details on methodology, can be found in 6Annex A.

Three groups of independent variables were included: 1) core demographics such as age and minority status, 2) activities such as physical activity and religious attendance, and 3) characteristics of employment. These variables were chosen based on a review of the questionnaire, and an eye to previous research that has identified variables that tend to predict aspects of SWB (Abdallah et al., 2013; Michaelson et al., 2009). Independent variables that involved a heavily subjective evaluation were avoided, because such variables are likely to introduce common-method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003) to the analyses. A first

¹² Another international study has compared the predictors of a variable labelled “eudaimonic well-being” with the predictors of life satisfaction (Joshanloo, 2018a). This study found that while women and men have similar levels of evaluative well-being, men had higher levels of eudaimonic well-being. Religiosity and education also predicted eudaimonic well-being more than evaluative well-being. However, the questions used to measure eudaimonic well-being did not conform with most theories of eudaimonia, and included a mixture of behaviours (e.g. volunteering or learning new things) and assessments of conditions within the country. As such, it is hard to draw conclusions about eudaimonia or eudaimonic feelings as defined in the current paper.

set of regressions included just group 1; a second set included groups 1 and 2; and a third set included groups 1 and 3.

For each independent variable (bearing in mind some independent variables were categorical and therefore produced multiple coefficients), the coefficients for each candidate eudaimonia variable were compared with the coefficient for the same variable for life satisfaction.¹³ It was noted when a) a coefficient was significant for the eudaimonic variable but not for life satisfaction,¹⁴ b) a coefficient was larger for the eudaimonic variable than for life satisfaction,¹⁵ and c) both the coefficients for life satisfaction and the eudaimonic variable were significant but in opposite directions.

On average (using a median), out of 63 possible coefficients for each eudaimonic variable, there were 8 new effects that did not exist for life satisfaction, 3 effects that were larger than for life satisfaction and 4.5 effects that were significant and ran in the opposite direction to the effect for life satisfaction.¹⁶ Table 4.1 lists some of the most interesting effects by concept (note of course that some concepts were measured by more than one item in the ESS).

Table 4.1. Differences in effects between eudaimonic variables and life satisfaction

Concept	New effects	Stronger effects	Effects in opposite direction
Meaning & purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> retired <input type="checkbox"/> watching TV <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> physical activity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> working in family business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> being sick or disabled, economic inactivity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> female <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> volunteering & providing help <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sector: health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age U-shape curve inversed <input type="checkbox"/> doing housework <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> self-employed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sectors: education & care <input type="checkbox"/> sectors: agriculture, accommodation, food manufacture
Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> physical activity <input type="checkbox"/> working in family business <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> autonomy in workplace <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> working in large establishment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> being sick or disabled, economic inactivity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> providing help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> female <input type="checkbox"/> living with partner <input type="checkbox"/> working in state-owned business <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sector: water & sewage <input type="checkbox"/> sector: food manufacture, electricity, agriculture
Relatedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> being in education <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> higher education levels <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> physical activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> being sick or disabled, economic inactivity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> living with partner <input type="checkbox"/> migrant and/or ethnic minority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> doing housework <input type="checkbox"/> female <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sector: water & sewage Unemployed but looking for work much less negative
Competence & accomplishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> being in education (competence) <input type="checkbox"/> being retired <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> higher education levels (competence) <input type="checkbox"/> watching TV 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> being sick or disabled, economic inactivity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> providing help (accomplishment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> doing housework <input type="checkbox"/> female (accomplishment) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> minority (accomplishment) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> self-employed (competence) <input type="checkbox"/> state-owned business (accomplishment)

¹³ All dependent variables were first converted into z-scores to allow comparisons of the coefficients between dependent variables (but not necessarily between *independent* variables).

¹⁴ An alpha threshold of 0.05 was used throughout.

¹⁵ This assessment was made more qualitatively, no statistical test was used to compare effect sizes.

¹⁶ Given the large number of tests and the risk of a high family-wise error rate, a Benjamini-Hochberg family-wise error correction was conducted (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995). At a false discovery rate of 10% none of the findings ceased to be significant (indeed this led to even more new effects being found).

Concept	New effects	Stronger effects	Effects in opposite direction
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> physical activity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> working in large establishment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> supervision duties (competence)		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sectors: water & sewage <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sectors: agriculture, food manufacture
Vitality	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> higher education levels <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> physical activity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> working central govt	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sick or disabled <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> volunteering <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social activities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> female <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> doing housework <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sectors: real estate <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sectors: food manufacture, mining, agriculture
Interest	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> retired <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> higher education levels <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> physical activity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> family business <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> supervision duties <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> autonomy in workplace <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> working central govt	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> volunteering <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> providing help	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> doing housework <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> migrant <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sectors: water & sewage <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sectors: food manufacture
Self-esteem	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> being in education <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> higher education levels <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> physical activity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> supervision duties <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> autonomy in workplace	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sick or disabled <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> providing help	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> female <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> migrant and/or ethnic minority <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sectors: domestic personnel, water & sewage <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sectors: agriculture, food manufacture
Optimism**	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> retired <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TV <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> autonomy in workplace	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> autonomy at work <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> volunteering <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social activities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> doing housework <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> migrant
Resilience***	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> retired <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> physical activity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sick or disabled <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social activities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> doing housework <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> female <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sectors: food manufacture

Note: "Sectors" listed under effects are employment sectors. For example, although people who work in health, arts, water or sewage sectors have lower life satisfaction than average, they have a higher sense of meaning and purpose than average. * Note that the effect of doing housework here is the opposite of that found in the study by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing which used data in the UK. ** Hope was not included in the European Social Survey, so optimism has been used in this analysis as a proxy (but see Section 3.3 for a discussion of how the two concepts are not identical). *** Resilience has been included in this analysis for the sake of comparison, although it is not being considered as a candidate component of eudaimonia.

Combined, these results highlight that policy makers seeking to increase opportunities for eudaimonic feelings cannot assume that policies that improve evaluative well-being will have the same effects, or conversely that only policies that could improve evaluative well-being can increase eudaimonic feelings. For example, physical activity appears to be much more important for several eudaimonic feelings than for life satisfaction. Furthermore, it highlights that some population groups that do not typically report low life satisfaction may nevertheless enjoy fewer eudaimonic feelings (for example women, and people doing housework). Furthermore, they highlight how different eudaimonic feelings tell different stories, making the measurement of several dimensions desirable.

5 Measurement of eudaimonia to date

Reviewing current practice is important both to have a sense of the data that are already available, but also because maintaining continuity and consistency are selection criteria in this working paper (refer to Section 3.2). This section will consider the original OECD recommendations and current national statistical office measurement practice in the light of our long-list of potential measurement concepts.

5.1 OECD framework

Of the nine elements recommended by the OECD in 2013, seven have been preserved in some form or other in the long-list, the two exceptions being calm and resilience (Table 5.1). Both of these concepts were included in the 2013 recommendations because they are part of Huppert's definition of flourishing. However, as discussed in Section 2, Huppert's intention was not to define eudaimonia, and none of the 'purer' definitions of the concept include these two components (hence its absence from both Table 2.2 and Figure 3.1).

Table 5.1. Original OECD recommendations compared to long-list

Original OECD recommendations	Long-list of eudaimonic feelings
CORE	
Meaning and purpose (I generally feel that what I do in my life is worthwhile)	Meaning and purpose
EXTENDED	
Self-esteem (In general, I feel very positive about myself)	Self-esteem
Optimism (I'm always optimistic about my future)	Hope/hopefulness
Autonomy (I am free to decide for myself how to live my life)	Autonomy
Accomplishment (Most days I get a sense of accomplishment from what I do)	Competence & Accomplishment
Resilience (When things go wrong in my life, it generally takes me a long time to get back to normal)	-
Vitality (I had a lot of energy)	Vitality
Calm (I felt calm)	-
Relatedness (I felt lonely)	Relatedness
-	Personal growth & self-actualisation
-	Interest
-	Flow
-	Beneficence
-	Balance & Harmony

In two cases, the 2013 recommendations can be mapped onto slightly distinct concepts which have been included in the long list. Firstly, **hope** is proposed as a candidate as opposed to optimism. As discussed in Section 3.3, hope is a more proactive emotion than optimism, including a sense that one's actions can contribute to a bettering of the situation. As a result, hope has been found to better predict positive outcomes than optimism. Nevertheless, actual wordings for questions may be quite similar, and there may be challenges in translating the nuances of the differences between the two concepts into other languages.

Secondly, the 2013 recommendation to include a question on accomplishment has been broadened out to an element on **competence or accomplishment**. Whilst an accomplishment question might still be acceptable here, the concept of competence is more reflective of the two dominant theories of eudaimonia – SDT and Ryff’s psychological well-being (where it is called environmental mastery).

Five concepts on the long-list were not included in the 2013 recommendations: **personal-growth and self-actualisation, interest, flow, beneficence, and balance and harmony**. Section 6 will consider which of these should be included in future recommendations, combining findings from the literature review in Section 2, and evidence reviewed in Section 4. Of these five concepts, personal-growth and self-actualisation have been most frequently identified as an aspect of eudaimonia (see Table 2.1). The challenge is to be able to measure the *experience* of personal growth and self-actualisation, rather than an orientation.

5.2 National statistical office (NSO) measurement

Table 5.2 presents an overview of the candidate elements of eudaimonia or eudaimonic feelings that are being (or have been) measured in official surveys in 12 OECD countries which were approached for this paper. The table is repeated in 6Annex B with the actual question wording (all translated into English where relevant).

Table 5.2. Eudaimonic concepts measured by national statistical offices

	Meaning & Purpose	Personal growth	Relationships	Autonomy	Competence	Contribution to others	Self-esteem	Interest	Vitality	Hope	Balance
Finland	Bright Green		Bright Green	Bright Green	Bright Green		Bright Green		Bright Green		Light Green
Italy	Bright Green		Bright Green			Bright Green					Yellow
Japan	Bright Green										
Korea	Bright Green		Yellow	Yellow	Yellow						
Luxembourg	Bright Green										
Mexico	Bright Green			Bright Green	Bright Green		Bright Green				Yellow
the Netherlands	Bright Green	Yellow				Yellow					
New Zealand	Bright Green		Bright Green	Yellow		Yellow		Bright Green	Bright Green		Yellow
Poland	Bright Green								Bright Green		
Slovak Republic	Bright Green										
United Kingdom	Bright Green		Bright Green	Yellow		Yellow					Bright Green
United States	Bright Green		Bright Green	Yellow	Bright Green	Bright Green	Bright Green				Bright Green

Note: Bright green indicates that a concept is (and continues to be) measured repeatedly, light green that it has been measured at least once, and yellow indicates that a related concept has been measured. Blanks indicate that we were unable to identify any measurement of the element.

Meaning and purpose was measured in some form by all the countries approached, with most including some version of the question recommended by the OECD in the 2013 *Guidelines* (see Mahoney, 2023 for more on this). However, whilst many countries have included the question in a one-off survey, only six have on-going plans to measure it.

There is some measurement of most other candidate feelings (or related elements of eudaimonia). For example, many countries have multiple questions about **relationships**, covering family relationships, satisfaction with relationships and/or loneliness. **Autonomy** is frequently measured, but in most cases the framing is very much about control over life or decision-making rather than the more subtle sense that what one does in life is authentic to one’s internal motivations. These questions may be appropriate for Western

contexts but, as we have noted, some theorists argue that they run counter to more collectivist perspectives of society. Similarly, we have coded measures of optimism as ‘yellow’ under **hope**. That means that they represent a related concept, but not precisely what is proposed in the long list.

Only one country has a measure of **personal growth** – the Netherlands. In that case, the question used measured orientation towards growth, rather than the eudaimonic feeling – hence it is coded yellow rather than green. Meanwhile, no country reported including a measure of **balance or harmony** in official data collection.

The Italian national statistical office, ISTAT, has dedicated significant efforts to defining and measuring eudaimonia (Tinto & Conigliaro, 2023). It has been measuring four concepts that it defines as eudaimonia: institutional and generalised trust, optimism, positive relations and (social) engagement. This shows an interest in pursuing the concept, though the approach taken differs from other examples highlighted in the literature explored in earlier sections of this working paper.

Finland’s approach is also promising. It has been closely informed by Frank Martela, and his recommendations for measuring eudaimonia (Martela & Ryan, 2023) have been included in the Finnish Citizen’s Pulse. However, this survey has been discontinued as of Q3 2024.

6 Suggested measurement recommendations

This section will first suggest recommendations on the concepts to measure as eudaimonic feelings, and then suggest specific items to measure each concept.

6.1 Concept recommendations for consideration

As a reminder, in Section 3.2, seven criteria were listed for the evaluation of concepts: consistency with literature, conceptual fit, association with long-term well-being outcomes, association with pro-social or pro-environmental outcomes, distinct predictors, existing data collection, and continuity with the 2013 *Guidelines*.

Table 6.1 qualitatively evaluates 14 elements in the long-list based on these different criteria. As well as the 12 eudaimonic feelings listed in Figure 3.1, two elements of eudaimonic orientations which do not have clear one-to-one mappings to feelings are also included in this assessment – pro-social behaviour and pursuit of challenge. The colour-coding in Table 6.1 is indicative, with bright green indicating strong performance on a criterion, light green indicating adequate performance, yellow indicating partial and orange indicating that the element does not meet the criterion. Boxes are left empty when no information is available. Details relevant to the colour-coding of each criterion can be found in the table note.

Based on this evaluation we recommend:

1. **A core set of four measures of eudaimonic elements: meaning and purpose, autonomy, relatedness and competence and accomplishment.**
2. **A standard module of nine, including the four mentioned plus: vitality, personal-growth and self-actualisation, self-esteem, interest and hope.**
3. **An additional experimental set including beneficence, pursuit of challenge, and balance and harmony**

Repeating the point made in Section 3, we have recommend measuring feelings related to each of these constructs, rather than attitudes towards them or behaviours to support them. Whilst attitudes and behaviours are also critically important, they are not subjective feelings and therefore, strictly speaking, not elements of SWB. Future work should be done to consider how to measure these variables, but it should not be restricted to self-report measures.

The core set identified includes four eudaimonic feelings that have strong conceptual fit and have been included in most theories of eudaimonia to date. All of them show strong evidence of predicting other positive outcomes both in isolation and in combination with other elements of eudaimonia. They are all also associated with positive pro-social or pro-environmental behaviours. All four show important differences to life satisfaction in terms of their main predictors (although less so for autonomy), and all four are already measured in some form or other by NSOs. The only one of the core set not included in the

2013 *Guidelines* extended eudaimonic module (Figure 1.2) is competence, although the related concept of accomplishment had been included.

Table 6.1. Evaluation of candidate elements

	Consistency with literature	Conceptual fit	Predictive power: Positive personal outcomes	Predictive power: Pro-social pro-environmental outcomes	Distinct predictors	Existing measurement practice	OECD 2013 Guidelines
CORE							
Meaning & purpose			Turnover intention, health, productivity, SWB				
Autonomy			Health, education, long-term SWB, depression	Pro-social behaviour			
Relatedness			Long-term SWB, depression, health outcomes, education				
Competence & accomplishment			Long-term SWB, Depression, health, education				
STANDARD							
Personal growth & self actualisation					n/a		
Self-esteem				Acceptance of others			
Hope (or optimism)			Health, productivity, incarceration	Linked to political activism			
Vitality			n/a	n/a			
Interest			n/a	n/a			
EXPERIMENTAL							
Pursuit of challenge					n/a		
Beneficence			SWB	n/a	n/a		
Balance & harmony			n/a	n/a	n/a		
NOT FOR INCLUSION							
Pro-social behaviour			SWB, Health		n/a		
Flow			n/a	n/a	n/a		

Note: “**Consistency with the literature**”: bright green indicates that at least seven of nine frameworks included this concept; light green that between four and six frameworks include it; yellow between one to three; orange that no framework includes it. “**Conceptual fit**”: bright green if both of the following criteria are met (1) the concept can be measured as a feeling or experience and (2) it is linked to a clear eudaimonic orientation; light green if only one criterion is met. “**Predictive power**”: bright green indicates that there is evidence related specifically to that element of eudaimonia. In many cases, however, studies used scales (such as Ryff’s PWB scale) where multiple elements of eudaimonia were combined. In these cases, the elements are colour-coded light green, as we cannot be confident as to whether all the elements within the PWB scale were responsible for the effect. “**Predictors**”: elements for which several predictors were found (in the analysis of ESS data) which were different to the predictors of life satisfaction are coded light green; where the differences are more substantial, they are coded bright green. For six components, we did not have data to test this criterion. “**Existing measurement practice**”: bright green is reserved for meaning and purpose, which has been extensively included in NSO surveys; light green is used for all other elements which have been measured by at least two NSOs; interest is yellow as it was only measured by one NSO; orange is used for elements which have not been measured in line with our conception by any NSO. “**OECD 2013 Guidelines**”: bright green is reserved for meaning and purpose which was included in the core recommendations; all other elements included in the eudaimonia module are colour-coded light green, with the elements that are slightly modified coded yellow.

Five further elements have been identified for a larger set of eudaimonic measures. All of these represent eudaimonic feelings that can be linked to key elements of eudaimonia. In most cases, these links represent clear one-to-one mappings, the only exception being vitality. However, as discussed in Section 2, vitality

is seen as one of the key outcomes of psychological need satisfaction in SDT and therefore as an indicator of eudaimonia (if not a direct outcome of a particular element of eudaimonia). Self-esteem scores well on the evaluation, but was not included in the majority of models of eudaimonia. Nevertheless, its inclusion in Ryff's PWB scale (as self-acceptance) and Huppert's flourishing scale means that there is plenty evidence of its relevance for other outcomes. Hope, as we have noted, was not included in any theory of eudaimonia, but Section 3.3 has argued that this has been an important omission, and Section 4 showed that it is important for predicting multiple outcomes, from health to political engagement. It is not a large step to move from optimism, which many NSOs collect, to hope. Interest has been identified particularly by Vittersø as an important outcome of eudaimonic behaviour. In the ESS, there were interesting divergences between interest and life satisfaction, for example interest being higher amongst migrants (whereas life satisfaction was lower), and being more closely related with education level, physical activity, volunteering and various work-related variables. As it is not typically measured in eudaimonia scales, we did not find evidence linking interest to other positive outcomes, but this is a potential area for future desk research.

The three elements recommended for the experimental set all have clear pluses and minuses. Of the three, the only one that clearly fits conceptually with our definition of eudaimonic feelings is beneficence, but the concept is relatively new to eudaimonia research. Balance and harmony also might potentially be understood as eudaimonic feelings, but they have not had been included in any eudaimonia theories to date, and measures are still in their infancy. The pursuit of challenge meanwhile, is clearly an element of eudaimonia, but Figure 3.1 presents it is an orientation, rather than a feeling. As such, in the context of SWB, it would be better to measure the feelings or experiences that emerge from that pursuit (namely competence, interest and maybe vitality).

We have not recommended including flow for measurement as it did not score well on any of our criteria except conceptual fit. Pro-social (and pro-environmental) behaviour is an orientation rather than a feeling/experience. NSOs frequently collect data on such behaviour already. It would be of value to collect this data alongside measures of eudaimonic feelings.

The 2013 *Guidelines* identified one single measure of eudaimonia (meaning and purpose) to include when there is only space for one measure. Such a recommendation is tricky to make purely based on the evidence. All four of the core recommendations performed well on the criteria assessed here, and they are not intended to substitute for one another. For example, in Section 4.5, the effect of gender on meaning and purpose was even stronger than the effect on life satisfaction (females had even higher meaning and purpose); but sense of autonomy, relatedness and accomplishment were all lower for females. Meanwhile, people who live with their partners have higher levels of relatedness, but lower sense of autonomy. Indeed, the correlations between the different elements of eudaimonia in the ESS are no higher than the correlations between those elements and life satisfaction.

If it is absolutely necessary to reduce the set to a single item, we expect that many surveys would continue to include a measure of meaning and purpose. This has been fielded in the most surveys, and is the element that has been most commonly used in predicting positive health outcomes. Looking crudely at correlations between the questions in the ESS, the measure of meaning and purpose has one of the highest average inter-item correlations. In SDT and according to Steger, meaning is considered as an *outcome* of psychological need satisfaction, suggesting it might not be a bad indicator of the three needs being met. Whereas autonomy and competence are very much focussed on the individual, and relatedness on relationships, meaning can be derived from both individual and social pursuits.

6.2. Item recommendations for consideration

As will have been made apparent in Section 2, most approaches to measuring eudaimonia have involved large scales with multiple items designed for measuring each element. Ryff's original psychological well-being scale includes 20 items per element (Ryff, 1989b) and the original psychological needs scale (Deci

& Ryan, 2000; Gagne, 2003) includes seven items per need. Whilst shorter versions of these scales have been created, psychologists tend to avoid using single items for measuring concepts because of concerns about measurement error (Nunnally, 1978).

However, whilst sensible for research and focussed surveys, long scales are unrealistic in large population surveys (Allen et al., 2022). This is one of the reasons why the eudaimonic measurement recommendations in the 2013 *Guidelines* were based on Huppert's Flourishing Scale, which contains only 10 questions, each covering a different element. The problem is, as discussed in Section 2, that the Flourishing Scale was not intended to measure eudaimonia. Of the four core elements identified in Section 6.1, two of them (autonomy and competence) were not included in the flourishing scale. Three of the five extra elements in the standard set are also not in the flourishing scale. Even in those cases where the flourishing scale does measure the same or similar elements (e.g. relatedness or self-esteem), it should be noted that the operationalisation of the scale was in effect determined by the questions available in the well-being module of the European Social Survey in 2006. Whilst Huppert did lead the development of the module, it was a collaboration between multiple academics, and compromises were made in the precise question wordings.

To be able to decisively recommend single questions for measuring the elements listed in Table 6.1, analyses would need to be conducted to demonstrate that those questions hold convergent validity with established scales that have been developed to measure those elements, ideally also demonstrating that they correlate with such scales *better* than any other question does. Such analyses are however disappearingly rare, with only one study to date that is relevant to our purpose (Martela & Ryan, accepted).

As such, Table 6.2 should be interpreted as a *first* set of recommendations. In Section 6.4 we will suggest further analyses that are needed to cement these recommendations. In some cases, we have suggested two or more possible candidates, to be decided on through further consultation.

These items have mostly been chosen based on their use in existing large-scale surveys and/or validated scales.

The **meaning and purpose** question remains unchanged from the original 2013 *Guidelines*. A standalone version is proposed alongside the version that is more appropriate for use alongside other eudaimonia questions. These questions have enjoyed the most uptake of all the eudaimonia recommendations made by the OECD and maintaining the same recommendation allows for continuity. Nevertheless, there is considerable scope for improving translations of the question. Section 2.2 noted that meaning contains three sub-components – purpose, significance and coherence. The English version of this question can be understood as focussing on purpose (pursuing personally valued goals) with perhaps an element of significance (that one has an impact on the world). A review of translations used in the EU-SILC module suggests that these have not always carried the same sense. For example, sometimes the question is translated as if it means something such as “do you think your life is worth living?”, which sounds rather negative. In the long run, it would be preferable to develop a question that is easier to translate.

The three questions derived from Martela & Ryan (accepted) for measuring **autonomy**, **competence** and **relatedness** have the advantage of having been designed to be used as single-item scales, and have been shown to demonstrate convergent validity with longer scales, divergent validity from one another, external validity (correlating with other expected constructs) and test-retest reliability. They have been used in a Finnish population survey. The autonomy question avoids focussing too much on the notions of freedom to choose and deciding for yourself, which can be seen as being more individualist. Being ‘able to do the things you want and value in life’ is more about not having one’s freedom restricted, and living authentically. It is also hoped that this question is relevant to more fatalistic cultures that place less

emphasis on individual freedom and more on destiny.¹⁷ There is a concern with the Martela & Ryan question on competence, in that it is double-barrelled, including an element of competence (do things well) and achievement (achieve goals). Because of that, two further questions are proposed here which have been used in large scale surveys and that focus more on the competence aspect.

Table 6.2. Item recommendations for consideration

Element	Item	Source
CORE		
Meaning and purpose	I generally feel that what I do in my life is worthwhile. (0-10 scale); Standalone version: Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things that you do in your life are worthwhile? (0-10 scale)	OECD <i>Guidelines</i> , VanderWeele et al. (2020)
Autonomy	I am able to do things that I really want and value in life (5-point Likert)	Martela & Ryan (accepted), Citizen's Pulse Finland
Relatedness	I feel close and connected with other people who are important to me (5-point Likert)	Martela & Ryan (accepted), Citizen's Pulse Finland
Competence & accomplishment	I can do things well and achieve my goals (5-point Likert) OR	Martela & Ryan (accepted), Citizen's Pulse Finland
	I've been feeling useful (last two weeks) (5-point frequency scale) OR	WEMWBS
	In my daily life I get very little chance to show how capable I am (5-point Likert).	ESS Well-being Module
STANDARD		
Personal growth & self-actualisation	For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing and growth. (7-point Likert Scale)	Shortened Psychological wellbeing Scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995)
Self-esteem	In general, I feel very positive about myself (0-10 scale)	ESS Well-being Module, OECD Guidelines
Hope	Overall, how hopeful do you feel about your future? (0-10 scale)	ONS (with input from Carol Graham)
Vitality	How much of the time during the past week you had a lot of energy? (4-point frequency scale) OR	ESS Well-being Module, OECD Guidelines
	How often have you felt active and vigorous? (two weeks, 6-point frequency scale)	WHO-5
Interest	How often have you ... felt that your daily life has been filled with things that interest you? (two weeks, 6-point frequency scale)	New Zealand General Social Survey, WHO-5
EXPERIMENTAL		
Pursuit of challenge	Over the past two weeks, how often have you done something with the primary aim of pushing yourself or your abilities? (frequency scale)	<i>New</i>
Beneficence	I feel that my actions have a positive impact on the people around me (7-point Likert)	Martela & Ryan (2016)
Balance & harmony	In general, how often ... are the various aspects of your life in balance? (4-point frequency scale) OR	Gallup World Poll (Lomas, Ishikawa, et al., 2022)
	In general, how often ... are your thoughts and feelings in harmony? (4-point frequency scale)	Gallup World Poll (Lomas, Ishikawa, et al., 2022)

Within the standard set, the 2013 recommendations regarding **vitality** and **self-esteem** are maintained. However, the WHO-5 question on vitality is also widely used, and analyses would be worth conducting to assess which question performs better (particularly in terms of translatability and external validity). In the interests of moving from optimism to **hope**, a new question recently developed by the ONS in the UK is proposed. However, initial feedback from reviewers in some countries has highlighted that the distinction between hope and optimism does not translate directly into all languages, and care should be taken to

¹⁷ It would be important to test this question with people with physical disabilities. The expectation would be that such disabilities would lower scores on this question, but that this decrease would be more moderate in physical environments which have been designed with physical disabilities in mind.

ensure that the subtle sense of agency embedded in the English word ‘hope’ is not lost, but also not exaggerated, in translation.

There are two possible candidates for measuring **balance and harmony**, one focusing on balance and the other focussing on harmony. The balance question has now been fielded in three rounds of the Gallup World Poll, and has already demonstrated value in analyses conducted on the data (Lomas, Lai, et al., 2022). However, cognitive testing showed that respondents think about many different things when faced with this question, and the most commonly considered issue was work-life balance. If many, but not all, answering this question are thinking about work-life balance, then a question on work-life balance may be preferable in terms of interpretation. In terms of assessing some deep underlying concept of balance, this may however not be optimal. Therefore, the newer question that Lomas and colleagues developed to measure harmony between thoughts and feelings may be more valuable. However, this has not been tested to any great extent in surveys.

No suitable single questions were found to measure the experimental concept of **pursuit of challenge**. As such, a new wording is proposed here. However, testing is required to ensure this question performs appropriately.

6.3 Methodological recommendations

The questions recommended here include a mix of response scales, recall periods and pronouns. This is because original wordings have been transplanted from a range of different surveys and scales. Survey designers are well advised to attempt to reduce the amount of variation in these factors. This working paper does not however make specific recommendations regarding this because the best approach depends on **contextual factors** including:

- The actual questions selected from the proposed modules
- Surrounding questions in the survey
- Survey mode (with the first person more appropriate in self-complete surveys)
- The needs and potential for comparability with time series or comparison data.

The last of these factors may require further explanation. For example, if an NSO already has an existing time series with one version of a question (for example, using a two-week recall period for the question on interest), it may prefer to continue to use the two-week frame. However, if the question is being fielded in the country for the first time, alongside the ESS question on vitality which has a one-week recall period, it may be preferable to adapt the question on interest so that it uses the same time frame.

Recall periods: The concurrent working paper on measuring affect argues that, all else being equal, shorter recall periods should be used. However, this logic may not apply to eudaimonic feelings, as they can be expected to be less frequent than general affect states such as happiness or sadness. Further analyses should be conducted to test whether a one-week or two-week recall period is best. More broadly, one could consider whether *all* questions should be framed with a recall period, as opposed to the more general evaluative framing used. For example, the meaning and purpose question could be asked as follows: “Over the last two weeks, how often have you felt that what you are doing in your life is worthwhile?” We are unaware of any research which has explored such approaches to measuring eudaimonia, but note that the approach put forward in this working paper is to foreground experiences and feelings related to eudaimonia rather than the more underlying orientations and traits. As such, there is a case for exploring more short-term experiential measures instead of the more general evaluative framing.

Response scales: For the time being, all else being equal, 0-10 response scales anchored with verbal labels are recommended for the questions without explicit recall periods. This would mean, for example, adapting the three core module questions taken from the Finnish Citizen’s Pulse, which currently use 5-

point Likert scales. For the experiential questions (which have explicit recall periods), it would be valuable to align the recommendations for eudaimonia with those for affect.

Question order: As discussed in the original *Guidelines*, questions on subjective well-being should be included as early as possible in surveys as they are subject to biases caused by priming from previous questions (OECD, 2013). Broadly speaking, more general questions should precede more specific ones. As such, it is recommended that, if eudaimonia questions are being included in a survey with a general life evaluation question, the life evaluation question should go first. Where it is not feasible to follow these guidelines on question order, the use of introductory text or of other questions can buffer the impact of context.

Translation: As noted on several occasions, translation is a challenge with SWB in general, and with eudaimonia in particular. As recommended in the 2013 *Guidelines*, a robust translation process, including back translation, is therefore essential.

6.4 Conclusions

The case for measuring eudaimonia is strong. Subjective well-being cannot and is not seen by most people as simply limited to life satisfaction and momentary emotional states (Benjamin et al., 2012; Kryszewski et al., 2024; Lomas & VanderWeele, 2023; Nussbaum, 2008; Vittersø, forthcoming). Even for those unconvinced by the philosophical argument for seeing eudaimonia as part of the ultimate prudential good, there is solid empirical research showing that it predicts outcomes which are uncontroversially considered valuable, including physical and mental health, other aspects of SWB and productivity (see Section 4). The effects on health outcomes alone imply potential huge cost savings for national health systems. Its status as a lead indicator, which can have a causal impact on other outcomes, makes it important to measure, as it can help countries assess the early impacts of policy changes or interventions, or detect future problems. Simply put, eudaimonia offers an actual theory of SWB, rather than just measuring it.

Despite the richness of the evidence of the positive impacts of eudaimonia, there is still disagreement on exactly how to define and operationalise it. This working paper distinguishes between eudaimonia as a set of ways of thinking and behaviours, and eudaimonic feelings as outcomes of these ways of thinking and behaviour. It provides a clear definition of eudaimonia as an overall concept grounded in previous definitions that avoids specifying which ways of thinking or behaviours should be considered eudaimonic, but also a set of criteria that allow one to empirically judge whether a certain way of thinking or behaviour should be considered part of the overall concept. It explicitly identifies eudaimonia as leading to outcomes that are beyond the now (long-term) and beyond the individual (pro-social and pro-environmental). It also acknowledges that, whilst theorists have been most interested in eudaimonia as set of ways of thinking and behaviours, it is eudaimonic feelings that are most often measured as indicators of this eudaimonia.

Based on the criteria set out, 12 elements have been proposed for measurement, with four identified as core measures, and a total of nine as a standard set.

However, due to a lack of methodological experimentation with different measures, it is difficult to make definitive recommendations on precisely how to measure those elements. The working paper makes suggestions based on existing questions which can be used already. However, it also calls for further question testing to be able to cement these recommendations. Specifically:

- Cognitive testing, to understand how respondents understand questions
- Test of convergent validity (with more established longer scales) and divergent validity (from other elements of eudaimonia and SWB)

- Testing of experiential measures as opposed to evaluative measures, as well as appropriate recall periods and response scales (assessing options for retest reliability, external validity – predicting other outcomes, and susceptibility to cultural and response biases)
- Careful translation, including back translation and cognitive testing of translated versions

This kind of testing would best be done by NSOs in collaboration with academics and research institutes.

Lastly, it is worth reiterating that this paper has focussed on the measurement of eudaimonic feelings, not eudaimonia itself. Such measurement, which needn't be limited to self-report, should be a future area of investigation in the measurement of well-being overall.

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Annex A. Analysis of ESS

Three sets of parallel regressions were carried out with 14 dependent variables (the 13 variables listed in Table A.1 plus life satisfaction). The first set included just the 10 demographic variables (Table A.2, column 1) as independent variables. The second set included the 10 demographic variables plus seven variables assessing participation in various activities (column 2). The third set included the 10 demographic variables plus seven variables on working conditions.

$$\text{First models: } y = \beta_0 + \sum_{i=1}^{10} \beta_i \text{demographic}_i + \varepsilon$$

$$\text{Second models: } y = \beta_0 + \sum_{i=1}^{10} \beta_i \text{demographic}_i + \sum_{j=1}^7 \beta_j \text{activity}_j + \varepsilon$$

$$\text{Third models: } y = \beta_0 + \sum_{i=1}^{10} \beta_i \text{demographic}_i + \sum_{k=1}^7 \beta_k \text{work_variable}_k + \varepsilon$$

Where:

y is the dependent variable (either eudaimonic outcome or life satisfaction)

β_0 is the intercept

$\sum_{i=1}^{10} \beta_i \text{demographic}_i$ is the set of 10 demographic variables and their coefficients β_i

$\sum_{j=1}^7 \beta_j \text{activity}_j$ is the set of 7 activity-related variables and their coefficients β_j

$\sum_{k=1}^7 \beta_k \text{work_variable}_k$ is the set of 7 work-related variables and their coefficients β_k

and ε is the error term

Omitting activities and employment from the first regression is desirable because then it is possible to observe effects of demographics on outcome variables that might be mediated by those other variables. Conducting a separate regression including employment variables was necessary because doing so excludes respondents who are not in employment. Had they been included in the first or second set of regressions, then those regressions would have only included employed people.

Regressions were conducted in SPSS using General Linear Model method. Data from all 29 countries in the ESS Round 6 were pooled, combined weights were used combining both design weight and country-population weights. Country dummies were included in the analyses, but were not analysed. Dependent variables were converted to z-scores before analyses, with Likert scales treated as cardinal variables. Variables were recoded such that positive values indicated higher well-being.

Sample sizes ranged from around 40 000 for the first models down to 33 000 for the third models (which included work variables). R^2 s for the eudaimonia variables ranged from around 0.05 (for the first model for 'free to decide') up to 0.18 (for the second model for lonely). These values were lower than the R^2 s for life satisfaction, which ranged from 0.23 for the first model up to 0.27 for the second model.

Further details available from the authors on request.

Table A.1. List of items potentially measuring eudaimonic well-being from ESS Round 6 Well-being Module

Concept	Item
Meaning & purpose	I generally feel that what I do in my life is valuable and worthwhile
Autonomy	I feel I am free to decide for myself how to live my life.
Relatedness	How much of the time during the past week ... did you feel lonely?
Competence & accomplishment	In my daily life I get very little chance to show how capable I am.
	Most days I feel a sense of accomplishment from what I do.
Vitality	How much of the time during the past week ... did you have a lot of energy?
Interest	How much of the time would you generally say you are ... interested in what you are doing?
Self-esteem	In general I feel very positive about myself.
	At times I feel as if I am a failure.
	There are lots of things I feel I am good at.
Hope (optimism)	I'm always optimistic about my future.
Resilience	When things go wrong in my life, it generally takes me a long time to get back to normal.
Calm	How much of the time during the past week ... did you feel calm and peaceful?

Table A.2. List of independent variables from ESS Round 6 analysed

1. Demographics	2. Activities	3. Employment
Main activity	Religious activities	Establishment type
Highest level of education	Volunteering	Establishment size
Disability	Meeting socially	Supervision duties
Age	Social activities	Autonomy at work
Gender	Watching TV	Working hours
Belong to ethnic minority	Physical activity	Sector (e.g. public or private)
Born in other country	Providing help for others	Industry
Living with partner		
Living with children at home		
Income		

Annex B. Example eudaimonic indicators from official surveys

Table A B.1. Questions on eudaimonia collected in member states

	Meaning & Purpose	Personal growth / challenge	Relationships / Relatedness	Autonomy	Competence	Contribution to others	Self-esteem	Interest	Vitality	Hope
Finland	I feel that my life is precious and significant right now.		I feel closeness and connected with people whom I care about and who care about me / I feel that there are close and good relationships in my life	I can do things that I really want and appreciate in my life / I feel that I can influence the course of my own life.	I can do things well and achieve the goals I have set. I feel I can pursue and achieve things that are important to me		How satisfied are you with yourself? (5-point Likert)		Do you have enough energy for life?	How confident are your feelings about your future at the moment?
Italy	Think about the aspects that make life important and meaningful. To what extent do you think your current life has meaning? (0-10)		Satisfaction with family relations, satisfaction with friends relations, people to rely on			Voluntary activity, civic and political participation. Helping others				In the next five years, do you think your personal situation will: Remain the same, get worse, improve
Japan	Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? Zero means you feel the things you do in your life are “not at all worthwhile”, and 10 means “completely worthwhile”)									
Korea	Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? (10-point scale)		I am lonely (4-point Likert)	To what extent do you feel that you are able to make life’s decisions autonomously? (10-point scale)	How satisfied are you with economic or social achievements you have done? (4-point Likert)					

	Meaning & Purpose	Personal growth / challenge	Relationships / Relatedness	Autonomy	Competence	Contribution to others	Self-esteem	Interest	Vitality	Hope
Luxembourg	Overall, on a scale of 0 to 10, do you think the things you do in life are worthwhile?									
Mexico	In general, I feel that what I do in my life is worthwhile. I feel that I have a purpose or a mission in life			I am free to decide my own life	Whether things go well or badly depends fundamentally on me. Most days I feel that I've accomplished something		In general, I feel good about myself			I am always optimistic about my future
the Netherlands	I feel that my life is worth living (5-point Likert scale)	The following question is on personal development Think about learning new things and skills, experiencing new things and accepting challenges. How important is personal development or you? (5-point Likert)				I feel I contribute to society (5-point Likert)				
New Zealand	Where zero is not at all worthwhile, and ten is completely worthwhile, overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?		Loneliness, family WB, family support, connectedness, sense of belonging	Where zero is no control at all, and ten is complete control, how much control do you feel you have over the way your life turns out? How easy or hard is it for you to be yourself in New Zealand? People in New Zealand have different lifestyles, cultures, and beliefs that express who they are. How easy or hard is it for you to be yourself in New Zealand? (7-point Likert)		Kaitakitanga, volunteering		In the last two weeks, how often have you: felt that your daily life has been filled with things that interest you?	WHO-5 questions (including active and vigorous, refreshed and rested)	How satisfied do you expect to be with your life in five years time? [0-10]

	Meaning & Purpose	Personal growth / challenge	Relationships / Relatedness	Autonomy	Competence	Contribution to others	Self-esteem	Interest	Vitality	Hope
Poland	I generally feel that what I do in my life is meaningful.								Please specify how often over the last month have you felt...? Full of energy (5-point frequency scale)	
Slovak Republic	Overall, on a scale of 0 to 10, do you think the things you do in life are worthwhile? [0-10]									
United Kingdom	Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? [0-10]		Satisfaction with relationships, loneliness	Over the last two weeks ... I've been able to make up my own mind about things [5-point Likert scale]		Volunteering				Overall, how hopeful do you feel about your future, where 0 is 'not at all hopeful' and 10 is 'completely hopeful'?
United States	My life has a clear sense of purpose [5-point Likert scale]		Multiple questions	What happens in my life is often beyond my control. Other people determine most of what I can and cannot do. I have little control over the things that happen to me. (6-point Likert) In the last month have you: Felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	I am able to do things as well as most other people. (6-point Likert) I certainly feel useless at times. (6-point Likert)	Care for a sick or disabled adult? Do volunteer work with children or young people? Do any other volunteer or charity work?	I feel that I have a number of good qualities. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. (6-point Likert)			The future seems hopeless to me and I can't believe that things are changing for the better. (6-point Likert) I'm always optimistic about my future. (6-point Likert)