



Integrated Positive Psychology and Paths to Resilience and Happiness

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A brief overview of what Positive Psychology actually is – and how it came to be.

We will look at factors that coalesce to create a holistic pathway to robust health, happiness and resilience – mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually.

Resilience and Positive Psychology –
Creating Health Through Happiness

What we are Covering Today





What is Positive Psychology?

- Positive psychology complements traditional psychology's focus on pathology. It studies strengths, virtues, and the factors that contribute to a full and meaningful life.
- *"Probably the biggest insight is that happiness is not just a place, but also a process. Happiness is an ongoing process of fresh challenges and . . . it takes the right attitudes and activities to continue to be happy."*

– Ed Diener



- **Martin Seligman**, often referred to as the founder of positive psychology, describes it as:
- *"The scientific study of optimal human functioning that aims to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive."*



A Quick Introduction



- Before the advent of positive psychology, mainstream psychology focused heavily on the negative aspects of life, such as depression and anxiety.
- The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM)* is a diagnostic manual owned by just about every psychologist in the world. But up until the early 2000s, there was no comparable manual that systematically classified positive human traits and values.
- In fact, between 1887 and 2001, for every 17 psychology studies related to the topic of negative emotions, there was only one related to positive emotions (Myers, 2015).
- A few researchers tackled topics like creativity, optimism, and wisdom, but there was no theory or overarching framework uniting them.

- Before World War II, psychology had three main missions:
- *To understand and cure mental illness;*
- *To improve the lives and productivity of individuals;*
- *To identify and nurture high talent.*
- However, given the humanitarian crises in the period following World War II, all available psychology resources were directed toward researching and treating psychological disorders.
- This is how the field of psychology came to operate within a disease framework. One product of this framework is positive: fourteen psychological conditions that were considered incurable can now be treated.





Positive Psychology Theory

- Positive psychology was born out of the need to scientifically study the positive aspects of life.
- The theory of positive psychology has evolved greatly over the last few years—an ever-growing body of research has been uncovering the building blocks of happiness and well-being.
- Through multiple studies, Martin Seligman found that the extent to which people were aware of and using their signature strengths (for example, courage, persistence, and wisdom) greatly impacted the quality of their lives.

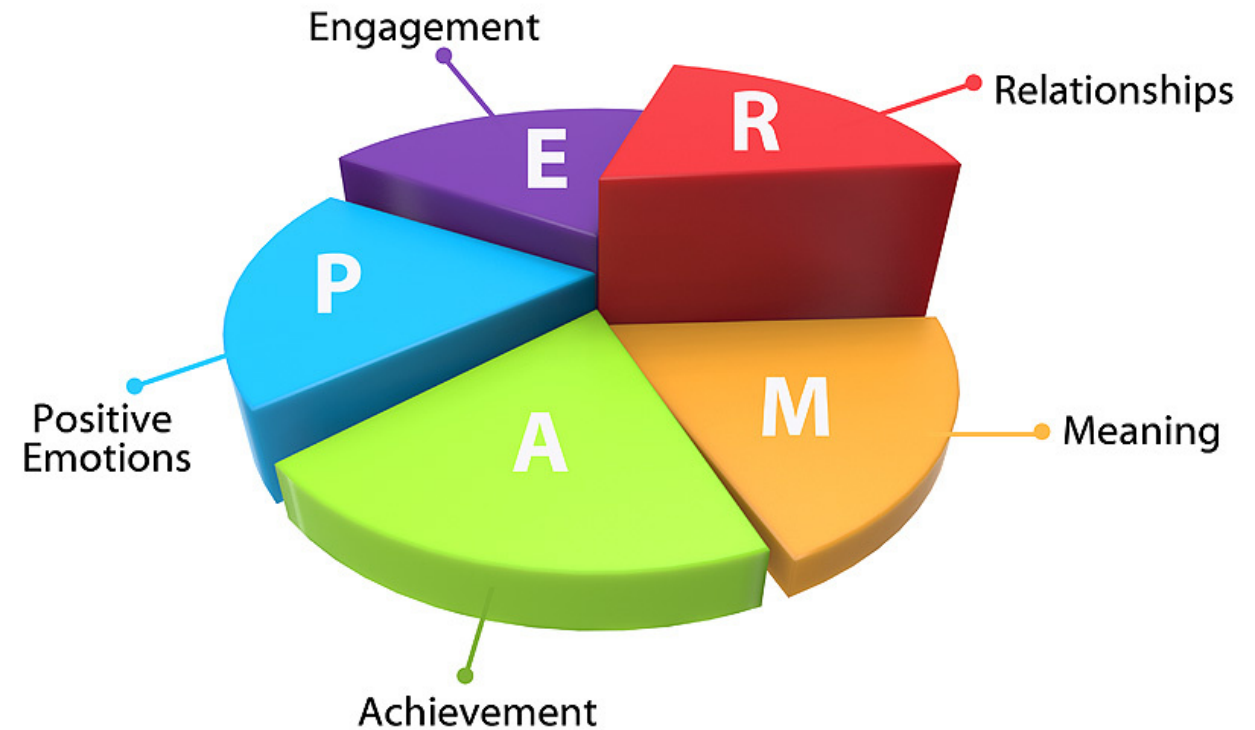
The PERMA Model


- Seligman spent years developing a theory of well-being called the **PERMA** model. The model comprises five elements that create the foundation of a flourishing life:
- Positive Emotions;
- Engagement;
- Relationships;
- Meaning;
- Accomplishments.



Each of these elements has three properties:

- It contributes to well-being;
- People pursue the element for its own sake - not just to attain the other elements;
- It can be measured and defined independently from the other elements.





The PERMA Model In- Depth

Let's take a deeper
look at each aspect
of the PERMA model.

It consists of five
components:

1. Positive Emotions

- ▶ Barbara Fredrickson, through her broaden-and-build theory, explains that positive emotions can build our physical, intellectual, and social abilities.
- ▶ She hypothesized that by broadening our awareness and thought-action repertoire, we look for creative and flexible ways of thinking and acting.
- ▶ Over time, this broadening effect builds skills and resources. Fredrickson's research shows that people who experience positive emotions make more connections, create more inclusive categories, and have heightened levels of creativity.
- ▶ Positive emotions also help us perform better at work and strengthen our relationships.

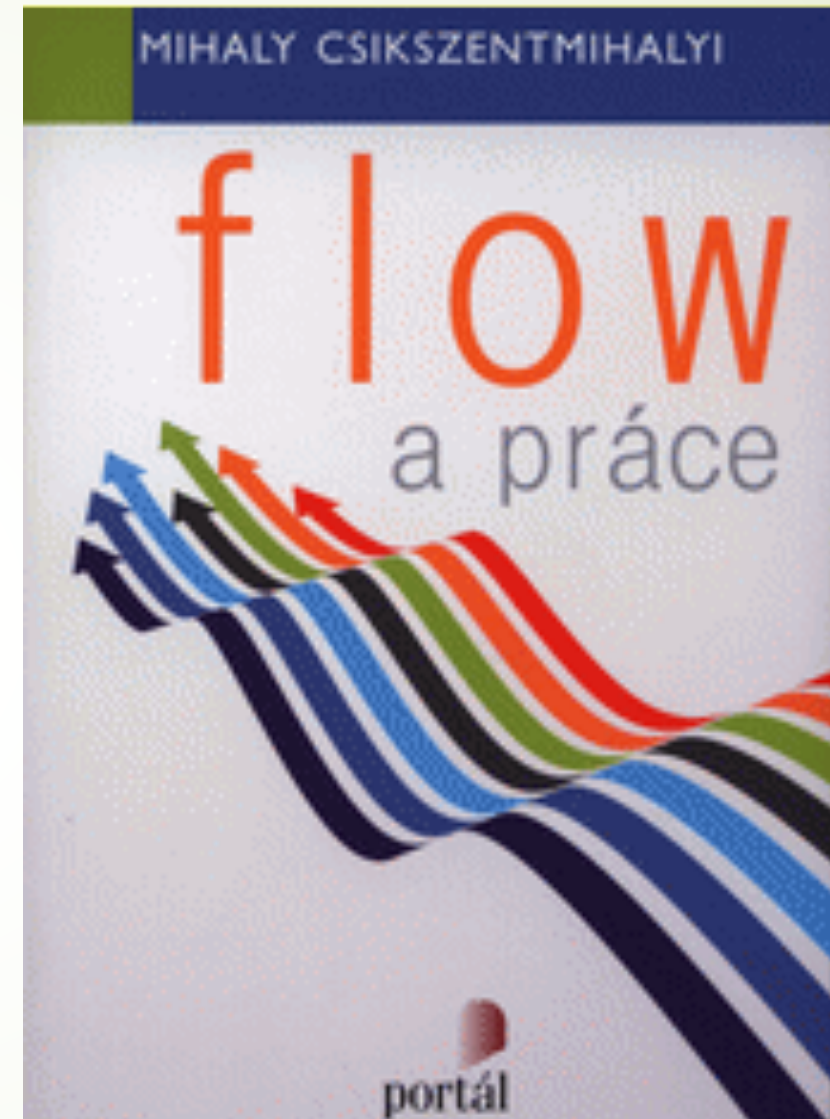
2. Engagement

- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the researcher who coined the term “flow,” believes happiness isn’t something that simply happens.
- Instead, Csikszentmihalyi says it’s the product of an individual facing challenges that are neither too demanding, nor too simple, for one’s abilities.
- Flow is an experience of optimal psychological functioning, where we are completely absorbed in a task that slightly exceeds our skill level, and therefore, requires us to stretch to a new level of performance.
- *“The best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times . . . The best moments usually occur if a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile.”*

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

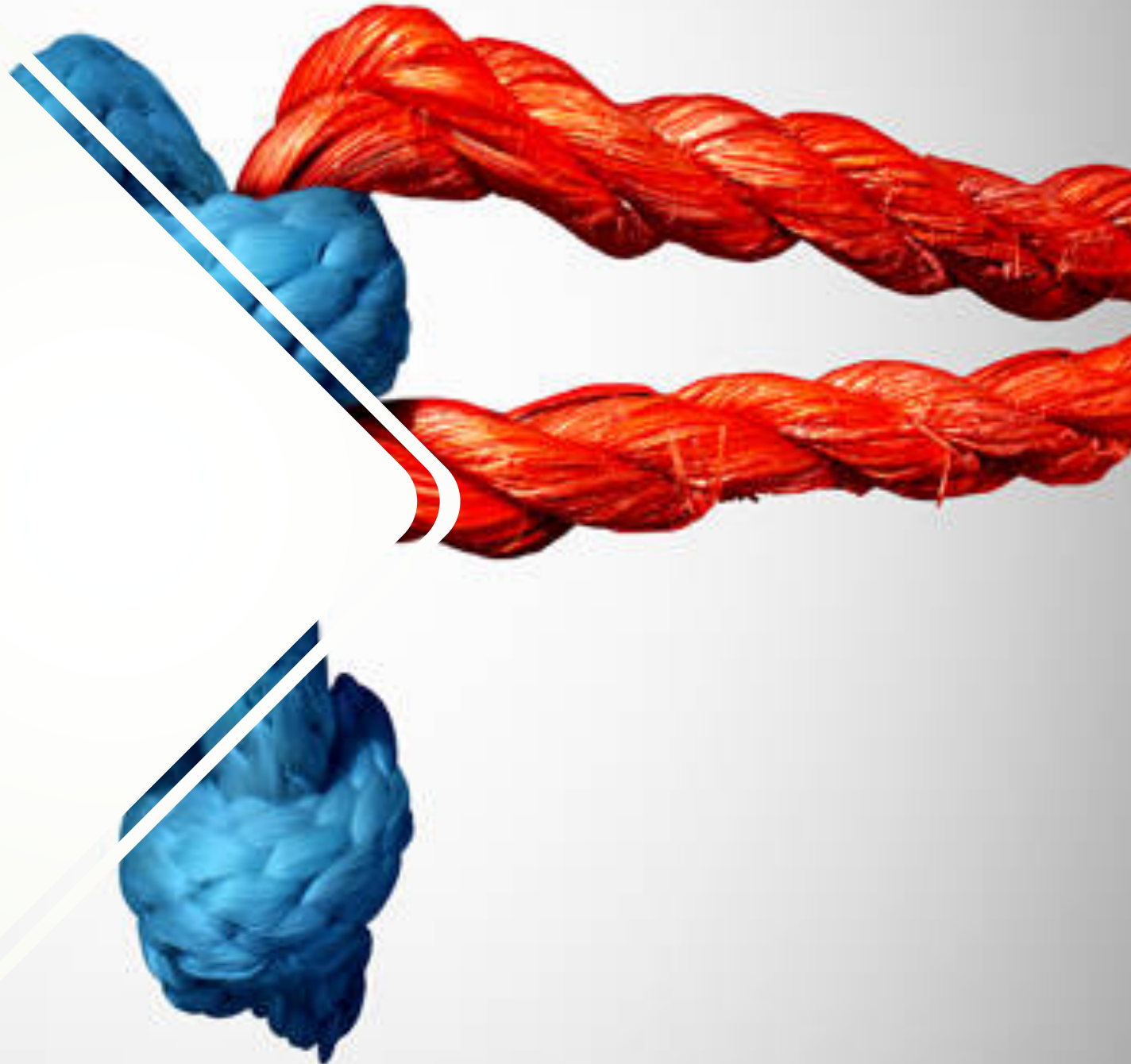



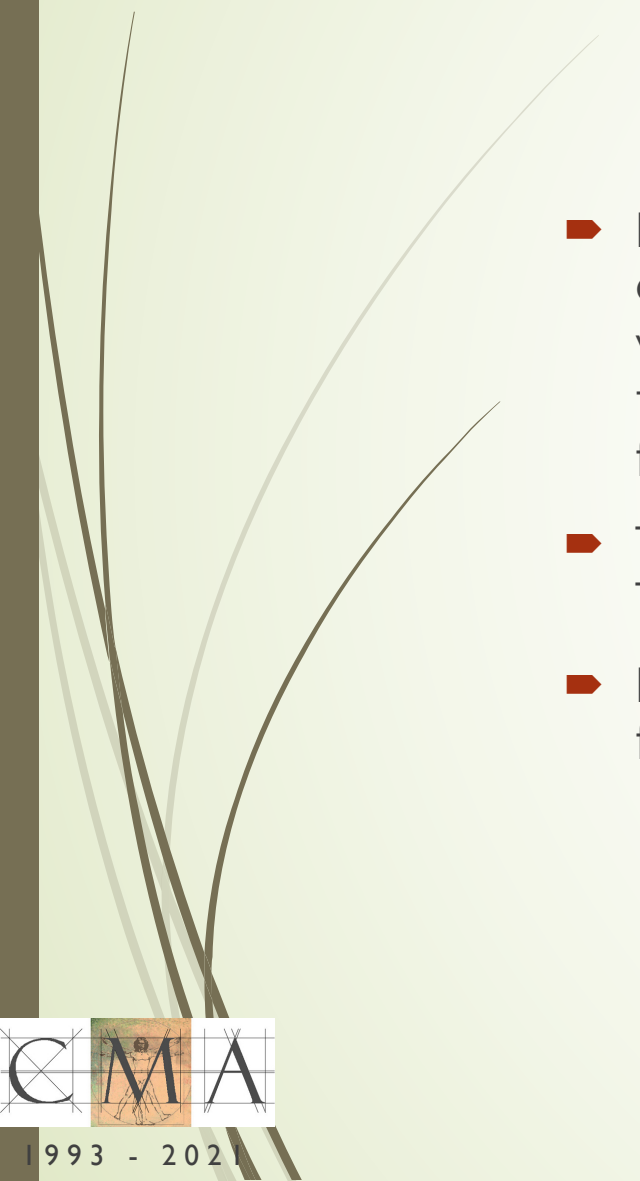
- When experiencing flow, concentration becomes so laser-focused that everything else seems to disappear and perception of time is altered.
- The incessant voice in our head also quiets down when experiencing flow.
- The prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain responsible for cognitive processes such as self-reflection and self-consciousness, shows less activation during states of flow.
- The result is a heightened level of performance and creativity.



3. Relationships

- ▶ As humans, we are hardwired to connect with others. We have a need for connection, love, and physical and emotional proximity to others.
- ▶ The need for connection begins at birth—human babies depend on others to care for them because they are unable to survive on their own.
- ▶ In addition, humans develop and learn about life and navigating the world through interactions with other people and the perspectives they offer.
- ▶ It might not come as a surprise, then, that studies have repeatedly shown that the one thing that sets happier people apart is the quality of their relationships.



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- ▶ Psychiatrist Robert Waldinger is behind one of the longest and most-complete studies of adult life. The study followed two cohorts of men for 75 years, starting in 1938. These men answered surveys every two years about the quality of their marriages, job satisfaction, and social activities. Every five years, researchers examined the subjects' physical health.
 - ▶ The study had one question to answer, What keeps us happy and healthy? The results revealed a simple answer: good relationships.
 - ▶ Dr. Christopher Peterson (1950-2012), summed this up perfectly with his famous quote:

"Other people matter."

4. Meaning

- Seligman believes that our level of well-being is affected by our *choices, attitudes, and behaviours*.
- *"There are no shortcuts. Well-being takes effort and persistence"*.
- And while positive emotions are necessary to a healthy life, fostering a deeper, more enduring sense of well-being requires an exploration of meaning.
- *"Use your signature strengths and virtues in the service of something much larger than you are."*



He also states
that
authentic
happiness is:

- *"A preface to the meaningful life and that while it is possible take drugs to generate the effects of positive emotion and pleasure through pharmacology, it is not possible to synthesize the positive effects of being in the flow or of experiencing meaning."*
- When we only chase pleasure for its own sake and fail to use our strengths toward something meaningful, we might squander our potential. But when we apply and develop our unique strengths and virtues toward something bigger than ourselves, we experience a deeper sense of satisfaction.

5.

Accomplishments

- People who feel personally involved in achieving their goals indicate higher levels of well-being and are in better health than people who lack a sense of direction in their lives.
- Not all goals contribute equally to well-being. Goals that lead to well-being are personally meaningful.
- In the early 1960s, Seligman was working in Professor Byron Campbell's lab at Princeton University.
- At that time, the prevailing theory of motivation was drive reduction-theory, which states that all animals act based on the need to satisfy their biological needs.



- However, in 1959, Robert White published an article titled “Motivation reconsidered: the concept of competence,” which went against drive-reduction theory.
- In it, he argued that rather than just satisfying biological needs, people and animals often acted for the sake of mastery over their environments.
- Seligman found this to be true. We often pursue accomplishment for its own sake, even if it doesn’t translate into an increase in positive emotions, meaning, or the quality of relationships.
- So how do we shift our perspective to incorporate these other aspects that help humans thrive?





A Brief Summary

- Seligman explains how with positive psychology and his holistic study of happiness, he is:

“[...] trying to broaden the scope of positive psychology well beyond the smiley face. Happiness is just one fifth of what human beings choose to do.”

– Martin Seligman

Seligman, M. E. P. (2012). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

A group of people, including adults and children, are silhouetted against a bright sunset. They are holding hands in a circle, with their arms raised, creating a sense of unity and joy. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow across the sky and the silhouettes of the people. The overall mood is peaceful and hopeful.

What else can we do to holistically
increase happiness in ourselves and
others?

Awe



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Nature



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Nourishment



Sleep



Exercise



Relationships



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A ACTION
C CHANGES
T THINGS



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