Preparing for Sustained Joy & Well-Being in Leadership Roles

Happiness and well-being are complex, dynamic and multi-faceted (Forgeared et al., 2011). Frequent experiences of positive emotions and happiness in the workplace lead to:

- enhanced individual and organization learning, problem solving and creativity,
- improved social relationships,
- better workplace performance and productivity,
- decreased susceptibility to burnout, absenteeism and turnover,
- increased job satisfaction, and
- higher rates of organizational citizenship and community volunteerism (Clément et al., 2024; Fredrickson, 1998; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

Like many leadership skills, we can intentionally work to strengthen our capacity for experiencing greater happiness and wellbeing in the workplace.

The PERMA Flourishing Framework

Wellbeing combines elements of feeling good and positive functioning (Huppert & So, 2013). The PERMA 'flourishing' model (Seligman, 2012; Slavin et al., 2012) is an accessible framework for promoting individual and workplace well-being. The framework is based on five elements:

- Positive Emotions: Feeling joy, hope, compassion, pride, gratitude and contentment. Reducing stressors, promoting positive coping & resilience.

- Engagement: Feeling attached, involved, absorbed and able to concentrate on activities. Creating meaningful opportunities to draw on strengths and interests.

- Relationships: Feeling connected, supported, and cared about by others. Promoting opportunities for collaboration and interaction with and amongst teams.

- Meaning: Feeling valued and connected to something greater than self. Connecting to purpose and promoting reflection.

- Accomplishment: Progressing towards goals, feeling capable and a sense of achievement. Providing autonomy and celebrating success.

In their updated PERMA+4 framework Donaldson et al. (2022) propose four additional elements to the PERMA framework:

- Physical health: perceptions of physical health, physiological functioning; engagement in physical activities.
- Mindset: embracing a learning and growth-mindset; pursuing goals; sense of hope and self-efficacy; expressing gratitude; reframing failure.
- Work Environment: physical work environment, design and safety, connectedness to others.
- Economic Security: financial well-being; managing financial obligations; certainty of one's financial future.

Toxic Positivity and Toxic Resilience

Flourishing should not be conflated with toxic positivity or toxic resilience. Toxic positivity is an overgeneralization or excessive expression of happiness and optimism that invalidates genuine emotional experiences, suppresses challenging emotions, impedes emotional resilience and growth, and often contributes to stress and burnout (Wyatt, 2024). In contrast, emotional authenticity (e.g., identifying, validating, accepting, and processing emotions) and psychological safety (e.g., where it is safe to take risks, admit mistakes and express ideas without fear of consequences) support positive and productive work cultures (Edmondson, 2018; Wyatt, 2024). Likewise, toxic or maladaptive resilience refers to when we continually attempt to cope and adapt to adverse or harmful situations when we actually need to change the situation, care for ourselves, or seek additional support (Mahdiani & Ungar, 2021; Lee, 2024). This contrasts traditional models of resilience which reinforce positive adaptation or coping in the face of adversity, ultimately leading to learning and growth (Mahdiani & Ungar, 2021).

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Session Reflections

If you had to explain the most meaningful and relevant thing you learned today in one sentence, what would you say? Who would you most like to share this learning with?

What one action or next step will you take as a result of today's discussions? How does this relate to your PERMA self-assessment (if applicable)?

How will you keep yourself accountable to this next step? What supports might help you?

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PERMA framework (Seligman, 2012; Donaldson et al., 2022)	Recommendations for promoting well-being	What can you do to support yourself in these areas?	What can you do to support your teams or colleagues in each of these areas?
Positive Emotions feeling joy, hope, gratitude, compassion, and contentment	reduce stressors, promote positive coping & resilience		
Engagement feeling attached, involved and an ability to concentrate on activities	create meaningful opportunities to draw on strengths & interests		
Relationships feeling connected, supported and cared about	promote opportunities for collaboration & interaction within & amongst teams		
Meaning feeling valued and connected to something greater than self	connect to purpose & promote reflection		
Accomplishment progressing towards goals, feeling capable and a sense of achievement	provide autonomy & celebrate success		
Additional reflections on PERMA+4	physical health, mindset, work environment, economic security		