

Flourishing

Peggy Andrews, PhD, SPHR

11/10/16

An Important Assumption

The opportunity to experience the state of flourishing presupposes that an individual has freedom or significant control over his or her life (Devettere, 2002), as well as a minimal threshold of physical security in terms of adequate food, shelter, and human connection (Snow, 2008).

Indicators of Flourishing

- Experiencing a sense of wellbeing that involves a combination of *feeling* well and *functioning* well psychologically and socially. (Keyes, 2002)
- Ability to reflect on one's actions and their implications, and to choose those that will lead to a well-functioning life overall, regardless of short-term inconvenience or pain. (Hinchliffe, 2004)
- A conscious rejection of selfishness. (InterVarsity, 2008)
- Commitment that seeking one's own good is compatible with and even predicated on seeking the good of the community. (Devettere, 2002)

Identifying Flourishing

- "Flourishing differs from contemporary understandings of happiness or pleasure in that an individual who is experiencing emotional or physical difficulty can still be described as flourishing based on how he or she faces and overcomes these circumstances." (Keyes, 2002)
- Human flourishing is primarily an objective state that in principle could be ascertained from a third-person perspective. Indeed, there is room for the paradox of the flourishing person who is feeling unhappy. (Gómez-Lobo, 2008, p. 895)
- There are many ways for a life to go well, and each person's happiness depends to some extent on the idiosyncratic features of the individual's personality and of the situations in which the agent exists. Happiness has to be somewhat of a vague notion because it has to cover many different kinds of life for many different kinds of people living in many different kinds of situations. To describe *a priori* the boundaries of happiness in a strict definition is to close off prematurely **the many unknown ways human beings can live truly good lives**. No one can give an exact definition of happiness because each person is unique and lives in a unique set of circumstances. Happiness is living a truly fulfilling and meaningful life, and there are many ways to do this...**No rich description of happiness can be given in advance because it would not cover all the various good ways the human life of each unique individual can unfold**. (Devettere, 2002, pp. 52-53) [emphasis added]

Not Flourishing...

The opposite of flourishing is not necessarily depression. Not all individuals who are not experiencing a state of flourishing are necessarily experiencing mental illness. This state of having an absence of mental health without the presence of a mental illness is known as “languishing” and is evidenced by (a) experiencing feelings or functioning that is in opposition to the symptoms of flourishing (Keyes & Haidt, 2002), (b) experiencing alienation and estrangement rather than connection and belonging (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002), and (c) feeling either overwhelmed or bored by the activities of life rather than confident and challenged by them (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes 2002).

Results of Flourishing

- Individuals who have been categorized as flourishing, according to this rubric, “have excellent emotional health, miss fewer days of work, cut back on work on fewer days, and have fewer physical limitations on their daily lives” (Keyes, 2002, p. 294).

- The wellbeing of employees is in the best interest of employers. When demands meet or slightly exceed resources individuals experience positive emotional states and they perceive themselves as growing, engaged and productive. These positive feelings are associated with:
 - Higher customer loyalty
 - Higher profitability
 - Higher productivity
 - Lower rates of turnover(Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2002)

References

- Devettere, R. (2002). *Introduction to virtue ethics: Insights of the Ancient Greeks*. Washington, DC: Washington University Press.
- Dutton, J, & Sonenshein, S. (2007), Positive Organizational Scholarship, in S. Lopez and A. Beauchamps (Eds). *Encyclopedia of Positive Psychology*. Blackwell Publishing
- Harter, J., Schmidt, F., & Keyes, C. (2002). Well-being in the workplace and its relationship to business outcomes: A review of the Gallup studies. In C. Keyes & J. Haidt (Eds.), *Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Hinchliffe, G. (2004). Work and human flourishing. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 36(5), 535–547.
- InterVarsity. (2008). Human flourishing: A thematic overview. Retrieved July 11, 2009 from http://www.intervarsity.org/gfm/download.php?id=6649&version_id=9219
- Keyes, C. (2002). Complete mental health: An agenda for the 21st century. In C. Keyes & J. Haidt (Eds.), *Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.