Chapter 7

Career well-being

Learning outcomes

After studying this chapter you should be able to:

- explain the difference between the disease model and the positive psychology model;
- distinguish between different approaches to well-being;
- explain psychological states associated with flourishing at work;
- evaluate the antecedents of flourishing at work;
- identify the role of personality traits in flourishing at work;
- review the outcomes of flourishing and languishing at work; and
- evaluate organisational and individual interventions to promote flourishing at work.

INTRODUCTION

People’s experiences of subjective career success (see Chapter 3) have been linked to their sense of well-being at work. While the notion of career well-being has been used by Kidd (2008) to measure people’s subjective career experiences as expressed by their positive and negative feelings about their careers, other researchers such as Gottfredson and Duffy (2008) and Coetzee and Bergh (2009) use more general measures of subjective well-being (including happiness and satisfaction) in the careers context. In order to flourish and prosper, and to survive in a continuously changing environment, organisations need employees who are well. Individuals’ experiences, be they physical, emotional, social or spiritual in nature, affect their well-being in the workplace. Individuals spend
almost one-third of their waking time at work. Therefore, work and career affect the well-being of employees (Hart, 1999; Kelloway & Barling, 1991).

The well-being of employees can be explained in the light of two models, namely the disease model and the positive psychology model:

- **The disease model**: Psychologists have long been concerned with the psychopathological underpinnings of suffering, ill health and deviance. Research focusing on these psychopathological aspects culminated in the disease model (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Although the disease model produced accurate means for the classification, identification and treatment of psychopathology, well-being and optimal development have not been studied to the same extent (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

- **The positive psychology model**: Decades of research focused on the disease model overshadowed efforts to enhance the states which make life worth living. Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2000) introduced the paradigm of positive psychology. Positive psychology refers to the science of subjective experiences, positive institutions and individual traits which improve well-being and prevent the onset of psychopathology, or stated briefly, the *science of happiness* (Seligman, 2002).

### Table 7.1 Models of well-being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The disease model</th>
<th>The positive psychology model</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The disease model focuses on ill health and unhappiness. Almost 96 per cent of articles in scientific journals in psychology have focused on negative outcomes, such as aggression, alcoholism, bullying, burnout, conflict, harassment, job insecurity, occupational stress and work-life interference.</td>
<td>The positive psychology model focuses on well-being and happiness. About 4 per cent of articles in scientific journals have focused on positive outcomes, such as engagement, happiness, hope, job satisfaction, optimism and meaning.</td>
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</table>

Since World War II, psychology has focused its efforts on psychological problems and how to remedy them. Good progress has been made in understanding and treating psychological disorders. Effective treatments now exist for various disorders that were once seen as intractable. However, psychology had little to say about *optimal functioning* (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology adds a focus on positive feelings...
and positive functioning, and asserts that human goodness and excellence is just as authentic as distress and disorder. In work and organisational contexts, the disease model is needed to understand the origins of illness, stress and burnout. However, the disease model is not sufficient for understanding the optimal functioning of individuals and organisations in the 21st century.

Why is the positive psychology model needed in work and organisational contexts? The workplace of the 21st century differs from workplaces in previous centuries. Developments in technology have paved the way for any number of changes, including globalisation, the rise of the knowledge worker, and the creation of more niche markets. The result was high competition and a strong focus on customising products and services to individual needs.

Some of the specific changes affecting individuals and organisations (also see Chapter 2) include the following (Robbins & Judge, 2013; Schultz & Schultz, 2014):

- Due to technological developments, large numbers of employees work offsite. The downside of these developments is that employers often expect employees to be available beyond working hours. Therefore, employees might find it difficult to escape from job demands.
- Employees are less likely to have full-time contracts, and lifelong job security is no longer guaranteed by organisations. Many employees prefer contingent work because it provides independence, challenges and opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills.
- Today’s employees want empowerment, involvement and participation. Employees are expected to master the tasks of a specific job, but they also need personal and interpersonal competence which they can transfer from one job to another. They have to constantly upgrade their skills and participate in multidisciplinary teams.
- Modern jobs require computer literacy and well-educated employees. However, many individuals in both industrialised and developing countries are functionally illiterate, and lack basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Globalisation resulted in a shift of jobs to places with lower labour costs and competition, an international pool of immigrant workers employed by multinational organisations, and an increase in cross-cultural contacts.
- Globalisation and developments in information technology, the mass media and transport have led to greater exposure to the way of life of people from other cultures. As a consequence, organisations have to become more sensitive to differences in cultures, languages, backgrounds and expectations.
To keep up with fast-paced systems, organisations have to rely more on creativity and innovation, and capitalise on the *unique intellectual and personal strengths* of their employees. This requires an organisational structure that allows for more communication and flexibility, task designs that take advantage of human capital, and an organisational strategy that gives the company a unique, competitive edge. It is not only a matter of getting employees to do their work, but rather getting them to do good work, or their best work. Today, organisations need their employees to be creative, which requires employees to be motivated and to put their all into their work. But how can a company foster that when work–life balance and burnout are becoming more of a concern? How can businesses and groups capitalise on their diversity? For that matter, what can organisations do to make sure the right people get on board and stay with the company?

What all of these questions have in common is that they are trying to go beyond fixing problems and into promoting excellence. It is precisely because of this perspective that the business world needs to turn to the branch of psychology that deals with human flourishing and human strengths, namely positive psychology (Donaldson & Ko, 2010; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Examples of issues related to individuals’ career experiences that require a positive psychology perspective on career well-being include the following:

- **Employee selection and person–environment fit:** Several factors need to be considered, including personality, complementarity of strengths and talents within the organisation, and fit with the organisation’s structure, strategy, goals and mission. For this, positive psychology initiatives, such as a strength perspective, job design and work identity, are required. These factors affect staff turnover, counterproductive behaviour and organisational commitment (Rothmann, 2014).

- **Performance, engagement and burnout:** Stress and burnout can result in employee turnover. The positive psychology model focuses on solutions for stress and burnout in terms of emotional well-being (Rothmann, 2013), engagement (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010), meaning (Van Zyl, Deacon & Rothmann, 2010; Steger et al, 2013), self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2008a), harmony (Rothmann & Baumann, 2014) and social well-being (Keyes, 2007), all factors which predict job performance, absenteeism and turnover of employees.

Given the increasing demands experienced by employees and organisations and a greater need for knowledge work, innovation and creativity, organisations have to find ways to enable their employees to do and be their best.
Because of positive psychology’s unique focus on flourishing, it will become an essential contributor to the success of individuals and organisations.

Two areas of positive psychology, namely its philosophy and cross-cultural issues, have generated criticism. Firstly, positive psychology is criticised for scientific reductionism and prescriptive tendencies (Taylor, 2001). Secondly, positive psychology is criticised for a Westernised, ethnocentric and individualistic stance, something the majority of the world’s population does not share (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008).

**APPROACHES TO WELL-BEING**

Various approaches to well-being are distinguished. These approaches are discussed in the following sections.

**Hedonia versus eudaimonia**

Two perspectives — hedonia and eudaimonia — are relevant when defining well-being (Ryan, Huta & Deci, 2008). **Hedonic well-being** is experienced when pleasure is maximised and pain is avoided. However, hedonic well-being might include living a life of shallow values, greed and the exploitation of others. **Eudaimonic well-being** focuses on the content of one’s life and the processes involved in living well (Ryan et al, 2008). Eudaimonic well-being refers to quality of life derived from the development of a person’s best potentials and their application in the fulfilment of personally expressive, self-concordant goals (Waterman, 2008). Central to this perspective on eudaimonia is living in a manner consistent with one’s daimon (or true self). To live in truth to one’s daimon is an expression of personal integrity through identifying one’s potential strengths and limitations and choosing goals that provide personal meaning and purpose in life. The dimensions of eudaimonic well-being include 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, and enjoyment of activities as personally expressive (Waterman et al, 2010).

**Subjective well-being**

Researchers focusing on subjective well-being assert that individuals react differently to the same circumstances, and that they evaluate conditions based on their unique expectations, values and previous experiences. Subjective well-being refers to subjective judgements of the quality of an individual’s life with regard to both the presence and relative frequency of positive and negative moods and emotions over time, one’s overall level of life satisfaction, and
one’s satisfaction with specific domains such as work, family, health, leisure, finances, the self and the group (Diener, Kesebir & Lucas, 2008). A person is as well as he or she perceives him- or herself to be (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999).

The components of subjective well-being can be described as follows (Diener et al, 2008):

- **Moods and emotions** (which together are labelled affect) represent people’s evaluations of the events that occur in their lives. Pleasant (positive) affect and unpleasant (negative) affect form two independent factors.
- **Life satisfaction** is defined as the degree to which the experience of an individual’s life satisfies his or her wants and needs, both physically and psychologically.

The factors that influence subjective well-being are divided into bottom-up processes and top-down approaches (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). **Bottom-up processes** refer to external events, situations and demographics. The bottom-up approach is built on the notion that basic and universal human needs exist, and that a person will be well if these needs are fulfilled. The experience of daily pleasurable events is related to pleasant affect, and the experience of daily undesirable events is related to unpleasant affect. However, research showed that external, objective variables and demographic factors (eg income, education age, sex, race and marital status) accounted for a relatively small percentage of variance in subjective well-being. As far as **top-down processes** are concerned, personality is one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of subjective well-being.

The term ‘happiness’ has been used as a synonym for subjective well-being. Veenhoven (2013) defines happiness as the extent to which an individual judges the overall quality of his or her life as favourable. Happiness is characterised by satisfaction with life, high positive affect and low negative affect. To increase happiness, it is important to understand the variables that produce the **greatest happiness for the greatest number of people**. According to Veenhoven (2013), greater happiness is a product of **live-ability** and **life-ability**. Six factors contribute strongly to live-ability in nations: economic affluence, political freedom, rule of law, state of welfare, income equality and tolerance. Life-ability results from learned abilities and choices people make.

**Activity**
Visit the following website to learn more about happiness in different nations in the world: http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/.
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The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions

Fredrickson’s (1998) broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions states that positive emotions, including joy, interest, contentment and happiness, all share the ability to broaden an individual’s momentary thought-action repertoires. In addition, these positive emotions assist in building the individual’s enduring personal resources. The tendency to experience the positive is considered to be central to one’s ability to flourish, to prosper mentally and grow psychologically.

Research showed that individuals who experience positive emotions (compared to individuals who experience negative emotions) show heightened levels of creativity, inventiveness and ‘big picture’ perceptual focus. Positive emotions also play a role in the development of long-term resources such as resilience and flourishing (Fredrickson, 2003). Although the notion of a positivity ratio (which suggests that experiencing three times more positive than negative emotions is associated with flourishing) has been challenged (Brown, Sokal & Friedman, 2013), a high emotional positivity-to-negativity ratio is beneficial (Fredrickson, 2013). Therefore positive emotions have a potentially adaptive and interactive nature that will affect career experiences.

Psychological well-being

The psychological well-being model of Ryff and Singer (1998) focuses on the contents of one’s life and the processes involved in living well. Psychological well-being consists of six dimensions, namely autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance.

- **Autonomy** refers to self-determination and independence, the ability to resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways, regulation of behaviour from within, and evaluating the self by using personal standards.
- **Environmental mastery** is defined as the individual’s ability to choose or create environments suitable to his or her psychic conditions and is defined as a characteristic of mental health.
- **Personal growth** refers to the continued development of one’s potential, seeing the self as growing and expanding, being open to new experiences, having a sense of realising one’s potential, and seeing improvement in the self and behaviour over time.
- **Positive relations with others** is defined as having warm, satisfying and trusting relationships with others; being concerned about the welfare of others; being capable of strong empathy, affection and intimacy; and understanding give and take of human relationships.
Purpose in life refers to having goals and a sense of directedness, feeling that there is meaning to past and present life, holding beliefs that give life purpose, and having aims and objectives for living.

Self-acceptance is defined as possessing a positive attitude towards the self, acknowledging and accepting multiple aspects of the self, including good and bad qualities, and feeling positive about one’s past life.

The psychological well-being approach implies that career experiences which allow autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance will result in employee well-being.

The PERMA model

The PERMA model was suggested by Seligman (2011). He suggested five dimensions of well-being, namely positive emotions (P), engagement (E), positive relations (R), meaning and purpose (M) and accomplishment (A).

The term positive emotions refers to having as much pleasure as one can through the experience of positive affect. People in a positive state process information more strategically, and people in a negative state process information more systematically. Those in a positive mood are ‘smarter’ at processing information than those in a negative mood. Positive emotions have been shown to be effective in medical contexts, improving decision making among medical students and creative problem solving and diagnostic reasoning processes among practising physicians.

Engagement results from knowing what your signature strengths are and recrafting your life to use them at work, in love, in leisure, parenting and friendship.

Meaning and purpose exist when you know what your highest strengths and talents are and use them in the service of something you believe is bigger than you are. Meaning is related to external goals and self-transcendence.

Accomplishment refers to pursuing success, winning, achievement and mastery.

Positive relationships refer to warm, satisfying and trusting relationships with others.

The mental health continuum

According to the mental health continuum (MHC) (Keyes, 2005), measures of mental health and mental illness form two distinct continua. Mental health is regarded as a syndrome of symptoms of an individual’s subjective well-being.
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The MHC consists of complete mental health (flourishing) and incomplete mental health (languishing). Individuals’ positions on the MHC are determined by their scores on three dimensions of well-being: emotional, psychological and social well-being (Keyes, 2007). Keyes (2007) defines flourishing as a pattern of positive feelings and positive functioning in life. On the opposite of the continuum is languishing, which can be defined as the absence of mental health. Each measure of subjective well-being is regarded as an outward symptom of an unobservable state (see Table 7.2).

Table 7.2 Mental health continuum diagnostic criteria and scale descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diagnostic measurement</th>
<th>Diagnostic scale and symptoms</th>
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</table>
| **Emotional well-being**: how often people feel positive affect and satisfaction with life | Positive affect: cheerful, in good spirits, happy, calm, peaceful, satisfied, full of life  
Life satisfaction: satisfied with life or domains thereof |
| **Psychological well-being**: how people see themselves thriving in their personal lives | Self-acceptance: ‘I like most parts of my personality.’  
Personal growth: ‘For me, life has been a continual process of learning, changing and growth.’  
Purpose in life: ‘I sometimes feel as if I’ve done all there is to do in life.’  
Environmental mastery: ‘I am good at managing the responsibilities of daily life.’  
Autonomy: ‘I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.’  
Positive relations with others: Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me. |
| **Social well-being**: how people thrive in their social lives | Social acceptance: ‘People do not care about other people.’  
Social actualisation: ‘Society isn’t improving for people like me.’  
Social contribution: ‘My daily activities do not create anything worthwhile for my community.’  
Social coherence: ‘I cannot make sense of what’s going on in the world.’  
Social integration: ‘I feel close to other people in my community.’ |

Keyes and Annas (2009) found that 48,5 per cent of individuals in samples they studied measured high on feeling well, 18 per cent measured high on feeling and functioning well, while 30,5 per cent measured high on feeling well
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and moderate on functioning well. Individuals who measured high on feeling well and moderate on functioning well had approximately twice the rate of mental illness than individuals who measured high on both types of well-being. However, languishing and flourishing are not stable, permanent conditions. Individuals who have been previously well can become mentally ill, while others who have been mentally ill can move towards flourishing.

A study of 507 managers in South Africa showed that 48.5 per cent of the participants were flourishing, 48.5 per cent were moderately mentally healthy and 3 per cent were languishing (Swart & Rothmann, 2012). Furthermore, research in a sample of 200 information technology professionals in South Africa showed that 37.6 per cent of the participants were flourishing, 58.5 per cent were moderately mentally healthy and 3.9 per cent were languishing (Diedericks & Rothmann, 2014).

Flourishing at work

The dimensions of flourishing in institutions are illustrated in Figure 7.1. Flourishing employees (compared to languishing employees) experience high levels of work-related emotional well-being (job satisfaction and positive emotions), psychological well-being (work engagement, purpose and meaning in their work, self-determination, learning, harmony), and social well-being (Rothmann, 2013).

![Figure 7.1 Dimensions of flourishing](image-url)

Figure 7.1 Dimensions of flourishing
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Emotional well-being

Emotional well-being at work refers to two types of judgements individuals make: job satisfaction and positive emotions (compared to negative emotions). These two dimensions reflect whether an individual *feels well* at work.

**Job satisfaction**

Job satisfaction is defined as ‘a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences’ (Locke, 1976:1304). Job satisfaction comprises cognitive and affective components: The cognitive component refers to attitudes towards the job and is represented by an evaluation of concrete and abstract aspects of the job. Affective job satisfaction refers to feelings and emotions related to a job.

**Positive emotions**

Positive emotions are critical ingredients for human flourishing because they are related to positive functioning (Fredrickson, 2006). The broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 1998) states that positive emotions such as joy, interest, contentment and happiness have the ability to broaden an individual’s momentary thought–action repertoires, facilitate generativity and behavioural flexibility, and assist in building the individual’s enduring personal resources. Positive emotions are associated with *approach-oriented* behaviour. People in a good mood are more likely to enter novel situations, interact with other people and pursue new goals. A safe and comfortable environment allows an individual to broaden and build resources, which can be called on in later times of need (Fredrickson, 1998). Armed with these resources and primed to pursue new goals, people who experience positive affect are well suited to experience work success.

Negative affect is also a reality. It has been demonstrated that negative affect is characteristic of human functioning, especially under conditions of change and stress (Keyes, 2005). However, positive emotions build lasting resources in individuals. As pointed out by Fredrickson (2006), an individual’s ratio of positive to negative emotions is important.

Psychological well-being

Psychological well-being at work includes the following states: work engagement (consisting of energy, dedication and absorption), purpose and meaning, self-determination (based on autonomy, competence and relatedness satisfaction) learning and harmony.
Work engagement

In the personal engagement model, the individual (rather than the employee) is the core of engagement (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). Personal engagement entails the extension of employees’ selves to work roles (Kahn, 1990) and the self-expression of the individual physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performance. The engagement construct has its roots in the concept of authenticity, which results in individuals investing personal energies into role behaviours and expressing their selves in roles by exhibiting authenticity. Engagement can be associated with positive and/or negative affect. Engagement comprises three components, namely (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014):

1. a physical component: being physically involved in a task and showing vitality;
2. a cognitive component: being alert at work and experiencing absorption and involvement; and
3. an emotional component: being connected to the job and/or others while working and showing dedication.

Purpose and meaning

Purpose refers to having a sense of desired end states to our work behaviour, while meaning refers to the perceived significance of individuals’ experiences at work (Barrick, Mount & Li, 2013).

Meaning refers to the subjective appraisals of events in one’s life (and work), the significance attributed to these events in relation to one’s goals, and the values, beliefs and personal identity created by them (Matuska & Christiansen, 2008). Meaning-making is important in dealing with negative life events (eg adverse circumstances). Psychological meaningfulness refers to ‘a feeling that one is receiving a return on investment of one’s self in a currency of physical, cognitive, or emotional energy’ (Kahn, 1990:703–704). More than half of an employed person’s life is spent at work; therefore, meaning in work is also pursued. Meaning of work (see Chapter 1) refers to the output of having made sense of something. Meaningfulness of work refers to the amount of significance an individual attaches to his or her work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003).

The relationship between affective disposition (ie positive or negative affect) and work engagement was found to differ by the extent to which individuals perceived their work as meaningful (Steger et al, 2013). When work was not perceived as meaningful, employees characterised by high scores on affective disposition were more strongly engaged compared to employees who were characterised by low scores on affective disposition. However, when work was
perceived as meaningful, positive or negative affect did not play a role in the engagement of employees.

**Self-determination**

The flourishing of individuals at work can be explained by the self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In SDT, motivation is conceptualised as ranging from *autonomous* and stemming from within the self (self-concordant), to *controlled* and stemming from outside pressure (Deci & Ryan, 2008b). Intrinsic motivation, which occurs when an activity is undertaken out of interest, enjoyment or inherent satisfaction, is divided into three parts, namely intrinsic motivation to know, intrinsic motivation towards accomplishment and intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation.

The basic premise of SDT is that the satisfaction of the three psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence and relatedness, is a prerequisite for intrinsic motivation, internalisation of work behaviour and flourishing (Deci & Ryan, 2008b). The satisfaction of basic psychological needs provides the nutriment for intrinsic motivation and internalisation in institutions (Gagné & Deci, 2005). The three psychological needs can be explained as follows (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014):

- The need for **autonomy** refers to the desire to experience freedom and choice when carrying out an activity.
- The need for **competence** refers to individuals’ inherent desire to feel effective in interacting with the environment. Competence indicates whether the individual is ready or confident to engage in his or her work role given the fact that people are also engaged in many other life activities.
- The need for **relatedness** refers to the innate need of individuals to feel connected to others, to love and care for others, and to be loved and cared for. This need is satisfied when individuals experience a sense of communion and develop close and intimate relationships with others. A positive relational context at work allows one to show and employ one’s self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career.

**Learning**

Learning is defined as ‘the sense that one is acquiring and can apply knowledge and skills to one’s work’ (Spreitzer, Lam & Fritz, 2010). Learning focuses on individual development and improvement, and is an important component of well-being.
Harmony

Harmony is defined as balance, inner peace, self-acceptance and a positive relationship with oneself (Delle Fave et al, 2011). This dimension indicates self-acceptance as well as balance. Self-acceptance is defined as possessing a positive attitude towards the self, acknowledging and accepting multiple aspects of the self (including good and bad qualities) and feeling positive about one’s past life.

Social well-being

Positive social functioning includes five dimensions, namely:

1. social acceptance: being positive towards and accepting of diversity in people;
2. social actualisation: believing in the potential of others;
3. social coherence: finding society and social life meaningful and comprehensible;
4. social contribution: regarding one’s own daily activities as adding value to society and others; and
5. social integration: experiencing a sense of relatedness, comfort and support from the organisation.

ANTECEDENTS OF FLOURISHING AND LANGUISHING

Employees’ experiences of the work situation affect their mental health. Useful knowledge about well-being in the work context has been gained by applying specific theories and models:

- The person–environment fit theory implies that well-being will result from a good person–environment fit: high congruence between corresponding person characteristics and environment characteristics yields more positive outcomes (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009).
- The job characteristics model (JCM) of Hackman and Oldham (1980) links intrinsic task characteristics to the well-being of employees.
- The effects of relationships at work on well-being can be explained in the light of the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). If relationships prove to be mutually beneficial over time, both parties gradually increase their contributions to a point where there is an equitable balance between each party’s contributions and the value thereof.
- The broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001) states that positive emotions during career experiences broaden individuals’ attention and thinking, while negative emotions narrow their attention and thinking.
According to the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001), every occupation has specific work characteristics associated with well-being. It is possible to model these characteristics in two broad categories, namely job demands and job resources. Job demands represent aspects of the job that could potentially cause strain in cases where they exceed the employee's adaptive capability. Job resources refer to those physical, psychological, social or organisational aspects of the job that reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, are functional in achieving work goals, and/or stimulate personal growth, learning and development. Hence resources are not only necessary to deal with job demands, but also are important in their own right.

The next section focuses on the antecedents of individuals’ work and career well-being.

**Person–environment fit**

Kahn (1990) believes that when people experience greater congruence between their subjective interpretation of the requirements of the role and their self-concept, they will invest greater personal effort to achieve individual and organisational goals. Work role fit instils an individual belief that the working environment is conducive to what the organisation wants, and eventually leads to positive outcomes for the employee and the organisation (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009). A good person–environment fit allows the employee to express his or her beliefs and values within the workplace (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004). Shamir (1991) found that employees seek out work roles where they can live out their authentic self-concepts — ie who and what they are and stand for — and not simply to achieve work-related goals. Individuals seek work roles in which they can express their authentic selves fully in creative ways. Studies (May et al, 2004; Olivier & Rothmann, 2007) showed that employees who have a good work-role fit experience more psychological meaningfulness and assist co-workers.

**Strengths use**

Individuals’ well-being will be high when it is possible for them to apply their strengths at work. Strength is defined as ‘a pre-existing capacity for a particular way of behaving, thinking or feeling that is authentic and energising to the user’ (Linley, 2008:9). Participating in activities that are congruent with an individual’s strengths contribute to that individual’s experience of meaning and engagement in work.
Peterson and Seligman (2004) distinguished between six virtues, which are divided into 24 strengths (see Table 7.3). Virtues are defined as the core characteristics valued by moral philosophers and religious thinkers. Character strengths refer to psychological processes or mechanisms that define the virtues.

Strengths can be categorised according to the extent to which they are realised. Realised strengths are those attributes which individuals find energising, which make them perform well and which they use frequently. Individuals should marshal these strengths for optimal performance. Unrealised strengths are those attributes they find energising, that make them perform well, but which they perhaps do not use often because of the context they find themselves in. Individuals should aim to maximise these strengths.

Learned behaviours are those attributes that individuals have learned to do well, but that do not energise them. Individuals should learn how to moderate learned behaviours. Weaknesses are attributes which individuals find hard to do well and which also drain them. Individuals should focus on ways in which they can minimise their weaknesses.

Strengths are associated with various desirable psychological and behavioural outcomes, such as happiness and fulfilment, energy, goal achievement and engagement (Linley, Woolston & Biswas-Diener, 2009). People who use their strengths experience greater subjective well-being (i.e., life satisfaction, positive affect balance and psychological well-being). Strengths are associated with job satisfaction, performance and low intention to leave (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan & Minhas 2011).

### Table 7.3 Classification of strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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| Wisdom: cognitive strengths entailing the acquisition and use of knowledge | - **Creativity**: thinking of novel and productive ways of doing things  
- **Curiosity**: taking an interest in on-going experience; exploring and discovering  
- **Open-mindedness**: thinking things through and examining them from all angles; not jumping to conclusions  
- **Love of learning**: mastering new skills, topics and bodies of knowledge  
- **Perspective**: providing wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world which make sense to the self and others |
### Strengths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Courage</strong></td>
<td>emotional strengths involving the exercise of will to accomplish goals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Bravery: doing what needs to be done despite fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Perseverance: finishing what one has started; keeping on despite obstacles; staying on the task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Integrity: the genuine presentation of oneself to others; taking responsibility for one’s feelings and actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Vitality: feeling alive, feeling vigorous and energetic, and approaching life with energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Love</strong></td>
<td>interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Intimacy: valuing close relationships with others; being close to people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Kindness/altruism: doing favours and good deeds for others; helping others; taking care of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Social intelligence: being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and the self; knowing what to do to fit in in social situations</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Justice</strong></td>
<td>civic strengths that underlie healthy community life</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Citizenship: working well as a member of a group or team; doing one’s share</td>
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<td>- Fairness: treating all people the same; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance</td>
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<td>- Leadership: encouraging a group of whom one is a member to get things done, and at the same time maintaining good relationships within the group</td>
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<td><strong>Temperance</strong></td>
<td>strengths that protect against excess</td>
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<td>- Forgiveness: forgiving those who have done wrong; giving people a second chance</td>
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<td>- Modesty: letting one’s accomplishments speak for themselves; not seeking the spotlight</td>
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<td>- Prudence/caution: being careful about one’s choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Self-regulation: regulating what one feels and does; controlling one’s appetites and emotions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Transcendence</strong></td>
<td>strengths that provide meaning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Appreciation of beauty and excellence: noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence and skilled performance in all life domains</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Gratitude: being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks</td>
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<td>- Hope/optimism: expecting the best in the future, and working to achieve it</td>
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<td>- Humour: a fondness for laughing and having fun; bringing smiles to other people</td>
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<td>- Spirituality: having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme (see Chapter 1)</td>
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Careers: An organisational perspective

The identify-and-use approach to strengths assumes that strengths can and should be used more than they currently are. Studies (eg Hill, 2001) showed that approximately one-third of people can identify their own strengths, and that only 17 per cent say they use their strengths most of the time each day (Buckingham, 2007). Another approach, namely the strengths development approach, assumes that strengths interventions should not primarily be about the use of strengths, but rather about strengths development. This approach emphasises building strengths competency. While the identify-and-use approach can influence individuals’ happiness and depression, strengths development additionally focuses on motivation, effort, interpersonal effectiveness and other aspects of psychological functioning.

In research with 198 000 employees in 36 companies by the Gallup Organisation, responses to the following question were analysed: ‘At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?’ Employees who answered ‘strongly agree’ to this question were 50 per cent more likely to work in businesses with a low turnover, 38 per cent more likely to work in productive business units and 44 per cent more likely to work in business units with high customer satisfaction scores (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). Furthermore, it was found that, globally, only 20 per cent of employees working in large organisations experienced that their strengths are utilised every day.

Role clarity

Employees need to understand how their job fits into the big picture, and what they must do more of and do differently to help the business succeed (Barkhuizen, Rothmann & Van de Vijver, 2014). Employees should be assisted to clarify which competencies they need and which capacities the particular organisation needs to grow. They should be assisted to upgrade their skills to match the needs of the future. A perceived fit between an individual’s self-concept and his or her role will lead to an experienced sense of meaning, thanks to the ability of the individual to express his or her values and beliefs (May et al, 2004).

Overload and personal resources

When a person is expected to do more than the time available permits him or her to do, such a person is likely to experience strain. It is true that almost everybody experiences role overload from time to time, but for some people role overload is a chronic thing they have to contend with. There are different types of role overload, namely working long hours, meeting deadlines, responding to time pressures, qualitative overload, and having many separate, essentially unrelated tasks to perform.
The quality and level of demands vary between and within jobs. The diminishing and/or depletion of resources and the inability to comply with job demands lead to exhaustion and eventual disengagement (Kahn, 1990) and, finally, languishing. Individuals who feel that their job demands exceed the available resources will gradually feel that they cannot meet set targets, will have to endure less favourable performance appraisals and will eventually realise that they are losing control over their jobs (May et al, 2004; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). This will lead to the employee experiencing a lack of competence, and he or she will consequently not flourish.

Individuals depend on their specific physical, emotional and cognitive resources to complete work-related tasks. Different jobs require various and different kinds of physical exertion and challenges, which can result in injuries (May et al, 2004). Less physically challenging jobs, eg ones which involve sitting at a desk, can also place tremendous physical stress on an individual, eg causing back problems (Hollenbeck, Ilgen & Crampton, 1992). Individuals vary in their stamina, flexibility and strength to successfully meet these physical challenges. Lacking these physical resources can lead to disengagement and languishing.

Emotional demands, especially in the services sector, require emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983; Sutton, 1991). Morris and Feldman (1996) state that continuous emotional demands could lead to the depletion of emotional resources (ie exhaustion), and they continue by indicating that the frequency, duration, intensity and variety can decrease these recourses. The consequences are that these individuals become overwhelmed by the amounts of information they need to process, and as a result their ability to think clearly diminishes. The expectation is that the presence of resources (physical, emotional and cognitive) would lead to greater availability and engagement. Those individuals who experience an overload tend to withdraw or disengage from their work in order to replenish their energy levels (Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991).

The nature of the job

Job characteristics will lead to higher levels of well-being if they allow individuals to take responsibility for their work, to be involved in the job in its totality, to be engaged in different tasks with varying levels of complexity and to be given regular feedback on accomplishment. Catalino and Fredrickson (2011) suggested that the nature of the task (ie whether it is intrinsically rewarding) impacts on positive emotions, which results in flourishing. There are five dimensions of a task that might affect the critical psychological states, namely (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; May et al, 2004):
Careers: An organisational perspective

1. **skill variety**: the assortment of diverse skills employees have to apply to complete their tasks;
2. **task identity**: the degree to which a specific piece of work is identifiable (i.e., whether it is clear to see what piece of work has just been completed);
3. **task significance**: the importance of a piece of work against the backdrop of the overall organisational goal;
4. **autonomy**: the degree of freedom to which employees can choose what they will do and how to complete their tasks; and
5. **feedback of results**: the feedback from the job itself, i.e., when the employee receives feedback from the inherent nature of the role.

There are three critical psychological states to be experienced, namely meaningfulness, experienced responsibility and knowledge:

1. **Experienced meaningfulness** refers to the extent to which employees feel that their jobs are important.
2. **Experienced responsibility** is defined as the degree of personal accountability employees have for their work outcomes.
3. **Knowledge** refers to how well employees believe they are performing on the job.

In addition to the characteristics as identified by the Job Characteristics Model (JCM), **knowledge characteristics** (e.g., job complexity, information processing, problem solving and specialisation) and physical characteristics (e.g., ergonomics, physical demands, equipment use and work conditions) might also determine employees’ experiences and behaviours and organisational outcomes (Grant, 2008).

Jobs, roles, tasks and projects are increasingly becoming intertwined with interpersonal relationships, connections and interactions. Relationships are becoming more pervasive and vital than in the past, not only because of the greater focus on teamwork (and interdependence between individuals), but also because of the need for co-ordinating work with individuals and teams from different departments, institutions and industries. External relationships (with clients and customers) have also become more widespread and important than before. Therefore the social context of work (i.e., the interpersonal interactions and relationships embedded in and influenced by the jobs, roles and tasks that employees perform and enact) plays an important role in shaping employees’ experiences and behaviours (Grant, 2007). Across cultures, people want to do good, make a social contribution, serve and make a difference. Jobs with strong pro-social characteristics (jobs that allow people to do good), contribute to the flourishing of employees, which positively affects organisational outcomes (Grant, 2007).