

# FLOURISHING IN CHILE HOW TO INCREASE WELL- BEING IN THE COUNTRY?

**Claudio Ibáñez Sepulveda**

## Abstract

*Flourishing in Chile was measured using PERMA, Martin Seligman's multi-dimensional theory of well-being. P (positive emotion) was measured using the Diener Satisfaction with Life Scale. E (engagement), R (positive relationships), M (meaning) and A (accomplishment) were measured using a single item for each. These indicators were included in the 2012 Happiness Barometer, an annual poll surveying a national sample of 1,313 Chileans, ages 18 to 80. The percentages of people with high scores in the PERMA elements were, from highest to lowest: R 71%, A 67%, P 53%, E 50%, and M 31%. People with high satisfaction, as compared to people with low satisfaction, were significantly higher in E, R, and A, but not in M. Flourishing was defined as a simultaneous high score in all five PERMA elements. According to these findings, 6% of Chilean people are flourishing.*

## Keywords

*Well-being; flourishing; PERMA.*

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## Introduction

Several theories and key approaches of positive psychology have gained ground in many fields in recent years. For example, the notion that it is more important to build on strengths than to correct weaknesses; that people are more attracted and motivated by their future than influenced by their past; that circumstances have a marginal impact on happiness; that health is not merely the absence of disease but an abundance of positive emotions; and so forth. Perhaps the broadest challenge of positive psychology is to promote that the development and progress of nations should not be measured using econometric indicators only, rather, it is essential that measurements of people's happiness and well-being be incorporated. The United Nations' *World Happiness Report* (HELLIWELL; LAYARD; SACHS, 2012), published in April 2012, is a good demonstration of how happiness has begun to be considered one of the most important concerns for individual countries and the global community.

## From Happiness to Well-being

The word "happiness" has its advantages because it focuses thinking, and it is more attractive to broader audiences than "subjective well-being," "psychological well-being," or simply "well-being." As a result, "happiness" is more frequently used than the other terms. However, this word also has some major disadvantages. Martin E. P. Seligman, founder of the positive psychology movement, suggests three reasons to stop using it (SELIGMAN, 2011). The first is that the word "happiness" is so overused that it has lost all meaning. Second, the word "happiness" is associated with a cheerful and smiling mood, which erroneously suggests that introverts or less expressive people are not happy. Third, happiness is a monistic concept, since as Aristotle said, happiness is the only thing we pursue for itself. A better term, Seligman argues, is well-being.

For Seligman, well-being is a construct, i.e., a conceptual object that has no concrete, tangible, or observable existence but can only be inferred from its elements. To identify the elements of well-being, Seligman uses the following three criteria: it must contribute to well-being; many people pursue it for its own sake; and it can be defined and measured independently of the other elements (SELIGMAN, 2011). According to these properties, the elements of well-being would be Positive Emotion, Engagement, Positive Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment, which are known by the acronym PERMA.

## The Elements of PERMA

The following is a brief definition of the five elements of PERMA.

P - Positive emotion constitutes the subjective aspect of happiness, in other words, it refers to what a person feels or thinks his or her level of satisfaction with life is. It is the degree to which a person believes that he or she experiences positive emotions associated with the present (joy, excitement, pleasure, love), the future (optimism, hope, faith, trust), and the past (satisfaction, pride, serenity, forgiveness).

E - Engagement is the positive emotional bond that people establish with work. It entails the attraction, absorption, involvement, enthusiasm, commitment, identification, and union that is experienced with the execution of tasks. This concept is closely related to the concepts of flow

(CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, 1996), calling (WRZESNIEWSKI; McCAULEY; ROZIN; SCHWARTZ, 1997), and passion (VALLERAND, 2012).

R - Positive relationships refers to the quality of interpersonal relationships. Positive relationships are characterized by the explicit presence and abundance of closeness, support, protection, affection, empathy, and recognition in interaction with other people.

M - Meaning or purpose entails belonging to and contributing to something larger than oneself, which provides a reason or sense for one's work and life.

A - Accomplishment refers to getting results or making achievements after undertaking a task.

None of the above elements corresponds directly to well-being, but each is a way towards it, and people actively seek out these elements to increase their well-being. In fact, some people favor some elements of PERMA over others as sources of well-being. Obviously, the more PERMA elements are present in an individual, the stronger their well-being will be.

## Measuring PERMA

In general, instruments to measure happiness assume that it is something singular and one-dimensional, corresponding to the way a person feels emotionally. As a result, the instruments and indicators used to measure happiness (e.g. "life satisfaction" and "subjective well-being") have a strong hedonic orientation (IBÁÑEZ, 2011) other words, indicators of happiness have been limited almost exclusively to measuring the P of PERMA.

When Seligman visited Chile in October 2011 (Chilean Institute of Positive Psychology, 2011), he suggested that we incorporate PERMA in the measurements for the 2012 Happiness Barometer.

While a measurement of this sort is more complex than the one-dimensional measurements of well-being or happiness, it contributes a much more comprehensive and analytical gauge, with more textures and nuances of how people are functioning, since it isn't limited to measuring only how people are *feeling* but also incorporates specific aspects about how people are *doing*. One of the benefits of using PERMA is that it offers a more eudemonic measurement of well-being.

The measurement of well-being most similar to PERMA was published in 2009 by Felicia Huppert, director of Well-being Institute at the University of Cambridge (HUPPERT; SO, 2009). Among the central elements in its operational definition of flourishing, this study considered positive emotions (P), engagement (E), and meaning (M) and, as one of the additional elements, positive relationships (R), but it did not include accomplishment (A). Therefore, the 2012 Happiness Barometer is, to our knowledge, the first measurement of PERMA in the world.

## The Happiness Barometer and Its Methodology

The Happiness Barometer is an annual survey measuring happiness in Chile that is carried out by the Coca-Cola Institute of Happiness. The first survey was conducted in December 2010. In 2012, the Institute of Sociology at the Catholic University of Chile took part as the technical advisor in charge of the study's execution.

The methodological characteristics of the 2012 Happiness Barometer are as follow:

- Target Population: Residents of urban areas (excluding the Los Lagos and Aysén regions) in communes with more than 45,000 inhabitants between 18 and 80 years of age. A total of 84 communes were selected.
- Type of sampling: random stratified multistage, in three stages: random selection of city blocks, households within blocks, and individuals (maximum of six households/individuals per block).
- Sample Size: 1,313 individuals.
- Margin of Sampling Error (95%): ±2.7 points.
- Type of survey: Face-to-face interview.
- Period of execution: July and August 2012.

### Incorporating PERMA into the Happiness Barometer

In order to incorporate PERMA into the 2012 Happiness Barometer, we – like Huppert – formulated one single item for each of the PERMA elements. The items were constructed based on the definition of the elements of PERMA presented below and then a group of judges assessed their face validity. This table presents the items added to the Barometer for each PERMA element.

ELEMENT OF WELL-BEING	ITEM ADDED TO THE BAROMETER
<b>P (positive emotion):</b> Subjective aspect of happiness; what a person feels or thinks his or her level of satisfaction with life is.	Rather than creating an additional item, E. Diener’s Satisfaction with Life Scale was used, which was already part of the Barometer.
<b>E (engagement):</b> Positive emotional bond of attraction, absorption, involvement, enthusiasm, commitment, identification, and union experienced with work.	I love the work I do, and it is one of the most important things in my life.
<b>R (positive relationships):</b> Existence of people with whom they have close relationships of support, protection, affection, empathy, and recognition.	There are people with whom I have close, positive and meaningful relationships.
<b>M (meaning or purpose):</b> A sense of belonging to and contributing to something greater than oneself, which provides a reason or sense for one’s work and life.	I belong to, serve, or contribute to groups, institutions, or causes that give meaning to my life.
<b>A (achievement):</b> Getting results or making achievements after undertaking a task.	I usually meet the goals and get the results that I intend.

Those surveyed responded to each component using the scale “Strongly Disagree / Disagree / Neither Agree nor Disagree / Agree / Strongly Agree.”

### PERMA Results

The Barometer results for each PERMA element are shown in Fig. 1. In the P bar, “High” corresponds to the answers “Satisfied” and “Very Satisfied” on the Diener Scale. “Neutral” to “Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied” and “Low” to “Dissatisfied.”

In the E, R, M and A bars, “High” corresponds to the answers “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” for each corresponding component. “Neutral” to “Neither Agree nor Disagree” and “Low” to “Strongly Disagree / Disagree.”

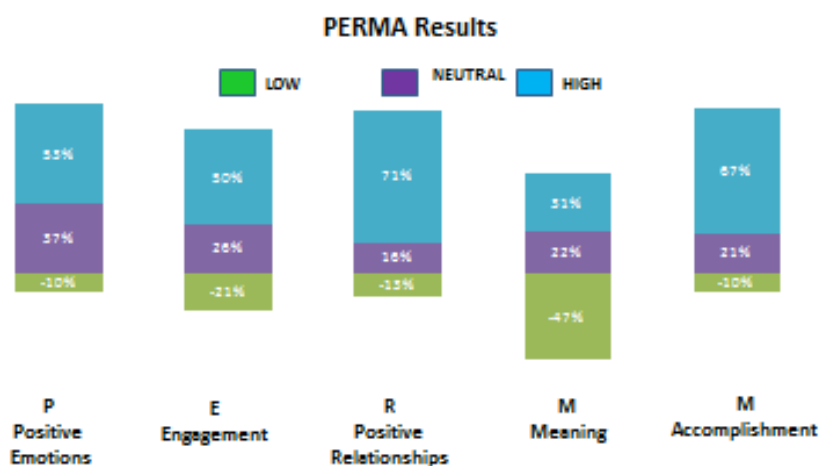


Fig. 1

PERMA elements can be understood as different ways to increase well-being, and indeed, there are people who experience well-being emphasizing some elements more than others. For example, some people pursue well-being by establishing and maintaining positive relationships, while others base their well-being on pursuing goals and results.

The Happiness Barometer survey found that the most frequent element of well-being reported by Chileans was positive relationships (R), with 71%; followed by accomplishment (A), with 67%; positive emotion (P), with 53%; engagement (E), with 50%; and meaning (M), with only 31%.

### Satisfaction with Life and PERMA

The Barometer results show that PERMA elements mark an important difference between those who are satisfied and those who are dissatisfied with their lives. The table below shows the percentages of the elements of well-being exhibited by people with Low Satisfaction and High Satisfaction.

ELEMENT OF WELL-BEING	LOW SATISFACTION	HIGH SATISFACTION
Engagement (E)	23%*	50%*

Positive Relationships (R)	41%*	78%*
Meaning (M)	26%	36%
Accomplishment (A)	38%*	81%*

(\*) Statistically significant differences at  $P < 0.05$  in the test of equal proportions for bilateral columns.

The results show that engagement (E), positive relationships (R), and accomplishment (A) appear more frequently among people with High Satisfaction than among those with Low Satisfaction, demonstrating a strong association of these elements with satisfaction with life. The exception is meaning (M). While this element does show a trend in favor of those with High Satisfaction, the difference from those with Low Satisfaction is not statistically significant. This finding probably does not imply that meaning (M) contributes little to people’s satisfaction with life, but that the total percentage of people who scored high in meaning was too low to be statistically significant.

## Flourishing in Chile

Researchers are now using the term “flourishing” to refer to the highest levels of well-being (KEYES, 2002). As we have already stated, the elements of PERMA can be understood as different ways to achieve well-being. Therefore, a person who flourishes is one who simultaneously experiences high levels of satisfaction with life, great involvement with work, a high level of positive relationships, high levels of meaning, and the achievement of remarkable results. Flourishing doesn’t just mean feeling good, rather, it is a combination of feeling good and functioning effectively (HUPPERT; SO, 2009).

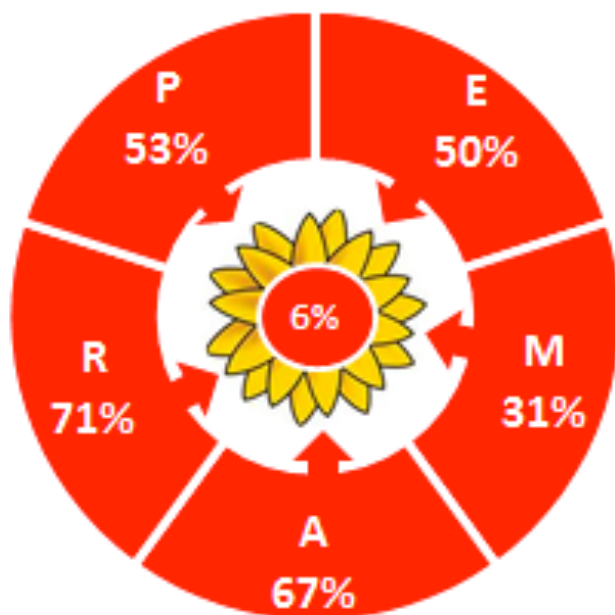
People who flourish are healthier, they have longer expectations of life, they contribute more to the communities in which they live, and they are more productive and efficient. In short, “when individuals flourish the result is health, productivity, and peace” (SELIGMAN, 2011).

Measuring how many people are simultaneously high in P, E, R, M and A can provide an estimate of how many people are flourishing in a community, an organization or a country.

In the 2012 Happiness Barometer, 6% of those people surveyed exhibited high levels in the five elements of PERMA simultaneously. Figure 2 below shows the result.

To measure flourishing by the simultaneous presence of various elements of well-being it is more demanding than to measure it by any of its components in a separate and isolated fashion. This is, probably, the explanation why flourishing score is lower than any single element of PERMA score.

## FLOURISHING IN CHILE



**Fig. 2**

Since this is the first time that PERMA has been measured, no comparative results are available locally or internationally. The conceptually closest measurement is Huppert’s study, which measures flourishing in 23 European countries (HUPPERT; SO, 2009). In Huppert’s study, the country with the highest percentage of people flourishing is Denmark with 33%, followed by Switzerland with 27%. At levels nearly half those of the countries ranked first are the UK with 18% and Spain at about 17%. At the end of the list comes Portugal with 7% and Russia with 6%. Nevertheless, all these scores are, as in this study, lower than the happiness scores these countries exhibit when happiness is measured in a one-dimensional way (HELLIWELL; LAYARD; SACHS, 2012).

### Opportunities for Chileans to flourish

One of the benefits of Seligman’s well-being theory is that it breaks this construct into concrete, actionable items. The Barometer results show that there are opportunities for improvement in all five elements of PERMA to increase the flourishing of Chileans, nevertheless, two elements – Engagement (50%) and Meaning (31%) – offer substantial opportunities for improvement.

Engagement (E) has to do with the type of relationship that people establish with their work. Amy Wrzesniewski (WRZESNIEWSKI; McCAULEY; ROZIN; SCHWARTZ; 1997) has conceptualized three ways in which people relate to what they do. The first she classifies as a “job,” in which employment is merely a means of subsistence: one works to live, literally. The second is what she terms a “career,” in which work is

considered the activity that allows one to grow and progress in life. The third way of relating to work occurs when a person loves what he or she does, the person is strongly attracted to this type of work, and it is a central part of his or her identity. This third type of relation is a “calling.” According to the Barometer, half of Chileans enjoy this sort of relation with work, which generates engagement and thus contributes significantly to their well-being. However, for the other half of Chileans, the work they perform has little or nothing to do with their “calling.” This is a very important aspect that should be taken into account by parents, teachers, business executives, and public-policy makers, who should educate and encourage people to work with their strengths, so that they become relevant criteria for deciding what to do in life: people who work from their strengths enjoy what they do, get better results, and find their lives more meaningful (BUCKINHAM; CLIFTON, 2001; VALLERAND, 2012).

The second element that deserves attention is Meaning (M). In positive psychology, the concept of meaning or purpose relates to the feeling of belonging to and contributing to something greater than oneself, for example, a family, a group, a cause, life itself, the future, the universe, and so on. The Barometer results show that only 31% of Chileans bolster their well-being with this element. A not insignificant 47% said they do not belong to, serve, or contribute to groups, institutions, or causes that give meaning to their lives. This provides an important opportunity for positive psychology education in order to teach people that being connected or feeling connected and contributing to realities that are beyond ourselves is important and has an impact on our well-being.

## Final comments

1. Measuring happiness at a country level represents a real breakthrough and a major improvement to the metric of development based solely on GDP. Additionally, using PERMA rather than one-dimensional measurements of happiness is a substantial improvement in measuring well-being.
2. Measuring PERMA was one of the important improvements introduced in the 2012 Barometer.
3. Measuring PERMA clearly shows the elements that Chileans use the most to increase their well-being (positive relationships and accomplishment) as well as those that can be used more intensively to increase well-being (meaning and engagement).
4. Measuring PERMA allows us to identify the percentage of people who are flourishing in the country and the elements that should be addressed – by individuals, by organizations, and in public policy – to increase flourishing.
5. Regular measurement of PERMA would allow well-being and flourishing in the country to be monitored.



## Sobre o artigo

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