Well-Being as Having, Loving, Doing, and Being:
An Integrative Organizing Framework for Employee Well-Being

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Abstract

Employee well-being is one of the most studied outcomes in organizational research, operationalized variously as job satisfaction, affective well-being, work engagement, work meaningfulness, and eudaimonic well-being. What is lacking is a unified theoretical framework integrating various disparate research streams around separate well-being indicators. The present work offers such an organizing framework, building on self-determination theory and Erik Allardt's multidimensional theory of well-being. In particular, I distinguish functional well-being from perceived well-being, with the former consisting of three existential conditions associated with particular needs: *having* focuses on feeling safe and getting the resources required for survival from work, *loving* focuses on getting one's interpersonal needs met at work, and *doing* focuses on getting one's agentic needs for autonomy and competence met at work. Perceived well-being (*being*) focuses on directly experiencing well-being at work, and I propose that it consists of evaluative, affective, and conative well-being, which largely result from having the three types of needs satisfied at work. I also propose a distinction between the fulfilment pathway to well-being and the frustration pathway to ill-being as two partially independent wellness processes. This integrative framework helps both scholars and practitioners make more informed choices about what dimensions of employee well-being to measure.

Keywords: Employee well-being, job satisfaction, functional well-being, eudaimonic well-being, human needs

Employee well-being has become a key research topic within organizational research (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009; Wright & Huang, 2012; Zheng et al., 2015). Some research treats it as a means for various desirable outcomes, examining how employee well-being impacts productivity and performance (e.g., Harter et al., 2010; Wright & Cropanzano, 2007), creativity and innovation (e.g., Huhtala & Parzefall, 2007; Valentine et al., 2011), and employee turnover (e.g., Tett & Meyer, 1993; Wright & Bonett, 2007). Other research treats it as a valuable and desirable end in itself, with a plethora of research examining, for example, how psychological need satisfaction (Van den Broeck et al., 2016), various leadership styles (Inceoglu et al., 2018), and structural factors such as virtual work (Hill et al., 2022) influence the well-being of the employees, making it one of the most studied outcomes in organizational research (Bakker et al., 2014; Wright & Huang, 2012).

Despite the centrality of employee well-being for organizational behavior and management research, there is surprisingly little theory on the exact nature of employee well-being. There are research streams concentrating on job satisfaction (Judge & Klinger, 2008; Wright & Cropanzano, 2000), on affective well-being (Staw & Barsade, 1993; Wright & Staw, 1999), on work engagement (Bakker et al., 2014; Lesener et al., 2020), on meaningful work (Bailey et al., 2019; Lysova et al., 2019), on job burnout (Demerouti et al., 2021; Maslach et al., 2001), and on other well-being–related constructs (e.g., Blustein et al., 2023; Demerouti et al., 2021; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Each of these constructs has individually been subject to much theoretical and empirical work and each of them arguably plays an important role in employee well-being. However, these research streams tend to operate relatively independently of one another, without much consideration of how representative each of them is as regards the broader construct of employee well-being, what is their relation with each other, or how could they be integrated.

Furthermore, typical well-being measures have been accused of being too narrow, leaving out important dimensions of optimal psychological functioning and eudaimonic well-

being at work (Bartels et al., 2019; Grant et al., 2007; Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009; Wright, 2014). This has led to attempts to cover factors such as personal growth, purpose, and interpersonal well-being (Bartels et al., 2019); learning, growth, and self-actualization (Zheng et al., 2015); and personal growth, purpose, and social significance (Turban & Yan, 2016) as parts of employee well-being assessments. Also, the role of human needs and their satisfaction has lately received more attention as key dimensions of psychological functioning at work (Blustein, 2008; Duffy et al., 2016; Gagné et al., 2022; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). However, the more specific nature of eudaimonic and functional well-being at work has remained ambiguous, with different theorists providing lists of quite different elements (e.g., Burns & Machin, 2012; Grant et al., 2007; Zheng et al., 2015), calling for work that would clarify the exact nature of eudaimonic dimensions of employee well-being.

Thus, we have several popular well-being–related constructs that are widely used in research as proxies for employee well-being but not much consideration of how well the chosen constructs and measures cover the wholeness of employee well-being — or even what that wholeness consists of. To decide whether job satisfaction, work engagement, or any other well-being–related construct is a good proxy for employee well-being, we must have a proper theoretical account of what employee well-being as such is about (Zheng et al., 2015). “Only when we are clear what we are trying to assess,” Warr (2013, p. 100) notes, “can we decide whether we have been successful.” Fisher (2010, p. 391) compares the current situation to the proverbial elephant examined by blind men: “We have developed a good if isolated understanding of its parts” but at the same time “decomposed the beast into almost meaninglessly small pieces.” This “dearth of theory” around mental health and well-being at work has left construct definitions and operationalizations “somewhat ungrounded,” leading to inconsistencies and significant overlap among many constructs (Kelloway et al., 2023, p. 366). Thus, we can conclude with Pradhan and Hati (2022, p. 387) that the “conceptual clarification and the definition of employee well-being still remain largely unclear and unresolved.”

What is thus needed is integrative accounts that would draw from these more specific research streams, aiming to produce an integrative framework of employee well-being (Fisher, 2010; Kelloway et al., 2023). A fully developed account of employee well-being would provide a theoretical backbone against which various operationalizations of well-being could be evaluated, allowing both researchers and practitioners to make more informed choices about what dimensions of well-being to measure. It could also provide the means to integrate various research streams operating with currently separate well-being–related constructs, helping to build much-needed consensus around key metrics of employee well-being (Siegerink & Murtin, 2024). Instead of isolated research streams, the standardization of well-being metrics would make possible a more cumulative science of employee well-being, where results from different studies would be more comparable, leading to a more nuanced understanding of the causes and effects of various dimensions of employee well-being.

Accordingly, the goal of the present article is to ignite the too-dormant discussion of the basic nature of employee well-being by providing one theoretical proposal about what it consists of. A key premise of the present work is that to understand what well-being for employees is about, we need to first understand what well-being for human beings is about. Recent work in psychology has started to address the recognized lack of theory around well-being (Fabian, 2022; Martela & Ryan, 2023; Martela & Sheldon, 2019); and the present integrative framework of employee well-being builds on these recent advances, combining them with sociologist Erik Allardt's theory of well-being as having, loving, and being, developed already in the 1970s (Allardt, 1973, 1976). My aim is to integrate Allardt's multidimensional theory of well-being with the account of basic psychological needs found in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Martela & Ryan, 2023; Van den Broeck et al., 2016), to come up with a broad integrative account of the key dimensions of employee well-being—and the key indicators for their assessment.

In particular, I distinguish between functional well-being and perceived well-being, arguing that the former is about satisfaction of human needs at work and the latter is about

experiencing well-being at work. Functional well-being itself consists of three modes of existence central to human living, each giving rise to certain human needs: having, loving, and doing. *Having* acknowledges humans as biological creatures; thus, employee well-being is also about getting the resources required for survival from work and experiencing safety at work. *Loving* recognizes humans as social beings; thus, employee well-being requires getting one's interpersonal needs met at work. *Doing* recognizes humans as agentic and active; thus, employee well-being requires getting one's agentic needs for autonomy and competence met at work. *Being*, as the fourth mode of existence, is related to perceived well-being and recognizes humans as experiencing beings who want to have positive experiences at work, namely evaluative, affective, and conative well-being. When our needs related to having, loving, and doing are satisfied at work, this leads to increased perceived well-being at work. Within this overall framework, we can find a place for most existing conceptualizations of employee well-being.

The goals of this review are thus integrative (Cronin & George, 2023): the aim is to synthesize disparate research streams around employee well-being to build a novel organizing framework within which many more specific concepts can find their place. Furthermore, I integrate research on employee well-being with psychological theories on the nature of well-being as such (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Martela & Ryan, 2023), thus anchoring employee well-being constructs more directly to theories about human nature (Allardt, 1993; Martela, 2024). Besides the integrative work, the present article makes several more specific contributions, such as 1) proposing a distinction between perceived and functional well-being, the latter grounded in need satisfaction and often mediating the effect of various work conditions on perceived well-being, 2) providing criteria for what counts as eudaimonic well-being at work, and arguing that these constructs are part of functional well-being, 3) proposing a tripartite distinction between evaluative, affective, and conative well-being, the latter category providing room for constructs with a motivational focus, such as engagement and burnout, and 4) proposing a distinction

between fulfillment pathway to well-being and frustration pathway to ill-being as two partially independent wellness processes. Overall, the present integrative framework enables both researchers and practitioners to make more informed choices about what dimensions of well-being to measure in future studies, both when they need comprehensive accounts of employee well-being and when they need accounts focusing on specific factors.

The Various Conceptualizations of Employee Well-Being

Employee well-being is a broad umbrella construct aiming to capture various factors that make work a positive experience for the employee. *Well-being* as such is defined by two key factors. First, well-being is something positively valenced, consisting of life experiences generally seen as good, valuable, and desirable for human beings. Second, well-being is something subjective and phenomenological, referring to a life going well from the point of view of the subject in question (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). In its broadest form, well-being can thus be taken as an overarching term for all that is good for a human—what a good life is like for a human. *Employee well-being*, then, narrows down the construct to the work context, focusing on all the factors that make work good for the employee in question (Wright & Huang, 2012). We can thus follow Grant et al. (2007, p. 52) in defining employee well-being as "the overall quality of an employee's experience and functioning at work." It is an overall assessment of how positively the employee feels about and evaluates their job and how well they function psychologically at their job.

The history of empirical research on employee well-being begins over a hundred years ago with early research on employee attitudes, boredom, contentment, and satisfaction (e.g., Hoppock, 1937; Wyatt, 1929). Such research has gained more systematic attention since the 1950s (see Judge et al., 2017; Wright, 2006).

Job satisfaction soon emerged as the most commonly studied indicator of employee well-being with empirical articles counted in the tens of thousands (Wright, 2006), arguably

becoming the most extensively studied topic in the history of industrial and organizational psychology (Judge & Klinger, 2008). Job satisfaction is a global assessment of one's job or job experiences as regards how positive and satisfactory they are (Judge & Klinger, 2008), classically defined as "an overall, evaluative judgment of one's job ranging from positive to negative" (Judge et al., 2020, p. 210). It thus focuses on a cognitive, overall assessment of one's situation at work (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000), where employees can themselves determine the standards they use to assess how satisfied or dissatisfied they currently are with their work.

Affective well-being has emerged as the other widely used proxy for employee well-being, tracking how much positive emotions and how much negative emotions the employee is experiencing at work (Bradburn, 1969; Diener et al., 1999). Given the cognitive focus of most job satisfaction assessments, the affective revolution in organizational research over the last decades (Barsade et al., 2003; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) led to calls to focus also on more affective dimensions of employee well-being. These examine whether individuals feel good at work in the sense of experiencing more positive emotions and less negative emotions (Warr, 1990; Wright & Cropanzano, 2000; Wright & Doherty, 1998). Research has demonstrated that affective well-being predicts many outcomes such as workplace turnover (Wright & Bonett, 2007) and job performance (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000) even when controlling for job satisfaction, underscoring the importance of examining employee well-being broadly.

Eudaimonic well-being, as a third dimension of employee well-being alongside job satisfaction and affective well-being, has more recently gained prominence, focusing on positive psychological functioning (Bartels et al., 2019; Grant et al., 2007; Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009; Turban & Yan, 2016). Proponents of eudaimonic well-being see that affects and cognitive evaluations provide too narrow a conceptualization of well-being and must be complemented with an evaluation of how well the employees are functioning psychologically (Zheng et al., 2015), typically focusing on factors such as self-acceptance, environmental mastery, autonomy, personal growth, and purpose in life (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009; Burns & Machin, 2012; see

also Ryff & Keyes, 1995) or the satisfaction of key psychological needs (Meyer & Maltin, 2010). However, different conceptualizations (Fisher, 2010; Grant et al., 2007; Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009) and operationalizations (Burns & Machin, 2012; Turban & Yan, 2016; Zheng et al., 2015) of eudaimonic well-being at work propose somewhat different elements, and thus a consensus is still lacking regarding the key components of more eudaimonic and functional dimensions of well-being.

Besides these paradigms focusing on job satisfaction, affective well-being, and eudaimonic and functional well-being, a few other parallel research streams have focused on specific constructs relevant to well-being but have progressed relatively independently from this discussion. *Work engagement* as a study of how energetic and devoted an employee is toward their work (Bakker et al., 2014; Kahn, 1990) has become one of the most studied employee well-being constructs, with a recent meta-analysis finding 179 studies on the link between engagement, performance, and absenteeism (Neuber et al., 2022). Furthermore, *job burnout* has received much attention as one of the most studied indicators of ill-being at work (Bakker et al., 2014; Canu et al., 2021; Maslach et al., 2001), recognized as a serious health concern at work (Schaufeli et al., 2009; Toker et al., 2012). *Meaningful work*, in turn, has been approached not only from a philosophical perspective but increasingly also as a psychological construct (see Michaelson et al., 2014). Having garnered increased empirical attention, it is seen as a subjective evaluation of how significant and valuable the employee finds their own job (Martela & Pessi, 2018), with a recent meta-analysis of the outcomes of meaningful work concluding that "people with meaningful work *feel* better and *work* better" (Allan, Batz-Barbarich, et al., 2019, p. 515).

Furthermore, a research agenda on *decent work* has recently emerged to better account for the experience of workers in precarious contexts (e.g., Blustein et al., 2023; Duffy et al., 2016, 2019). This has been partly pushed forward by the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2002) to set labor standards that would ensure decent working conditions for employees around the world, focusing on dimensions such as safe working conditions, adequate compensation, and

access to health care (Duffy et al., 2016). While other well-being constructs typically focus on good aspects of work, decent work shifts the focus to the minimal baseline aspects that work ought to have to be considered acceptable (Blustein et al., 2023), thus, in essence, identifying factors that prevent work from becoming a central source of ill-being for the employee in question. Duffy et al. (2016) have thus proposed decent working conditions as key antecedents to experiencing well-being at work.

Overall, constructs for examining employee well-being have proliferated, with many of them developed relatively independently from each other. To illustrate the wide range of constructs used to conceptualize and measure employee well-being, Table 1 gathers together a selection of recent conceptualizations of employee well-being. This has led to "a general lack of integration" (Kelloway et al., 2023, p. 378), where especially the role and definition of eudaimonic well-being have remained ambiguous. To bring structure to this diversity in ways of conceptualizing employee well-being, we need a broader integrative overall framework of employee well-being that could encompass within it these various more particular constructs.

Table 1

A selection of various employee well-being constructs utilized in past research

Job satisfaction	**Allan et al. 2019: Fulfilling work**	**Eudaimonic/Psychological well-being**
Wright, 2006; Wright & Bonett, 2007	Job satisfaction	*Page & Vella-Brodrick 2009;*
Satisfaction with work itself	Meaningful work	*Burns & Machin, 2012*
Satisfaction with coworkers	Work engagement	Environmental mastery
Satisfaction with supervision	Positive workplace emotions	Personal growth
		Purpose in life
Affective well-being	**Employee well-being**	Self-acceptance
(Warr, 1990)	*Grant et al., 2007*	Positive relations
Pleased - Displeased	Psychological well-being	Autonomy
Enthusiastic - Depressed	Physical well-being	
Contented - Anxious	Social well-being	**Eudaimonic workplace well-being**
		Bartels et al. 2019
Job-related affective well-being	**Four faces of happiness at work**	Comfort in relations
Van Katwyk et al. 2000	*Wright 2014*	Relatedness
Positive emotions at work	Objective life conditions	Reciprocity
Negative emotions at work	Life satisfaction	Energy
	Eudaimonic well-being	Purpose
Work engagement	Emotion-based well-being	Value
Bakker et al. 2014		Personal growth
Vigor	**Decent work**	
Dedication	*Duffy et al. 2016*	**Psychological well-being**
Absorbtion	Safe working conditions	*Zheng et al. 2015*
	Work hours allowing free time and rest	Environmental mastery
Meaningful work	Organizational values	Personal growth
Steger et al. 2012	Adequate compensation	Self-acceptance
Positive meaning in work	Access to adequate health care	Positive relations
Meaning making through work		
Greater good motivations	**Flow at work**	**Eudaimonia at work**
	Bakker 2008	*Turban & Yan 2016*
Job burnout	Absorption	Personal growth
Maslach et al. 2001	Enjoyment	Purpose
Exhaustion	Intrinsic motivation	Social significance
Cynicism		
Inefficacy	**Thriving at work**	**Basic psychological needs at work**
	Porath et al. 2011	*Van den Broeck et al. 2016*
	Learning	Autonomy
	Vitality	Competence
		Relatedness

Distinguishing Functional Well-Being (Having, Loving, Doing) and Perceived Well-Being (Being)

A proper account of employee well-being must be grounded in an understanding of human nature. As well-being focuses on factors deemed good and desirable for humans, in defining well-being we inescapably take a stand on what are the factors that make life good and desirable for human beings. As Metcalf (1917, pp. 175–176) argued more than one hundred years ago in the first volume of the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, "business must get down to the great elemental truths of human nature" and understand "the organic nature" and the "normal desires and needs" of humans to unleash the human element in business. This means that an understanding of employee well-being grounded in human nature must have a dual focus. Besides examining whether the employees are "feeling good," one needs to assess whether they are "doing well" (NEF, 2008) in terms of fully functioning and being able to realize their potential (Martela & Sheldon, 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Thus, we can make a key distinction between perceived and functional well-being (Martela & Ryan, 2023; Martela & Sheldon, 2019): *Perceived well-being at work* is about how positively or negatively we generally evaluate and feel about our work, whereas *functional well-being at work* is about the degree to which our human needs are satisfied or frustrated at work. Needs are factors universally necessary for human survival, functioning, and flourishing, reflecting "our adaptive human design" (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 88). In contrast to wants and wishes that are fleeting and vary between individuals, all human beings require the satisfaction of their needs "to function as a human being" (Galtung, 1980, p. 60), with need frustration associated with serious harm (Allardt, 1976).

The present integrative framework of employee well-being builds upon Erik Allardt's (1976, 1993) multidimensional theory of well-being that argued that in addition to material needs (having), we humans also have social needs (loving), and needs related to self-actualization and personal growth (what is here called doing). Building on Allardt and more

recent research on basic psychological needs (Doyal & Gough, 1991; Martela & Ryan, 2023), I thus argue that functional well-being is captured by three modes of existence—having, loving, and doing—each of them associated with certain more specific human needs.

Besides these three modes focusing on human needs, *being*, as the fourth mode of existence, has a slightly different role in capturing the most fundamental aspect of human life: the fact that we are experiencing it (cf. Heidegger, 1962). Overall, I thus come to argue that there are four modes to human existence: having, loving, doing, and being[1]. Whatever else human existence is about, and whatever the particulars of each human's unique situation, *at least* we humans are experiencing, biological, social, and agentic beings, thus giving rise to these four fundamental modes of human existence. An account of employee well-being mindful of human nature must thus recognize these four modes of existence and preferably should aim to identify how well the employee is faring on all these four accounts.

Functional Well-Being Leads to Perceived Well-Being

Of the modes of existence, being is not associated with any specific need but is about how the person perceives and experiences their work more generally. The three other modes of existence capture a slightly more specific aspect of human existence: that we are biological, social, and agentic, each associated with a few more specific needs. The satisfaction of our needs related to having, loving, and doing significantly impacts our feelings and evaluations about life and work, thus operating as key antecedents to perceived well-being. Functional well-being thus identifies

[1] While Allardt had three dimensions (having, loving, being), the present account has four. This builds on the distinction between perceived and functional well-being (Martela & Ryan, 2023; Martela & Sheldon, 2019) and reflects the identification of *being* as the most fundamental mode of existence, focusing on experiencing rather than any specific needs (Martela, 2024). It also follows other more recent researchers who have identified *doing* as a mode of existence missing from Allardt's typology (Helne & Hirvilammi, 2015; Hirvilammi & Helne, 2014). Although the account is thus inspired by Allardt, it defines being differently from his definition and includes doing as a separate dimension.

the key human needs work must fulfill (having, loving, doing) to lead to perceived well-being (being).

This means that the needs occupy a double role in the present framework. First, rooted in human nature they are key elements of functional well-being and are thus independently and intrinsically valuable, partly defining what well-being is for humans (Martela & Ryan, 2023). Simultaneously, they occupy a position in between environmental factors and perceived well-being: they explain why certain environmental conditions are conducive to perceived well-being, empirically operating as mediating factors between environmental factors and indicators of perceived well-being (Martela & Ryan, 2023; Martela & Sheldon, 2019).

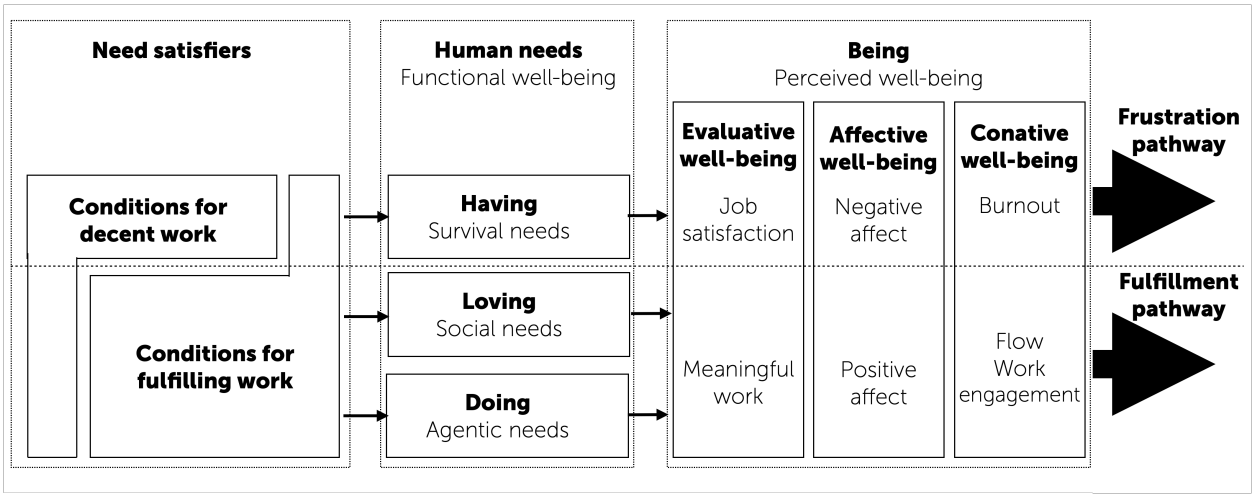
Thus, although there is a debate about the role of needs in employee well-being, where some argue that needs should be seen as parts of well-being (e.g., Zheng et al., 2015) and others argue that such needs should be seen as "predictors of well-being rather than as components of well-being" (Allan, Owens, et al., 2019, p. 275), I argue that both are right: the needs should not be seen as components of *perceived* well-being but rather antecedents to it, while they should be seen as components of *functional* well-being, which is independently an important part of what well-being is for humans. Thus, employee well-being consists of both positive functioning and positive perceptions (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009), with the former typically leading to the latter.

Figure 1 provides a schematic overview of the model of well-being proposed in the present article. In addition to the distinction between perceived and functional well-being, the figure highlights a distinction between *need satisfaction* as such and *need satisfiers* (Max-Neef et al., 1992), the latter referring to various material and objective resources and conditions that typically give rise to need satisfaction. Subjective need satisfaction thus provides a criterion variable that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of various need satisfiers. Within need satisfiers, we can further distinguish between *conditions for decent work* referring to factors without which work becomes a source of need frustration, harm, and ill-being and *conditions*

for fulfilling work, referring to factors whose presence will cause need satisfaction, well-being, and fulfillment (I explore this distinction more carefully later on in the article). Having outlined in broad strokes the overall well-being model and the four modes of existence, the next sections examine each part of the model in more detail.

Figure 1

A schematic overview of the relations between need satisfiers, human needs, and perceived well-being



Having: Humans as Biological Creatures

Humans are biological creatures whose survival depends on the satisfaction of certain material needs, such as oxygen, water, nutrition, and shelter from weather conditions and predators. *Having* as a need category captures these physical needs, being about "needs related to material and impersonal resources" (Allardt, 1976, p. 231). These needs typically adhere to a homeostasis model where the need is "salient primarily when the individual does not have it" (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 251) in that their deprivation activates motivation and behavior to ensure their satisfaction. Humans also bring their biological nature to work, making physical well-being (Grant et al., 2007) and the satisfaction of survival needs (Blustein, 2008; Duffy et al., 2016) a central component of employee well-being (Eshelman & Rottinghaus, 2019). It is hard to be

happy at work if one is starving. Deprivation of physical needs at work can cause both physical and psychological pain, seriously damaging employee well-being.

Having thus focuses on the lack of perceived threats at work and a general sense of safety and security at work (Martela, 2024), identified as a basic need by Maslow (1943). Lack of safety has been associated with increased ill-being and feeling threatened, which often has detrimental consequences (Chen, Van Assche, et al., 2015; Rasskazova et al., 2016), with Sirgy et al. (2001) classifying security and salary as key survival needs in their account of employee well-being. Accordingly, it is important to measure *the subjective sense of safety* at work, to assess the employee's general feeling about how safe and secure they feel at work. This general sense of safety can be further divided into a number of sub-components, such as a sense of physical safety at work, a sense of financial security, and a sense of interpersonal safety (the latter is here classified into loving). Although threats to physical safety might feel remote to Western middle-class office workers (Eshelman & Rottinghaus, 2019), globally, many people work in context where threat of violence and hazards push them to a constant alert state. As with other deficit needs, factors related to safety tend not to be an issue until they are in some way threatened.

Besides a subjective sense of safety, a number of crucial need satisfiers directly contribute to human survival. On the most basic level, what this means for employee well-being is that the employee must have *access to drink, food, and proper sanitation* facilities at work. Although these are easily taken as given among educated and privileged classes, globally many people work in conditions where these are a serious issue and a chronic source of ill-being at work. Additionally, *physical safety against various hazards* at work examines the objective prevalence of physical hazards and injuries at work (Duffy et al., 2016; Kelloway et al., 2023), which can be a serious issue in many physical occupations. A study of 209 welders in South India found that each had had at least two injuries in the past year, including lacerations, flash burns, and contusions (Kumar & Dharanipriya, 2014).

Given that the salary provided by employment has a key role in enabling physical need satisfaction—money is used to buy food and secure housing—having employment and adequate salary are key need satisfiers of human physical needs (Martela, 2024). In the work context, this means that *job security* is an important part of safety at work, with research showing how job insecurity is associated with increased burnout and reduced job satisfaction and somatic health (De Witte, 1999; De Witte et al., 2016; Richter & Näswall, 2019). Furthermore, the work must provide *adequate compensation* so that the employee can buy basic necessities for survival also outside of work (Blustein et al., 2023; Duffy et al., 2016), this being a key reason for why people work (Eshelman & Rottinghaus, 2019). All of these factors are independently important for employee well-being – a threat or deficit in any single of them could be a source of much distress for an employee. Thus, while they are categorized together as they all relate to the homeostatic physical needs at work, each needs to be assessed independently to know whether it is a cause of ill-being for the employee in question.

Loving: Humans are Social Animals

Human beings are social animals whose survival and well-being is dependent on other people, and thus each human needs reciprocal relations with people one "cares for" and by whom one is "cared for" (Allardt, 1973, p. 65). Most need theories recognize humans as having other-oriented needs (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943; McClelland, 1985) and most eudaimonic accounts of employee well-being similarly recognize social well-being as one key dimension of optimal functioning (e.g., Bartels et al., 2019; Grant et al., 2007; Pradhan & Hati, 2022), focusing on "relational experience and functioning" at work (Grant et al., 2007, p. 53). Given that humans have a need to belong and have caring interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2000), and given that people spend a significant proportion of their everyday life at work, work must fulfill certain interpersonal needs to be conducive to well-being (Blustein, 2008; Duffy et al., 2016).

Many ways to identify more specific dimensions within this broad need to belong are possible, but here I argue that in a work context, at least these three must be considered: A *sense of acceptance* is about feeling that one is fitting in, is accepted and respected by others, and is not facing discrimination. Rejection and outright ostracization are painful experiences (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 2003; Legate et al., 2013), making fitting in a crucial human concern (Martela et al., 2019; K. D. Williams, 2009). Recognition by colleagues (Kelloway et al., 2023) and not facing bullying or emotionally abused (Blustein et al., 2023; Duffy et al., 2016) have thus been recognized as important parts of employee well-being.

A *sense of relatedness* is about having relationships at work characterized by caring, mutuality, and a sense of connection. The importance of the "quality of one's relationships" and having high-quality connections for employee well-being is widely recognized (Grant et al., 2007, p. 53; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). Although an employee who is merely 'accepted' might need to conform to norms and downplay their uniqueness to retain their sense of fitting in, a sense of relatedness includes the feeling that one's uniqueness is valued by others and that those others care about oneself as the unique person one is (see Barak & Levin, 2002; Shore et al., 2011).

A *sense of prosocial impact* is about feeling that one can make a difference and contribute positively through one's work. Being able to do good through one's work has been shown to be an important source of well-being and meaningfulness at work (Aknin et al., 2013; Allan et al., 2018; Hui et al., 2020; Martela et al., 2021). It can be realized through the work having an overall prosocial purpose, through being able to concretely help customers, or even through feeling one is helping one's colleagues (Grant, 2007, 2012).

These subjective indicators of interpersonal well-being can be complemented with a few key need satisfiers. First, indicators of *an interpersonally safe working environment*, such as the prevalence of harassment, conflicts, and threats, can be measured. Second, indicators examining *(the absence of) discrimination* are important complements to the subjective sense of

acceptance individuals experience. Both of these are important conditions for decent work. As regards key conditions for fulfilling work, one can measure how much the work provides possibilities for *positive social contacts* with colleagues, customers, and other stakeholders to assess the relational job design of the work (Grant, 2007). *Prosocial purpose*, understood as the degree to which the organization is seen to have a prosocial mission or purpose as its aim can also significantly influence the employees' possibility to experience the job as interpersonally fulfilling**.** Here, however, it is important to measure both the extent to which the purpose is prosocial and the extent to which it is actually realized in the given organization.

Doing: Humans as Agentic Beings

Human relation to the world is active and agentic – we have desires, goals, and values that give direction to our activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Doing as a mode of existence thus highlights the fact that humans have future-oriented goals and aspirations, making choices that orient them towards the fulfillment of those aspirations—in others words, humans have agency over their own lives (Bandura, 2018; Frankfurt, 1978). In a work context, such agentic, self-determination needs are especially emphasized, as work by definition involves goal-oriented striving and action (Blustein, 2008). Accordingly, agency (Grant et al., 2007), self-regulation (Duffy et al., 2016), autonomy, and environmental mastery (Bartels et al., 2019) have been highlighted as key dimensions of optimal functioning and eudaimonic well-being at work.

Effective agency requires both room and capability to make one's own choices and the ability to effectively pursue those goals. It can thus be distilled into two more specific needs, autonomy and competence. *Autonomy* is about a sense of volition, choice, and self-endorsement as regards one's actions (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017). To experience autonomy, the employee must endorse the goals of one's work and have enough room to decide how they want to best pursue those goals. It is good to emphasize that autonomy is not the same as independence or individualism, but a person can experience autonomy in pursuing shared goals as part of a team,

as long as the shared goals and values are congruent with one's own aspirations (Chirkov et al., 2003). Thus, two persons occupying similar work roles and the same objective work conditions might have large differences in their well-being if one whole-heartedly endorses their role and finds their tasks interesting, while the other feels that they are trapped in a role that does not fit at all with their personal interests and values.

Competence is about a sense of efficacy, effectance, and mastery (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017). Already, Warr (1990) emphasized the importance of competence as a key aspect of mental health at work, with much research exploring the role of self-efficacy in job satisfaction and performance (Judge & Bono, 2001). As work is a goal-oriented activity, how effectively one is able to accomplish one's tasks and how much mastery one feels while doing it significantly affects one's overall well-being at work. Both autonomy and competence have been shown to predict work engagement, meaningfulness, job satisfaction and other aspects of perceived well-being at work in numerous studies (see meta-analysis by Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Furthermore, *learning and development,* as a sub-factor of a broader need for competence (learning means one's competence is growing over time), is such an important factor of work-related well-being that it makes sense to measure it independently as an indicator of how one's capability for agency is developing over time.

In terms of key need satisfiers *protection against overlong working hours* allowing the employee to have enough rest and free time and regulate their own work-life balance is an important condition for decent work (Blustein et al., 2023; Duffy et al., 2016), as having enough time outside of work is crucial for a person's overall sense of autonomy in life. Such protection can come from the laws of the relevant country, from employment contract, from the customs and culture of the organization, or from the employee having enough bargaining power. Furthermore, having *congruence between personal and organizational values* is an important precondition for making the work fulfilling, as incongruence here seriously diminishes the employee's ability to truly commit to the organizational goals and ways of working (Duffy et al.,

2016). Similarly, having a degree of *voice and the ability to influence working conditions* significantly influences one's ability to experience autonomy and, through that, to find one's work fulfilling.

Being: Humans as Experiencing Beings

Humans are, on a fundamental level, experiencing beings: our life feels something to us and we have evaluative attitudes toward it. Accordingly, how we generally experience our work is at the core of employee well-being. Perceived employee well-being consists of three dimensions (see Fisher, 2010 for a similar tripartite proposal), each representing one generic positive/negative experience one can have in and about one's work: whether one has positive or negative feelings about work (affective well-being), whether one evaluates one's work positively or negatively (evaluative well-being), and whether one's motivation toward work is positive or negative (conative well-being).

The distinction between evaluative and affective well-being is grounded in a dual-process understanding of human cognition (Dane & Pratt, 2007; Evans, 2008; Evans & Stanovich, 2013; Luoma & Martela, 2021). The human way of being involves both an *engaged self,* experiencing various intuitive feelings and emotions, and a *reflective self,* capable of reflective thinking and evaluations (Evans, 2008; Kahneman & Riis, 2005). This gives rise to two types of well-being: *affective well-being* captures how much positive and negative everyday emotions and feelings people have, and *evaluative well-being* captures reflective assessments a person makes about their life as a whole or a particular life domain, such as work.

However, in the work context, some key well-being constructs, such as engagement, are conative, focusing on the experience of being positively motivated and drawn towards one's goals and tasks. Psychological research has demonstrated that the quality of motivation matters: Motivation may feel positively engaging and exciting, or negatively enforcing and controlling (Deci et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000); and accordingly, we can draw on the classical distinction

between cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of psychology (Hilgard, 1980; Mayer et al., 1997) to argue that how one experiences one's work motivation may be seen as the third experiential dimension of employee well-being.

Evaluative Well-Being

Evaluative well-being refers to general assessments employees make as regards how positively they evaluate their work and is most typically measured with *job satisfaction*, defined as an "overall evaluative judgment one has about one's job," focusing on the favorability of the job (Judge et al., 2017, p. 357). Job satisfaction can be seen as the most important and most studied indicator of evaluative employee well-being. However, it is not the only one. Allan et al. (2019) recently proposed that along with job satisfaction, *meaningful work* should be used as another construct that taps into cognitive well-being; similar proposals have been recently made also within psychology (Martela & Ryan, 2023). Meaningful work is conceptualized as an evaluation of how personally significant and valuable the employee finds their work (Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017; Martela & Pessi, 2018). Thus, as meaningful work "captures how individuals *evaluate* the significance and value of their work" (Blustein et al., 2023, p. 297 emphasis added), it should be seen as another type of evaluative well-being. Job satisfaction focuses on how satisfied employees are with their work, and meaningful work focuses on how valuable they find their work. Together, they are, thus, currently the two most prominent indicators of evaluative well-being.

Affective Well-Being

Affective well-being refers to the affective experiences employees have at work that tend to range along a continuum from positive to negative (Warr, 2013). Given that positive and negative affects have been shown to be inversely correlated but partially independent phenomena (Bradburn, 1969; Diener et al., 1999), the most typical way of measuring affective well-being is to examine how much *positive affect* and how much *negative affect* the employee is experiencing. Some employees might approach their work with excitement and joy; others

may feel that their work gives rise to anxiety, frustration, and sadness. A second key distinction is often made between low-arousal and high-arousal emotions, giving rise to a circumplex model of affect with positive/negative and high/low arousal as the two axes (Russell, 1980; Warr, 1990; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996; Wright & Bonett, 1997). Notably, how much granularity is desirable from the measurement of affective well-being depends on the research question: if one is interested in the general relation between affective well-being at work and, say, performance, then a single affective index might be preferable (e.g., Wright & Bonett, 2007; Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). However, if one is interested in the comparative effects of different types of affects, separate measures for positive and negative affects (e.g., Wright & Staw, 1999), a circumplex measure separating low and high activation (e.g., Mäkikangas, Anne et al., 2007; Van Katwyk et al., 2000; Wright & Bonett, 1997) or even a scale focusing on discrete emotions (e.g., Levine et al., 2011; C. E. Williams et al., 2024) should be used.

Conative Well-Being

Conative well-being refers to the quality of the employee's motivation towards one's work, thus focusing on types of motivation felt as positive, where work feels attractive, intrinsically motivating, and the employee feels drawn towards and excited about one's work (see Bradshaw et al., 2023; Deci et al., 2017; Gagné & Hewett, 2024). As Bahrami and Cranney (2018, p. 963) argue, "eudaimonically oriented goal striving is valuable in and of itself" and as such contributes to well-being, independent of whether pursuit of the goal is eventually successful (which eventually has its own effect on affective well-being). The line between purely affective and purely conative concepts is blurry but some concepts seem more clearly to tap into this motivational side. For example, Warr (1990) suggested that aspiration should be measured separately from positive and negative affect.

*Work engagement***,** defined as a "positive motivational state of vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Bakker et al., 2014, p. 389), is a central concept within conative well-being, given the extensive research around the construct (Bakker et al., 2023; Neuber et al., 2022).

Engagement is often seen as involving both affective and motivational states (e.g., Allan, Owens, et al., 2019; Bakker, 2011) but is arguably "primarily a motivational construct" (Judge et al., 2017, p. 357), given its focus on vigor as "high levels of energy" and dedication as "being strongly involved in one's work" (Bakker et al., 2023, p. 27). Thus, it mainly taps into conative well-being although some of its dimensions have also affective and even cognitive undertones.

On the negative side, *job burnout* is characterized by "loss of energy and enthusiasm" (Bakker et al., 2014, p. 390), with physical and emotional exhaustion as its core symptoms (Canu et al., 2021). Although some definitions include more dimensions and some less (Bakker et al., 2023; Canu et al., 2021), including affective dimensions such as depressed mood (Schaufeli et al., 2020), given its focus on exhaustion, lack of energy, and mental distance from work (Bakker et al., 2014; Maslach et al., 2001), burnout can be seen as primarily a conative concept.

The Fulfillment to Well-Being Pathway and the Frustration to Ill-Being Pathway

The present framework of employee well-being proposes an overarching pathway from various need satisfiers through satisfaction of the needs related to having, loving, and doing to perceived well-being consisting of evaluative, affective, and conative well-being (Figure 1). The currently identified elements to be captured within each of the four modes of existence are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Key indicators of perceived well-being, need satisfaction, and need satisfiers

	Conditions for decent work	Conditions for fulfilling work	Needs and perceived well-being
Having	Access to drink, food, and proper sanitation		*Sense of safety and security*
	Physically safe working conditions		Sense of physical safety at work
			Sense of financial security
	Job security		
	Adequate compensation		
Loving	Interpersonally safe working conditions	Positive social contacts at work	Sense of acceptance
		Prosocial purpose at work	Sense of relatedness
	Absence of discrimination		Sense of prosocial impact
Doing	Protection against overlong working hours	Congruence between personal & organizational values	Sense of autonomy
			Sense of competence
		Voice and ability to influence work conditions	Sense of learning and development
Being			*Affective well-being*
			Positive emotions
			Negative emotions
			Evaluative well-being
			Job satisfaction
			Work meaningfulness
			Conative well-being
			Work engagement
			Burnout

However, full human wellness includes both the presence of well-being and the absence of ill-being. Accordingly, within this general pathway two more specific pathways can be distilled: a fulfillment pathway from need satisfiers through need satisfaction to well-being and a frustration pathway from need frustrators through need frustration to ill-being. This distinction between a positive well-being pathway and a negative ill-being pathway builds on many converging lines of evidence. Frederick Herzberg was an early pioneer who noticed that "the factors involved in producing job satisfaction (and motivation) are separate and distinct from the factors that lead to job dissatisfaction" (Herzberg, 1968, p. 56), calling the former

motivator factors connected to self-direction and psychological growth and the latter hygiene factors connected to physical and psychological pain avoidance.

The basic distinction between a positive well-being pathway and a negative ill-being pathway has been established by many other theoretical accounts (Sachau, 2007). First, the relative independence of positive and negative affect has been widely confirmed (Bradburn, 1969; Diener et al., 1999). Also, research on burnout and work engagement has found that the two tend to have "distinctive patterns of antecedents and consequences" (Bakker et al., 2014, p. 399), an insight that was formalized in the job demands-resources theory, which argues that there are two fairly independent processes, a health impairment process, where negative job demands lead to exhaustion and ill-being, and a motivational process where positive job and personal resources lead to engagement and well-being (Bakker et al., 2014, 2023; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The basic tenets of the theory have found broad support, as reviewed in several meta-analyses (e.g., Crawford et al., 2010; Lesener et al., 2020; Mazzetti et al., 2021).

Furthermore, research on psychological needs has demonstrated that need satisfaction and need frustration are separate: absence of need satisfaction is not the same as active frustration of the same need (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Research shows that while need satisfaction is associated with well-being indicators such as positive affect and vitality, need frustration tends to be more strongly associated with ill-being indicators such as depression, stress, and burnout (Bartholomew et al., 2011; Campbell et al., 2017; Chen, Vansteenkiste, et al., 2015).

Based on these research insights, one may thus argue for the existence of two partially independent wellness processes rooted in the distinction between survival needs, which emphasize avoidance of need frustration and consequent suffering, and enhancement needs, which focus on well-being and engagement resulting from need satisfaction (Martela & Ryan, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2017). First, work must meet certain basic conditions in order to not be a direct source of suffering and ill-being; the notion of *conditions for decent work* captures these,

referring to need satisfiers whose absence will cause need frustration, harm, and ill-being. Conditions for decent work thus focus on the necessary factors to ensure that employee needs are not seriously frustrated and employees are not suffering at work. However, work can, in the best case, be a key source of well-being, value, and fulfillment in a person's life, with *conditions for fulfilling work* referring to factors the presence of which will cause need satisfaction, well-being, and fulfillment. Conditions for fulfilling work thus focus on factors that lead the employees to experience positive need satisfaction and be able to flourish at work.

These are two partially independent dimensions: work can be decent without being fulfilling, but work can also be fulfilling without being decent. For example, zookeepers might find their work highly meaningful to the degree of being a calling despite suffering from poor working conditions, inadequate compensation, and overlong working hours (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). Conditions for decent work are mostly related to survival needs and indicators of ill-being such as negative affect, whereas conditions for fulfilling work are mostly related to social and agentic needs and indicators of well-being such as positive affect and meaningfulness.

Importantly, this distinction is not always clear-cut: first, given that well-being and ill-being tend to correlate, there are always going to be spillover effects where reduction in ill-being will also have a positive effect on well-being and vice versa. Second, many work factors might more strongly affect one over the other yet have also a minor effect on the other side of the equation, with some factors falling in the middle ground in terms of having roughly equal effects on both ill-being and well-being. Third, more research is needed, as currently many work factors are ambiguous in the sense that we have insufficient high-quality research to determine what side of the process they primarily influence. Fourth, while *having* primarily focuses on survival needs that operate mostly as hygiene factors the absence of which causes ill-being, *loving* and *doing* have elements that fall on both sides of the equation: social factors such as discrimination operate more on the negative side while caring, relatedness and prosocial impact operate more

on the positive side (Martela et al., 2019). Similarly, as regards agentic needs, oppressive supervisors operate more on the negative side whereas empowerment operates more on the positive side. Thus, although distinguishing between fulfillment and frustration pathways is illuminating and important, the reality is more complex, and the lines between the two processes are in some cases blurry.

Discussion

To answer the need for integration and more theory-based accounts of employee well-being, the present work has introduced a needs-based framework of employee well-being grounded in four human modes of existence: having, loving, doing, and being. Of these, being is arguably the most fundamental, focusing on perceived well-being and having three dimensions: evaluative well-being is about general evaluations of one's work such as job satisfaction and job meaningfulness, affective well-being is about positive and negative feelings and emotions at work, and conative well-being is about positive and negative motivation towards one's work such as engagement and burnout. Perceived well-being at work is, in turn, partly determined by how much employees experience need satisfaction at work. Having is associated with survival and safety needs, loving is associated with social needs for relatedness, acceptance, and prosociality, and doing is associated with agentic needs for autonomy and competence. When unacceptable work conditions lead to active frustration of needs, this causes ill-being at work, whereas fulfilling work conditions leading to active need fulfillment causes positive experiential well-being.

Theoretical contributions

The main theoretical contributions of the present work are integrative: to address the lack of integration among the plurality of employee well-being constructs (Fisher et al. 2010; Kelloway et al. 2023), this research offers a novel framework of well-being, grounded in a theory of human nature (Martela, 2024), within which we can find space for most existing employee

well-being constructs. Table 3 shows how various existing employee well-being dimensions can be organized within the present framework. It also demonstrates that the previous frameworks have not provided accounts as comprehensive as the present one; rather, each typically focuses on a much narrower set of constructs. Previous accounts have also not made a distinction between functional and perceived well-being, instead typically just listing a number of constructs without attempting to organize them.

Table 3

Integrating various existing dimensions of well-being into the present integrative framework

					Being	
Well-being construct	Source	**Having**	**Loving**	**Doing**	**Affective well-being**	**Conative well-being**	**Evaluative well-being**
Job satisfaction	Wright, 2006						Job satisfaction
Affective well-being	Van Katwyk et al. 2000				Positive emotions,Negative emotions		
Affective well-being	Warr, 1990				Pleased/Displeased, Enthusiasti/Depressed, Contented/Anxious		
Work engagement	Bakker et al. 2014					Work engagement	
Meaningful work	Steger et al. 2012						Meaningful work
Job burnout	Maslach et al. 2001					Job burnout	
Fulfilling work	Allan et al. 2019				Positive emotions	Work engagement	Job satisfaction, Meaningful work
Employee well-being	Grant et al. 2007	Physical well-being	Social well-being			Engagement	Job satisfaction, Meaningful work
Four faces of happiness	Wright, 2014	Objective life conditions		Eudaimonic well-being	Emotion-based well-being		Life satisfaction
Decent work	Duffy et al. 2016	Safe working conditions, Adequate compensation Adequate health care	Interpersonally safe working conditions	Work hours allowing free time and rest Organizational values			
Eudaimonic/ Psychological well-being	Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009 / Burns & Machin, 2012		Positive relations	Environmental mastery, Personal growth, Autonomy, Self-acceptance			Purpose in life
Eudamonic workplace well-being	Bartels et al. 2019		Relatedness, Comfort in relations, Reciprocity	Personal growth		Energy	Purpose, Value
Psychological well-being	Zheng et al. 2015		Positive relations	Environmental mastery, Personal growth, Self-acceptance			
Basic psychological needs at work	Van den Broeck et al. 2016		Relatedness	Autonomy, Competence			
Eudaimonia at work	Turban & Yan, 2016		Social significance	Personal growth			Purpose
Thriving at work	Porath et al. 2011			Learning		Vitality	
Flow at work	Bakker 2008				Enjoyment	Intrinsic motivation, Absorption	

To build this encompassing synthesis of employee well-being, the proposed framework also integrates research on employee well-being with psychological research on well-being, particularly the Allardtian framework of modes of existence (Allardt, 1993; Hirvilammi & Helne, 2014; Martela, 2024) and self-determination theory's research on psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Whereas most current accounts of employee well-being focus exclusively on either perceived or functional well-being (see Table 1), the present account proposes a clear distinction between them, with the latter grounded in need satisfaction. This helps to clarify how the so-called eudaimonic elements of well-being often proposed to complement job satisfaction and affective well-being (Bartels et al., 2019; Grant et al., 2007; Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009; Turban & Yan, 2016; Zheng et al., 2015) do not operate on the same level as perceived well-being but rather as factors explaining and predicting perceived well-being. Thus, the present work proposes that the fulfillment of the proposed dimensions of functional well-being causally leads to higher perceived well-being, these functional dimensions mediating to a large degree the impact of various work conditions on perceived well-being.

By integrating employee well-being constructs with human needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017), modes of existence (Allardt, 1993; Martela, 2024) and dual-process accounts of cognition (Dane & Pratt, 2007; Evans & Stanovich, 2013), the present work also anchors employee well-being into a deeper understanding of human nature. Even the success of the more established constructs such as job satisfaction has been "based more on practical, rather than theoretical grounds" (Wright, 2006, p. 272), thus calling for work that would theoretically locate job satisfaction in the broader construct of employee well-being. By distinguishing between modes of existence and the three types of perceived well-being, the present work gives place to job satisfaction and other well-being constructs in an overall account of key dimensions of human existence and experience.

The present work offers also integration and clarification to many specific discourses within employee well-being. While eudaimonic well-being at work has often been proposed as an important part of overall employee well-being (e.g., Grant et al., 2007; Pelly, 2023; Zheng et al., 2015), the construct itself has remained elusive and ambiguous, with little overlap between various conceptualizations (compare Bartels et al., 2019; Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009; Turban & Yan, 2016; Zheng et al., 2015). The vagueness of the construct has meant that virtually anything that is *not* job satisfaction or affective well-being has been sometimes called "eudaimonic." The present framework provides clearer criteria for the elements to include in eudaimonic well-being by arguing that any proposed element of eudaimonic well-being should be grounded in the satisfaction of human needs.

Furthermore, the tripartite distinction between evaluative, affective, and conative well-being clarifies the field of perceived well-being that has for a long time acknowledged the distinction between evaluative and affective well-being (Judge et al., 2017; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996; Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). The inclusion of conative well-being as the third dimension of perceived well-being argues that quality of motivation should be seen as an important dimension of employee well-being, thus making space for much-studied well-being–related constructs such as work engagement, flow, and burnout, all of which have a motivational focus. Relatedly, meaningful work and engagement have been typically seen as eudaimonic elements of well-being (e.g., Allan, Owens, et al., 2019; Grant et al., 2007); but here, they are taken as types of perceived well-being, with meaningful work representing a type of evaluative well-being complementing job satisfaction and engagement being a type of conative well-being. This helps clarify how, similar to job satisfaction and affective well-being, they are typical outcomes of need satisfaction (Martela et al., 2021; Martela & Riekki, 2018), thus being part of perceived well-being rather than of functional well-being.

Building on the distinctions between job demands and resources (Bakker et al. 2014), between need satisfaction and need frustration (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013), and between

motivator and hygiene factors (Herzberg, 1968), the present work also argues for a distinction between fulfillment pathway to well-being and frustration pathway to ill-being. In the former, conditions for fulfilling work give rise to need satisfaction and, through that, an increase in well-being, such as positive affect and engagement. In the latter, lack of conditions for decent work give rise to need frustration and, through that, an increase in ill-being, such as negative affect and burnout. Although they are related, I argue that well-being and ill-being are independent constructs, with partially separate antecedents and mediators, giving rise to two partially independent wellness processes.

The account as a whole offers itself as a useful heuristic tool for researchers wanting to measure employee well-being. Although a wide variety of measures are currently used, and empirical studies rarely justify why they chose to use a certain employee well-being indicator, the present integrative account allows researchers to make more informed choices about what dimensions to measure by giving them an overall view of the key dimensions from which to choose. Popular employee well-being indicators such as job satisfaction tend to focus on a single dimension of employee well-being (evaluative well-being in this case), but the present organizing framework makes possible a more comprehensive assessment of employee well-being to tap into all its identified key dimensions. For example, although job satisfaction alone provides some predictive power over quit intentions, other well-being indicators of engagement, affect, and psychological needs all provide unique additional predictive power, making such a more comprehensive measurement a much better predictor of quit intentions (Pelly, 2023). The present account helps in harmonizing the measurement choices across studies, allowing for a more comparative and, thus, more cumulative future science of employee well-being in the future.

Future directions for research

The present account opens up several areas for future research (gathered in Table 4). First, the present work offers an understanding of how various dimensions of well-being relate to each other, arguing that the identified dimensions of functional well-being will causally contribute to perceived well-being at work. While previous research has linked most constructs to each other, too much of the evidence base builds on cross-sectional data, and thus longitudinal and experimental research would be needed to establish the causal direction of influence between various dimensions of employee well-being to confirm whether the main causal pathways follow the present model. For example, are relatedness, prosocial impact, competence, autonomy, and learning predictors of work engagement and work meaningfulness, as suggested, or is there also a reverse causal pathway (see Allan et al. 2018; Martela et al. 2021, for partial investigations around this topic). This would help to determine whether the satisfaction of the proposed needs increases job satisfaction, engagement, and positive affect at work, as suggested. Furthermore, the same needs could be used as mediators in future studies to examine whether they mediate the relation between various organizational structures and perceived well-being at work. For many work conditions, we know that they are connected to employee well-being, but such mediation analysis would help to establish through which needs this connection operates.

Table 4

Key focus areas for future research

Future research focus	Research gap	Explanation
Establishing the causal link between functional and perceived well-being	While the components have been linked, research confirming the direction of influence is lacking	Longitudinal and experimental research to establish whether key components of functional well-being causally lead to perceived well-being.
The identified needs as mediators between work conditions and perceived well-being	For work conditions known to influence well-being, we do not know which needs mediate these connections	Examining the identified needs as mediators between work conditions (leadership etc.) and perceived well-being to establish which needs mediate the effect of which conditions.
The link between various types of perceived well-being	While satisfaction, engagement, and meaningfulness correlate, how they influence each other is unclear	Empirical research examining the complex dynamics between job satisfaction, work engagement, work meaningfulness, and positive affects at work.
Comparison of the effect sizes of various types of perceived well-being as outcomes	For various job conditions, we lack knowledge about what type of well-being are they mainly influencing	Using several dimensions of perceived well-being as dependent variable to compare the effect sizes. Helps in establishing what factors have their main impact on what type of perceived well-being.
Categorization of job-related factors into conditions for decent work and fulfilling work	We don't know which job factors have their strongest effect on well-being, which on ill-being	Examining various job-related factors, using both well-being and ill-being indicators as outcomes, to see which are more strongly related to positive well-being, which to negative ill-being.
The added value of comprehensive well-being measurement in predicting outcomes	We do not know how much more predictive power more comprehensive accounts of well-being provide	Comparing narrow (e.g., just job satisfaction) and comprehensive measurement of employee well-being as predictors of various relevant outcomes (e.g., performance) to establish how much more variance does the latter approach explain.
The role of employee attitudes and habits in well-being	We have little knowledge about whether certain job attitudes could buffer or strengthen the effect on well-being of various job conditions	Examining various attitudes and habits as potential moderators of the relationship between contextual factors and need satisfaction and perceived well-being.

Empirical research would also be helpful in exploring the complex dynamics between different types of perceived well-being, such as the relations between work engagement, job satisfaction, and meaningful work. They tend to correlate positively but we lack clarity about the direction of influence between such constructs. For example, does engagement increase satisfaction and meaningfulness or vice versa, or is their correlation mainly due to all three being influenced by many of the same underlying factors? Furthermore, measuring several dimensions of perceived well-being simultaneously as dependent variables in longitudinal or experimental studies would allow the direct comparison of effect sizes, to establish what factors contribute to what types of perceived well-being (cf. C. E. Williams et al., 2024). Different job conditions could influence different well-being outcomes differently (e.g. prosocial impact has

been suggested to have its strongest effect on work meaningfulness) but to establish this would require comparison of the effect sizes for multiple well-being outcomes. In addition, much empirical work is needed to more confidently categorize various job-related factors into conditions for decent work and conditions for fulfilling work, and to see what human needs the given factors are most closely associated with. This would require studies using both employee well-being and ill-being indicators as outcomes to examine what factors have their strongest effect on the well-being or ill-being side of the two pathways. To establish the added value of a more comprehensive employee well-being measurement, it would also be important to conduct studies using variables such as job performance, creativity, turnover intentions, and sickness absenteeism as outcomes to see how much variance job satisfaction alone would explain, and how much variance a more comprehensive measurement of employee well-being would explain (cf. Pelly, 2023). This would demonstrate how much added predictive power regarding relevant outcomes would researchers and practitioners gain, when utilizing a more comprehensive approach to employee well-being.

An important area not covered by the current framework is the role of employee attitudes and habits in well-being. In the present model, the external conditions give rise to need satisfaction or frustration, which in turn give rise to well-being or ill-being. However, attitudes such as optimism and habits such as regular engagement in job crafting (see Costantini et al., 2022) could significantly moderate such pathways, increasing some employees' resilience to the negative influences of poor environmental conditions, while increasing the ability of other employees to gain more from certain good job conditions. Integrating such attitudes and habits into a theory of employee well-being is thus a task for future work (Bakker & van Woerkom, 2017).

Practical implications

The present work also involves practical takeaways because how well-being is defined and operationalized affects how it is acknowledged, promoted, and supported in organizations (Kelloway et al., 2023). What you measure is what you get. Thus, the practical implications of a framework for employee well-being emerge from its use. Currently, employee well-being is often measured in quite an *ad hoc* manner in many organizations, without proper attention to the theoretical grounding and empirical validation of the questions used (Siegerink & Murtin, 2024). The present framework provides a heuristic tool to help managers and HR to make more informed choices about what dimensions of well-being to measure, to ensure that all the key dimensions are measured. For example, measuring just job satisfaction might alert about downward trends in the general level of employee well-being but does not start to answer the question of *why* well-being has decreased. Including measures of functional well-being at work would help to identify whether the problem concerns job security, sense of community, lack of autonomy, or something else.

By offering an account of the key dimensions of employee well-being the present framework also aims to contribute to the standardization of survey instruments to measure employee well-being. Such standardization would allow organizations to benchmark their performance against others, helping them to better identify their respective strengths and areas of development (Siegerink & Murtin, 2024). Investors have also expressed increased interest in utilizing such standardized well-being data – to understand the situation of a company in general and particularly when wanting to invest in companies that are strong on social sustainability. The framework should thus inform future operationalizations of employee well-being, leading to more comprehensive employee well-being surveys that managers and HRM can utilize to capture richer information about the state of the well-being of employees, which can then be used to evaluate and improve the well-being of the employees.

Beyond measurement, the framework as such can also help employees broaden their understanding of what well-being at work implies and help them to understand what areas they

need to focus on if they want to improve their own well-being. Many employees would want to improve their well-being, but without a proper understanding of what that entails, it can be hard. The identification of key dimensions of functional well-being helps to make well-being more actionable, as it is easier to come up with ways to improve those concrete dimensions rather than the rather abstract "well-being" or "satisfaction" as such. In similar ways, the present framework can help leaders by making them more aware of the key areas on which they should focus if they want to improve the well-being of their employees.

Conclusion

Work can be frustrating, dangerous, lonely, and oppressive, becoming a key source of strain, stress, and ill-being in a person's life. However, work can, in the best case, provide caring social relations, a sense of agency, self-endorsement, and mastery, and a chance to do something that makes the world a better place, thus becoming a key source of well-being, value, and meaningfulness in a person's life. To understand the role of work in well-being, we need to have an integrative account of both employee well-being and ill-being—something the present work has aimed to provide by conceptualizing employee well-being as being about work being fulfilling through four modes of human existence: having, loving, doing, and being. This focus on the essential elements at the heart of employee well-being helps to highlight both the positive and negative sides of employee well-being and what key factors enable work to be decent and absent of suffering on the one hand and meaningful and filled with engagement on the other hand.

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