

## Collective Flourishing and Community Well-being: A Conceptual Paper

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### Abstract

We coexist in an interdependent world where all are connected, and every action has both visible and silent ripples. We are in a world of change, and if there is one thing we can say for sure, it is the highly disruptive age with moving goalposts, more so regarding uncertainty. This disruption has caused significant damage to our families, relationships, jobs, communities, and economy, as well as political discourses or intercultural/international relations, thereby affecting the health of individual people and safety, severely affecting the well-being of individuals besides societies. These are indeed challenging times. However, this situation also presents an opportunity for transformational breakthroughs and the birth of new paradigms that can help us better deal with societal issues. So, how does one become someone who flourishes regardless of what life throws one's way? How can we foster a culture of care, compassion, and hope in our communities? What does it take to unite our communities and build their resilience despite external threats or opportunities? Well, as scientific evidence suggests, humans can flourish. Thus emerges the fundamental question of what stops us from moving forward. This paper is based on critical reflection, a literature review, and extensive practice experiences of working in the community sector, which has provided the impetus to find an alternative lens to look at the challenges of the current technologically advanced, fast-paced society.

**Keywords:** Collective Flourishing; Flourishing; Communal Well-being

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## Introduction

Eudaimonia, a term originating from Aristotle, is often translated into modern dictionaries as "happiness" (Deci & Ryan, 2006; Huta & Waterman, 2014) or the successful life of virtuous activity. It is sometimes translated from ancient Greek as welfare, flourishing and well-being (Kraut, 2018). This Aristotelian idea is extracted from the text, *The Science of Happiness* (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./2019), also known as *Nicomachean Ethics*. Eudaimonia is an ancient idea, and one returned to present-day psychology for several reasons. Consumerism and materialistic attitudes have an adverse effect on the accountability of happiness, as well as psychological health in general. This is so even as basic living needs are positively met; the hoarding of wealth brings with it a heightened risk of anxiety, depression and low self-worth. Empirical findings reveal how materialism erodes interpersonal bonds and fuels feelings of vulnerability, which in turn can result in disillusioning outcomes for well-being (Clark et al., 2008; Kasser et al., 2007).

Also, sociological shifts in more affluent societies have left many people free to choose how they lead their lives, and traditional sources of authority and faith have been weakened. Then, it becomes a legitimate, fruitful art in life. These trends raise questions for human beings about what makes a life good, which has implications related to well-being and quality of life (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 2013). While seeking material wealth leads to disenchantment, people struggle to conceptualise what will be a source of joy in life (Ryan & Deci, 2008).

Eudaimonia represents both a psychological concept and an object of study that provides hope to many seeking fulfilments other than mere hedonistic happiness. Though common, eudaimonia is still widely misunderstood in the literature on positive psychology. Some of the confusion here is caused by theoretical interpretations that understand eudaimonia as a unique kind of happiness or feeling rather than other elements such as pleasure and involvement. This contrasts with eudaimonia in

an Aristotelian philosophical framework, which cannot be considered to fit the model of a psychological state or happiness (Bartlett & Collins, 2011). Instead, it represents a deeply integrated way of living, life-sustaining and noble life that aligns with virtues and values that contribute to one's personal growth, happiness, and, ultimately, flourishing.

Most modern interpretations reduce Eudaimonia to happiness or emotional satisfaction, which ignores its fundamental nature as a virtuous way of living and flourishing in life. This misunderstanding chides the wide and long involvement that Eudaimonia demands for real flourishing instead of fleeting satisfactions.

Keyes (2002, 2005) identified this state of complete mental Health as "flourishing". Positive mental well-being is, therefore, dissociated from the overall category of "mental health" and psychopathology in Keyes' framework of complete mental Health. Stated otherwise, flourishing exists at the high and cheerful end of all current empirical indices for functioning competently well and being free from psychopathology with a full helping of happily ever after. So flourishing is impressive because it begins the long overdue alliance of positive psychology with utilitarianism, virtue ethics and hedonics and eudaimonia.

It was in the mid-20th Century that social psychologists and health scientists began to ask, at a new level of precision, what exactly flourishing is and how it relates to health on one end of the continuum. That said, until only a few years ago, flourishing and its measurements were coming to light. Since then, flourishing has been rarely used in real life and research (Agenor et al., 2017) because it remains an underdeveloped concept within positive psychology (Logan et al., 2023)

According to the World Happiness Report 2024, strong social support is generally more prevalent in many regions than feelings of loneliness. Studies consistently show that people who perceive more social support also report greater

happiness and satisfaction with their lives. The report finds that social support plays a crucial role in enhancing individual flourishing (Helliwell et al., 2024).

However, instead of grasping that flourishing is for each individual, this paper works with Prilleltensky et al. (2007)'s *Relational-Organisational-Communal Dimension* collectively. This article argues for a more explicit theoretical conception of Collective flourishing in order to become transformational agents of change in our communities, workplaces and families that allow all to flourish. This paper delves deeper into the theme of Collective flourishing and delineates its key attributes, and explores collective flourishing models that can be employed for promoting holistic flourishing across varying socio-cultural backgrounds. It then discusses the challenges and opportunities of ensuring that all can flourish before concluding with recommendations on adopting a new paradigm known as an enabling environment geared towards fostering collective flourishing.

### Human Flourishing

Flourishing is where everything we do corresponds to all dimensions of ourselves, offering a whole system supporting both individual and collective good. To define it very briefly, flourishing is about feeling happy with your life and being able to live a full one (Keyes, 2002, 2005; Keyes et al., 2010; VanderWeele, 2019b)

Human flourishing is a multifaceted and complex concept covering multiple components of living well (VanderWeele, 2017). It goes beyond simply feeling happy or satisfied and delves into meaning, purpose, and fulfilment. There is no consensus on a standard definition, but experts from fields like psychology, philosophy and economics have defined flourishing for us. Human flourishing is a globally recognised holistic condition of comprehensive well-being, not just instrument good (Lee et al., 2020). Human flourishing, in its broadest sense, is considered an ultimate aim rather than a mere intermediate or instrumental goal. Drawing on

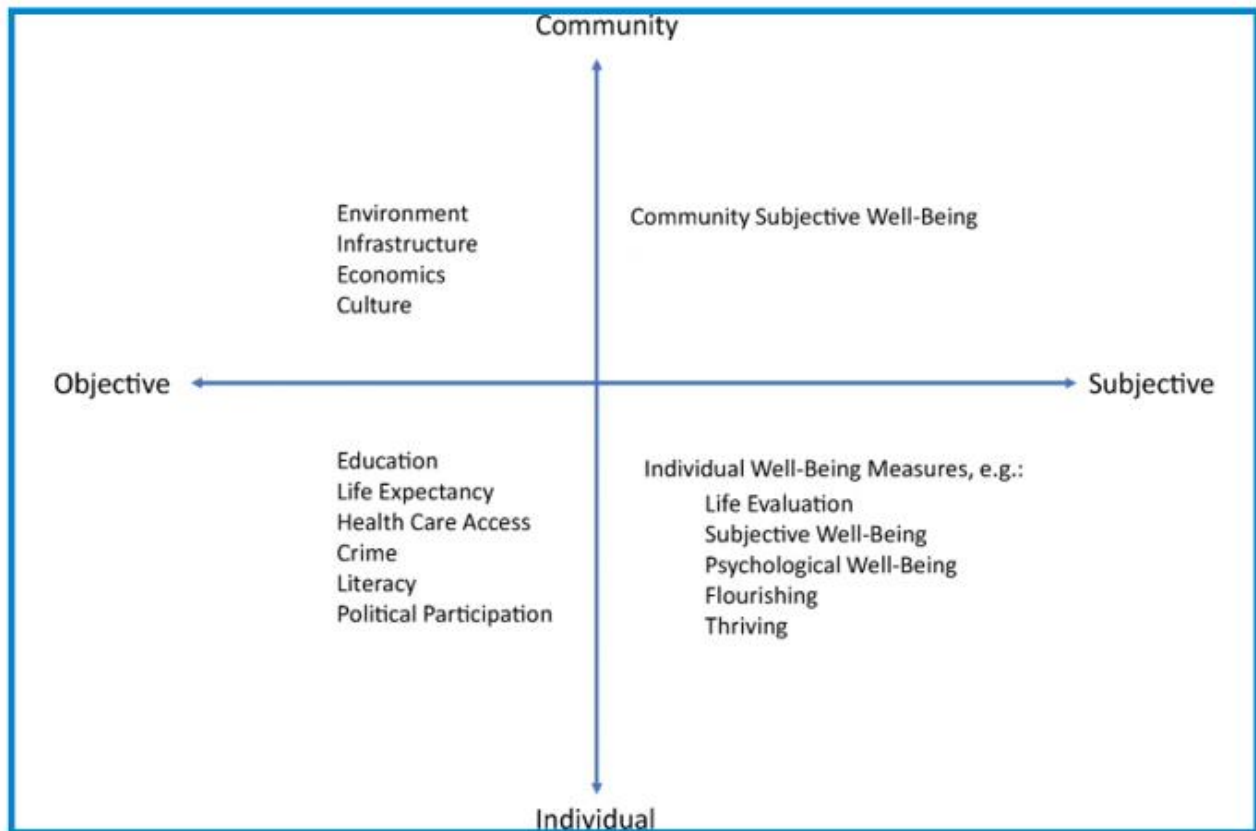
Aristotelian philosophy, the idea of "human flourishing" represents the ultimate objective that human beings strive for. It is a comprehensive response to the question of the purpose of human existence. Therefore, if individuals aspire to live flourishing lives, it is reasonable to expect that any act should ultimately contribute to this aim. According to VanderWeele (2017), to flourish individually, we need to focus on five broad domains of human life: Happiness and life satisfaction; Health, both mental and physical; meaning and purpose; character and virtue; and close social relationships.

Tyler J. VanderWeele, Ph. D., is a professor of epidemiology at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and also the Director of the Human Flourishing Program at Harvard. VanderWeele has published over 400 papers and is a preeminent scholar in the positive psychology movement, specifically the flourishing movement and one of its most gifted synthesisers; his models for thinking about well-being systematically capture broad features that so far appear to be nearly universal.

Flourishing is a holistic state of positive well-being (Keyes, 2002; Lee et al., 2021) defined by the experience of high levels of interpersonal and intrapersonal flourishing and optimal functioning in social, emotional and psychological domains.

Figure 1 illustrates a framework developed by VanderWeele, T. J. (2019b) for evaluating community and individual well-being along two dimensions: *objective vs. subjective* and *individual vs. community*.

VanderWeele, T. J. (2019b) discusses six domains that have been proposed for assessing community subjective well-being. They consist of flourishing individuals, good relationships, proficient leadership, healthy practices, a satisfying community, and a strong mission. A community's flourishing can be seen as a condition where all facets of communal life flourish, and it encompasses both objective and subjective aspects at both the individual and community levels.



**Figure 1: Joint Dimensions of Communal vs. Individual and Objective vs. Subjective Well-being Assessments.**

**Source: VanderWeele (2019). *Measures of Community Wellbeing: A Template by VanderWeele, 2019* (please refer to the permission below)**

VanderWeele (2019b: p256) states “good community is constituted in part by flourishing individuals.” However, humans need help to flourish in a collectivist society. Instead of understanding that flourishing is only for individuals, this article argues for a relational-organisational-communal dimension (Prilleltensky et al., 2007) of flourishing. Moreover, in living well, they become transformational change agents within their communities, workplaces and families in ways other people flourish. They drive others to expand, forming a cascading strength through our mutual flourishing in all areas.

Collective flourishing is a state of well-being, prosperity, and resilience achieved through the collaborative efforts and collective actions of individuals, groups, or communities, enabling them to thrive and reach their full potential (Seligman, 2011; Keyes, 1998). In the quest for a meaningful and fulfilling existence, the concept

of flourishing extends beyond individual satisfaction to embrace the collective well-being of communities and societies. Flourishing, as envisioned in positive psychology and philosophical traditions, represents a state of holistic well-being that integrates physical, emotional, social, and mental dimensions.

### **Scope for Collective Flourishing**

The concept of flourishing in positive psychology is gaining momentum as a holistic state of well-being congruent with physical, emotional, social, psychological and spiritual dimensions. It gives importance to both satisfaction and the most whole living, which echoes human flourishing, which is found in philosophical traditions such as Aristotelianism. *Human flourishing* is a global value considered an ultimate goal rather than an intermediate one. Contrary to individualistic perspectives, flourishing is not solely an individual pursuit but has relational, organisational, environmental and communal

dimensions. With the world changing at a pace unseen in our lifetimes, we face new challenges unheard of before, such as increased geopolitical tensions due to territorial disputes, competition for resources, nationalist fervour, economic competition, military escalations, forced migration, political instability, cybersecurity risks, changing international partnerships, the effects of worldwide pandemics, climate change, and ideological disputes regarding human rights and democracy. The Covid-19 pandemic has also exposed the extent of inequality and vulnerability in our societies. This results in a global environment that is complex and frequently highly volatile. Collective flourishing is something we all need to start thinking about in this age of disconnection, isolation and violence. This paper contends that collective flourishing must also exist for people to flourish.

It is crucial to wear the lens of flourishing in comprehending human experiences and in informing policies or practices across many domains. It includes mental and physical health, happiness, life satisfaction, meaning/purpose in life, character/strengths of personality and social relationships. Thus, flourishing offers a framework for researchers and policymakers to assess and promote well-being, shifting from deficit-based models focusing on negative states. It emphasises the importance of social structures, relationships, and community engagement in promoting well-being. Flourishing also raises questions about what constitutes a good life and how societies can create conditions that allow individuals to achieve their potential. It is relevant across disciplines, including psychology, sociology, public health, education, and economics, highlighting its importance in understanding human behaviour and societal dynamics.

Most of the significant advances in our current time contribute to individual flourishing metrics. However, flourishing was conceptualised relative to optimal attainment within all aspects of one's life, including the contexts within which one lives (VanderWelee, 2017). This definition implies that flourishing is rooted in higher-level principles such as mutualism, compassion,

justice and empathy at both the community and individual levels. The systemic problems are rooted in the very fabric on which society is founded. They are so insidious that they spread far and wide as symptoms develop too glaringly before we notice them. These problems, when left unresolved, in turn, result in a tangled series of conflicts that drastically impact the psychological stability and mental health of entire communities. (Logan et al., 2023). We can see this ripple effect played out in wars across the world, including those between Israel and Gaza, as well as Ukraine vs. Russia, among others. The effects are not just localised; they ripple globally, impacting international relations, economies, and global peace (Hryhorczuk et al., 2024). The trauma inflicted by these conflicts is not only physical but also psychological and this is where the concept of 'collective trauma' comes in (Hirschberger, 2018). Such trauma is often handed down as intergenerational trauma, frequently on a subconscious level, which colours the thoughts and feelings as well as actions of people for many more generations. This begets a cycle of intimidation, doubt and violence. We need to respond to the collective trauma.

Individual vulnerability focuses on the susceptibility of individual persons to harm or adverse effects based on their personal characteristics, circumstances, and capacities. Bohle et al. (1994) defined *vulnerability* as a multi-layered and multidimensional social space defined by people's determinate, political, economic and institutional capabilities in specific places and at specific times. While individual vulnerability considers each person's specific traits and vulnerabilities, socioeconomic vulnerability looks at the broader social and economic context in which individuals are situated, considering factors that affect entire communities or groups (Biswas et al., 2023). Socioeconomic vulnerability, also called collective vulnerability, has evolved through various schools of thought and empirical studies. Political and economic determinants have been identified as crucial factors in defining vulnerability, as they shape resource allocation,

safety measures, capabilities, and overall welfare of at-risk populations.

Furthermore, vulnerability is also related to the opportunity for access and political-economic analysis, revealing how these social considerations implicitly specify which factors influence vulnerability. Overall, the conceptual evolution of socioeconomic vulnerability as it relates to collective vulnerability has been driven by a more holistic understanding, including both physical exposure and social, economic, or political determinants that define an individual or community's extent of susceptibility. Socioeconomic vulnerability addresses the systemic and structural aspects of vulnerability that impact groups or communities. It signifies that collective vulnerability will sidetrack the progress of collective flourishing.

At the individual level, flourishing includes six building blocks: emotional well-being, physical health, meaning and purpose (which encompasses both eudaimonic well-being as a psychological-based understanding of wellness that involves using your strengths to contribute versus seeking hedonistic pleasures); character virtues, social connectedness; and economic security. (VanderWeele, 2017). However, it is essential to recognize that individual Flourishing is intricately intertwined with communal Flourishing, necessitating understanding various factors at the group level. These factors include mutuality, belongingness, mission, justice, relational growth, effective leadership, and trust (VanderWeele, 2019b). Moreover, for most individuals, flourishing cannot be separated from spiritual well-being (Ryff, 2021).

Suppose as most existing literature does, that subjective accounts of well-being exclusively justify flourishing for individuals; then we need help acknowledging the collective flourishing of families, organisations or communities. However, if we broaden our perspective from human flourishing to collective flourishing, where everyone and everything prospers, the narrative undergoes a significant transformation.

The connection between human flourishing and collective flourishing is nuanced and

complicated; both are interwoven elements that ensure societal flourishing. The premise here is that, as a society, flourishing has quite some impact on individual human flourishing. Collective flourishing preconditions individual flourishing

In the research literature, terms such as "happiness", "subjective well-being", "thriving", and "flourishing" are regularly used interchangeably (Butler & Kern, 2016). The necessity for defining "collective flourishing" in research arises from the extensive and often imprecise use of existing terminology, which leads to significant confusion. As VanderWeele noted, "community wellbeing interchangeably used for community subjective well-being" is perhaps somewhat an abuse of language (VanderWeele, 2019b p.255). The prevalence of positive psychology movements encourages us to use these terms more frequently and less accurately. Thus, it can potentially detract from clear communication within the academic community. A clear conception and collective language around "collective flourishing" can facilitate more effective discourse about it, helping researchers work together towards a common goal. A lack of consistent terminology regarding collective flourishing prevents knowledge development of collective flourishing as a distinct concept.

Collective flourishing, or the idea that our well-being is inherently tied to something larger than individual happiness, has gained popularity in recent years. Understanding and supporting this shared well-being is important for building stronger, more vibrant communities. Though the concept of flourishing has been around for a while in the literature, researchers using it as an outcome variable are newer. In this paper, we have used collective flourishing to represent the holistic well-being of a community in all its aspects.

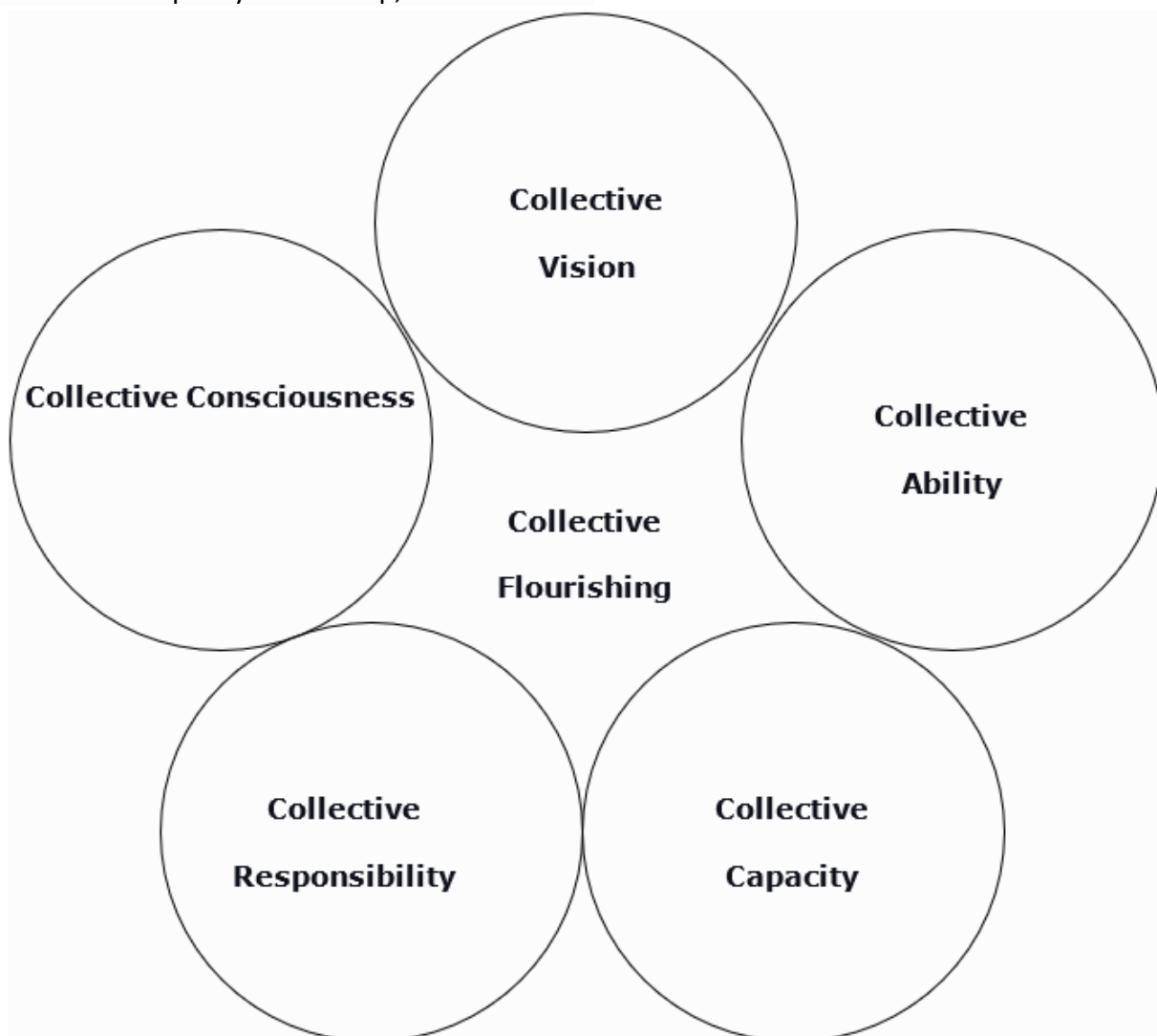
Different religious and philosophical traditions concur that the highest tier of human development involves transcending individual self-absorption by recognising one's connection to a larger order or reality. Across individualistic and collectivistic countries varying in their

cultural orientation, harmony represents the core feature of happiness at its individual and societal levels, as it presupposes connections at the intra and interpersonal levels (Delle Fave et al., 2023). A holistic, harmonious, interconnected viewpoint brings into transparent focus relationships between individual and collective flourishing and their overlapping pathways (Lee et al., 2023).

The ontological interconnectedness of human flourishing and collective flourishing is evident as they mutually depend on each other (VanderWeele, 2019b; Lee et al., 2021). The achievement of human flourishing necessitates the recognition and appreciation of interbeing, as the overall well-being ecosystem encompassing social, political, and environmental factors significantly influences individuals' capacity to develop, actualise their

potential, and lead a lengthy and healthy life, often surpassing the age of 100 (Buettner, 2012; Lee & Mayor, 2023). Analytical and holistic perspectives are valid ways of seeing the world and are helpful for different purposes. However, not acknowledging the holistic perspective in our healthcare, economic, political, and other social systems has contributed to fundamental disconnects that impede human flourishing and a thriving ecosystem.

Collective flourishing, the notion that a community's well-being transcends individual happiness, has gained traction in recent years. Understanding the factors influencing this collective good is crucial for building vibrant and resilient communities. Here, we explore several vital elements, drawing on research to paint a comprehensive picture (Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Attributes of Collective Flourishing**  
Source: Created by the Author

### **Collective Vision**

The Positive Humanities, dedicated to exploring culture's impact on human wellbeing, advocates for a shift towards eudaimonia in the humanities, emphasising human flourishing as a central pursuit. This shift is seen as a means to restore the humanities' original purpose, offering a rationale for their contemporary relevance and promoting global flourishing. Recommendations of Pawelski (2022) include promoting wisdom as much as knowledge, collaboration as much as specialisation, the positive as much as the negative, adequate friction as much as increased efficiency and the flourishing of humans as much as the flourishing of the humanities and prioritising human flourishing alongside the advancement of the humanities.

Establishing a shared purpose or vision that aligns community members towards common goals provides a sense of direction and unity. A shared purpose motivates individuals to work together towards a collective vision, fostering a sense of accomplishment, fulfilment, and meaning within the community. A flourishing community is united by a collective vision and shared values guiding decisions and actions. This fosters collaboration, trust, and commitment to the common good (Lederach, 1997)

### **Collective Ability**

Collaboration is a vital element in proving the collective ability in a study conducted in the US examining the causal association between middle-aged persons who are flourishing and those who have suicidal ideation in a retrospective cohort study (Xiao et al., 2023) Out of the total number of persons surveyed, 486 (30.0%) reported experiencing a high level of flourishing. This high level of flourishing was found to be associated with a significant 18.6% decrease in any suicidal thoughts. The findings indicate that implementing preventative programs aimed at enhancing well-being during middle age could lead to significant decreases in the likelihood of suicide. Enhancing collaboration at the population level among policymakers, clinical practitioners, and non-

medical partners can help us collectively minimise suicide risks in various social, economic, and structural contexts, hence promoting overall well-being. The above study suggests that collaboration enhances collective ability and facilitates collective flourishing.

Another qualitative research study in Canada underscores an adaptive community that can be achieved through supportive structures and flexible practices that promote growth, innovation, and well-being among community members. For many, interpersonal relationships were central to the job and represented a connection with collegial support, caring, shared meaning or involvement. The influence of such interpersonal contexts helped create a social environment that enabled flourishing. Teachers could work together in ways that serve their learning and developmental needs as a group and increase enthusiasm for the collective work, leading one way or another away from this creativity (Cherkowski, 2018).

Developing positive relationships and maintaining the same in the community builds trust, collaboration, and membership. Positive relationships contribute to a supportive environment where individuals feel valued, respected, and motivated to contribute to the community's success (Cherkowski et al., 2018).

### **Collective Capacity**

Communities face several challenges and opportunities that academics, policymakers, and interventionists typically classify into distinct categories. A study by Goodman et al., (2022), talks about the "flourishing community" model, which aims to improve the collective ability to tackle difficulties and take advantage of opportunities. It shows a high level of sensitivity towards the difficult situation faced by children living on the streets and their families, who experience various challenges. The Sustainable Development Goals emphasise the need for creative and comprehensive models that acknowledge the complex interaction between challenges and possibilities within communities in their everyday existence.



Flourishing communities have generativity, supportiveness, resilience, compassion, curiosity, responsiveness, and self-determination (Goodman et al., 2022). These features promote the development of resources in various areas, including the economy, society, education, and health. A study in Kenya examined the correlations between survey-collected variables with 335 participants by combining theoretical frameworks such as community-led development, multi-systemic resilience, and the "broaden and build" attachment cycle. The study revealed a positive correlation between more robust collective efficacy, commonly developed through group-based microlending operations, and increased sociopolitical control. Increased positive feelings, perception of purpose in life, spirituality, curiosity, and compassion influence the association. Equitable access to resources, opportunities, and power is essential for collective flourishing. Addressing inequalities empowers individuals. It strengthens the social fabric and suggests that collective capacity informs community flourishing.

### **Collective Responsibility**

Common responsibilities refer to working with a group or community toward the same objective, engaging in ethical behaviour, supporting each other "circumstances", and solving problems collectively. The premise is that each person, as part of an identified group or category to which a behaviour can be attributed, should not only take responsibility for their actions but also share a sense of accountability for the actions of others within that group. If some members act wrongly, it impacts everyone. The idea is that if everyone bands together, helps each other and pulls in the same direction, then collectively, we will all be able to reach common goals that serve us all equally while at the same time spreading out responsibility as well as success among everyone.

Collective responsibility shares ideas with social responsibility, but a group or society rather than an individual will be held accountable for the actions of any member. Moorhouse (2020) directly applies the concept of collective

responsibility to the fashion industry, arguing that making fashion sustainable requires collective efforts from all stakeholders, manufacturers, and consumers. It emphasises that the industry can only move toward environmentally gentle and ethical practices through shared, ongoing commitment.

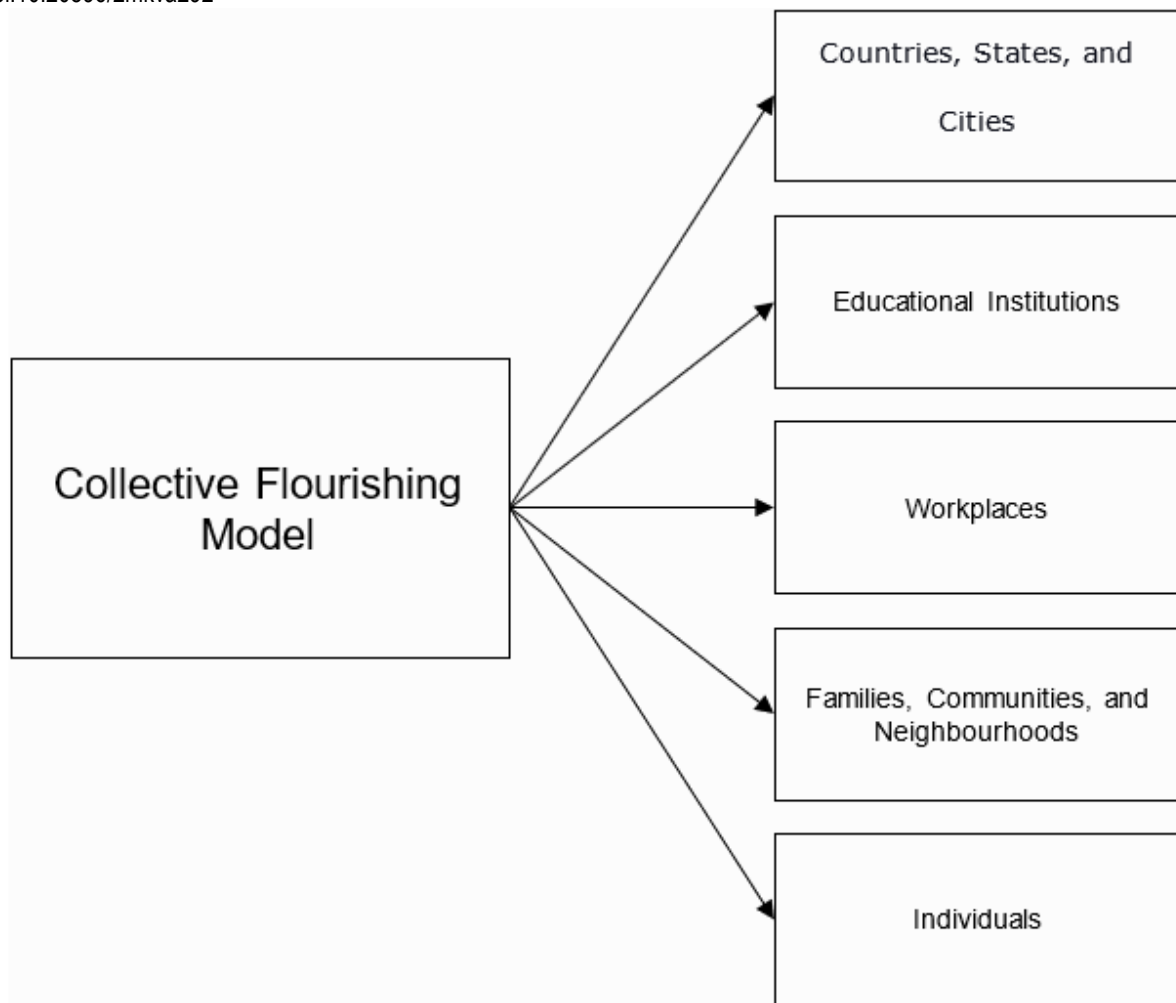
### **Collective Consciousness**

While the researchers might not specifically use the term "collective flourishing," many approaches to development have included dimensions of collective flourishing. Research by Davies and Alexander (2005) has demonstrated that reducing collective tension through transcendental meditation can reduce violence in a geopolitical region by creating a positive societal impact. Research by Orme-Johnson (2016) and others indicates that the unified field level of natural law can be enlivened through meditation practices to promote social flourishing. Individuals who practise evidence-based Automatic Self-Transcending meditation can add to a peaceful, harmonious and successful society due to increased abstract collective consciousness achieved by practising this technique on an individual or group level. This study proves beyond doubt that collective consciousness can influence collective flourishing.

### **Collective Flourishing Model**

Collective flourishing models (Figure 3) can be employed in different social-cultural contexts, such as collective flourishing in countries, states, cities, educational institutions, workplaces, families, communities and neighbourhoods, and individuals (VanderWeele, 2019b). This is not an exhaustive list; other dimensions can be investigated more carefully using this collective flourishing approach.

This collective flourishing model (Figure 3) is a generalisable model that can scale from one socio-cultural site to another and move up into countries, cities or neighbourhoods down on institutional settings, schools or offices, families and individual groups involving people.



**Figure 3: Collective Flourishing Model**  
**Source: Created by the Author**

It follows the micro, meso, and macro framework for addressing issues across different levels of society. It is potentially applicable well beyond these domains and could be used to further opportunities for many other outcomes, offering a vastly more nuanced lens in the study of collective flourishing.

This has prompted calls for systemic ways of seeing and doing more extensive work based upon interbeing, which can be made whole.

The empowering behaviours exhibited by leaders and the prevailing organisational culture significantly contribute to the flourishing experiences of the employees (Singh et al., 2022), suggesting that collective influence facilitates collective Flourishing.

Incorporating individual and collective flourishing has significant consequences for the

conceptualisation of Health. Health is described from a biomedical perspective by this narrow view, which terms disease as any deviation perceived from the ideal norm of health (Sartorius, 2006). Other, more traditional humanistic models are now also applied to the allopathic model in a broad sense so as not to define health only by pathology of body and self but with reference back to social structures (Lee & Mayor, 2023) The World Health Organization has defined 'health' as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being" for over 70 years (Sartorius, 2006; VanderWeele et al., 2019b). However, the implications of this comprehensive definition of Health and its relation to Flourishing have only recently been considered (VanderWeele et al., 2019b; Delle Fave et al., 2023).

Prioritising environmental stewardship and resource conservation ensures a healthy planet for present and future generations, contributing to long-term community well-being (Costanza et al., 2014). Experimental research by Wernli (2021), demonstrated how meeting basic human needs cultivates transpersonal skills that promote integrative Flourishing. It highlights how crucial self-regulation is to day-to-day living and how it calls for bravery, resilience, and physical engagement. This study emphasises the role of individuals as agents within socio-natural systems by focusing on the integrative practice of fermentation and examining biological processes, especially human waste. It implies that dealing with complicated issues entails facing them head-on and proactively, exposing social norms and self-control techniques that help people overcome difficult circumstances. Despite technological difficulties, participants in a domesticity study that fermented urine for plant development showed amazing cooperation and tenacity. This group effort promoted a failure-tolerant culture that benefits meaningful experiences, social engagement, and innovation. Embodied interactions with the environment can lead to deeper insights and choices when one pays attention to shared impermanence and vulnerability (Wernli, 2021). Integrative flourishing stems from patterns of eating, living and engaging with the world that promote well-being and a healthy environment. It also suggests that 'collective curiosity' can generate integrative flourishing that can facilitate collective flourishing, notwithstanding participants' individual experiential journeys.

Past research has distinguished between distressed and flourishing communities in terms of quality-of-life indicators: distressed communities tend to focus on the basic needs of community residents (e.g., food, shelter, crime, unemployment, and security measures); flourishing communities focus on basic needs plus growth needs (e.g., sports, recreation, arts and culture, innovations, and leisure). A flourishing community is a recognisable assembly of people with shared values cooperating to ensure clear evidence of positive physical, economic, environmental, and social

well-being. This empowers constituent members to affect further prosocial outcomes for community stakeholders. A distressed community is essentially the converse, which struggles to reach this level of collective flourishing.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

The pursuit of collective flourishing is not without its challenges. The main challenge is the Western and Eastern divide, where Western culture promotes individualism, which stresses the importance of personal freedom, self-expression, and individual rights. The cultural model of individualism, in which people are decontextualised entities with exaggerated senses of self-agency, is the basis for much contemporary psychological practice and science (Dudgeon et al., 2023). Western cultural context has further fostered what is described as "epistemic violence", which promotes the marginalisation, suppression, and extinction of Indigenous psychologies in history. However, Eastern culture prioritises collectivist beliefs, where group, family, or community well-being is esteemed above individual wishes. Although group orientation is generally robust, social harmony and even identification with the most basic human characteristics are at a premium.

Another major challenge for the community to collectively flourish is the shared resources and opportunities. This includes access to education, healthcare, employment and social services that benefit the wider community. Positive social connections and a sense of belonging are linked to individuals' overall Health, happiness, and prosperity, helping communities flourish. Achieving collective flourishing is hindered not only by inequity and gender disparity, but also by poverty, discrimination, environmental threats, weak social ties, unjust institutions, economic instability, lack of consensus, multidisciplinary tensions, insufficient resources, leadership gaps, cultural conflicts, excessive individualism, and widespread mental health challenges. Addressing these barriers requires systemic, coordinated, and inclusive approaches at every level of society. These disparities create imbalances in access to resources,

opportunities, and decision-making power, hindering communities' overall well-being and development.

The multidimensional aspects of collective flourishing, including social, economic and political dimensions, limit its scope. It cannot work everywhere, in every case, for all communities or cultures. Furthermore, the lack of collective leadership creates a challenge in working for the common good (Goodman et al., 2022).

Cultural and environmental factors can severely hinder collective flourishing, leading to social disintegration, resource exhaustion, and health detriments. Because social cohesion facilitates collective advancement, cultural norms that create marginalisation or division and discriminate against one group of people limit opportunities for widespread success by promoting gender disparities and resisting change. This leads to environmental challenges like over exploitation of resources, pollution and climate change that not only degrade natural resources but further pose health problems for the populations in these areas by altering natural systems on which communities depend. The interplay of these factors may precipitate economic collapse, social unrest, and universal migration, making the challenge more painful for affected communities.

With the increasing reliance on digital communication instead of face-to-face interaction, urban sprawl results in transient communities and economic inequality, fostering division. Is it any wonder that social capital has been decreasing today? This increased individualism, coupled with the erosion of traditional institutional trust, signals a cultural shift toward more individualism, self-sufficiency and privacy. The context of globalisation, health crises on a global scale with pandemics such as COVID-19 or new Coronavirus and the substitution of human interaction by technology are not helping either — it is challenging to create links conducive to collective action.

Also, the significant challenges are the lack of informed practitioners who integrate interventions, scientific scrutiny, and minimally

developed proxies to assess the growing influence or power. These constraints have plagued efforts to develop and test interventions promoting human flourishing for years, leading to a patchy assessment of what can or cannot definitively work in the service of collective flourishing. This highlights the urgent need for a more methodological and robust approach to evidence-based interventions to be designed, developed, trialled and evaluated. Efforts have been taken through Harvard's Institute for Quantitative Social Science's Human Flourishing Program, which conducted a Global Flourishing Study with 240,000 participants from 22 countries. These projects lend to the Human Flourishing Program, serving as a hub for understanding all that is excellent and driving policies and practices that allow human flourishing. (VanderWeele et al., 2025)

Collective flourishing is still being processed, and more extensive acknowledgement or substantial discussion is needed in academic terms. Understanding this is critical for policymakers, researchers and educators to appropriately apply the principle within their areas of interest. This lack of consciousness is a significant barrier to enabling the collective flourishing model. To effectively integrate this concept into policy, research, or educational practice, stakeholders would benefit from developing a deeper understanding and appreciation of its significance.

The opportunity for the collective flourishing model is vast. Collective flourishing should be taught in the classroom, incorporated into fieldwork and research, and influence policy through the context of medicine for social ills. Practical Exposure and Direct Engagement Fieldwork, Community Service Built-in (Return) Academic research must develop protocols to estimate a more collective flourishing and investigate potential correlates. To this end, policymakers must embed their decisions within these guiding norms to enhance the lives of those most affected. Practitioners, in turn, should examine the lived experiences that form the foundation of existing systems, so that caring communities can flourish. We continue to weave

a resilient and thriving edge between systems by executing these projects across sectors.

Cultural differences, competing interests, and resource constraints can present significant obstacles. Addressing these challenges requires inclusive dialogue and collaboration— building consensus through respectful dialogue and actively engaging diverse voices is crucial for crafting social policies and initiatives that genuinely serve the needs of the whole community (Young, 2002). Institutional innovation is where traditional institutions may need to adapt and evolve to promote collective well-being. Emphasising collective flourishing effectively recognises our interdependence and seeks to cultivate an environment where everyone can prosper. A society where individuals pursue their flourishing at the expense of others (exploitation, resource depletion, etc.) is unlikely to be sustainable in the long run. Collective flourishing, emphasising shared values, responsibility, and equity, offers a more sustainable path for human development and environmental stewardship. Collective flourishing can amplify individual flourishing. When everyone has access to resources, opportunities, and a supportive social network, it creates fertile ground for individuals to reach their full potential. Strong communities provide the foundation for personal growth, purpose, and well-being. Collective thriving allows people to maximise their potential in life, which leads to peace, harmony, and global citizenship. Transcending compartmentalisation helps individuals understand the grander scheme of humanity and encourages a desire for excellence. As a result, collective flourishing must be factored into the UN development agenda if all communities are to prosper inclusively and sustainably.

We need societies that foster individual autonomy, shared responsibility, cooperation, and commitment to the common good. This balance can be attained through policies that promote equitable access to resources, opportunities, and participation while respecting individual agency and diversity of values.

## Conclusion

Various studies have considered the effects on human flourishing by using interventions at an individual level and implementing insights from positive psychology. However, more emphasis should be directed at models of collective flourishing that could have a higher impact on society. Meeting this gap should feature prominently in future research agendas among academia, practitioners and policymakers. This realignment of priorities would allow for increased possibilities in research, community-based innovation, and evidence-based interventions led by large-scale collaborative efforts. This paper offers a conceptualisation of collective flourishing and an appreciative inquiry research agenda for taking those inquiries further. Remember that flourishing is a collective journey and not an end state. Collectively, we have been fixated on doing well; let us turn our heads toward how meaningful change occurs by searching out new solutions, capitalising upon what makes sense and participating more effectively with others.

Fostering an environment in which individuals contribute to their communities through increased engagement with voluntary associations, organised community groups, political activities, or other forms of public life is one factor that ensures in advancing collective well-being. When individuals and the collective ultimately come together, this confers a deeper meaning. The community is served better by supporting individual behaviours that serve those purposes.

Knowing the various dimensions of collective flourishing means that we can collectively contribute to forming proactive societies and communities that foster well-being. The paper argues that policy formulation and evaluation should adopt a new paradigm towards fostering enabling environments for collective flourishing.

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### **Ethical Approval**

It is a conceptual paper, and no ethical approval was required.

### **Conflict of Interest**

There is no conflict of interest. The manuscript was not prepared using AI-generated text, and AI-assisted tools were not used to develop the figure(s).

### **Informed Consent**

Consent was deemed unnecessary, as this is a conceptual paper based on the secondary data available at the time of its writing.

### **Funding**

No funding was received for this paper.

### **Data Availability Statement**

Sources are available through libraries and research websites, and the author also has a collection of the materials used in this paper.

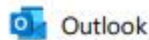
### **Acknowledgements**

I want to acknowledge the valuable contributions of my colleagues to this paper. Dr. Samata Vasisht was pivotal in inspiring me to work on this concept, while Dr. Hyacinth Udah (James Cook University) enriched the work through insightful discussions on collective flourishing. Vineetha Joseph (James Cook University) contributed significantly through the initial literature review. N Shenbakam (PhD Scholar, Christ University) meticulously reviewed the material, and her copy-editing was valuable in shaping the final version of this paper.



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