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Happiness in Motion: The 5S Model as a Recursive Process Theory of Well-Being

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Article

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Title Page

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Abstract

This paper develops the 5S model—Situation, Salience, Simulation, Selection, and Satisfaction—as a recursive process theory of well-being. Existing approaches illuminate distinct aspects of happiness: hedonic and eudaimonic theories distinguish pleasure from valued functioning, self-determination theory identifies motivational conditions, flow theory explains optimal experience, and PERMA specifies multidimensional flourishing. Less clearly explained is how these elements are generated and connected through situated motivation and action. The 5S model addresses this gap by showing how socially and culturally structured situations shape what becomes salient, which futures are imagined, how competing desires are regulated, and how outcomes are evaluated. Satisfaction is not the endpoint of action; it reshapes self-evaluation, perceived competence, future expectations, and subsequent opportunities. The paper distinguishes experiential, evaluative, and anticipatory well-being and argues that sustainable happiness depends on whether present satisfaction reproduces the capacity for future valued action. This recursive account explains why immediate pleasure may sometimes undermine well-being, whereas autonomously accepted difficulty may strengthen accomplishment, self-respect, hope, and resilience. The framework integrates established theories at complementary explanatory levels and reconceptualizes happiness as a renewed capacity to pursue valued possibilities under changing conditions.

Keywords: Well-being; Happiness; 5S model; Recursive process; Motivated action; Self-evaluation; Capacity reproduction; Anticipatory well-being; Self-determination theory; Flourishing

1. Introduction: From States of Happiness to Happiness in Motion

Research on happiness and well-being has developed through several influential traditions. Hedonic approaches emphasize positive affect and life satisfaction, whereas eudaimonic approaches focus on meaning, personal growth, self-realization, and valued functioning (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989; Waterman, 1993). The PERMA model identifies Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment as dimensions of flourishing (Seligman, 2011). Self-determination theory specifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as basic

psychological needs supporting healthy motivation and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017), while flow theory explains the optimal experience that arises when attention, skill, challenge, action, and feedback become closely coordinated (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

These theories have greatly expanded the understanding of happiness beyond the accumulation of pleasure. They show that well-being is affective, evaluative, relational, motivational, and activity-based. Yet they often address different explanatory questions: what well-being consists of, which psychological conditions support it, what optimal engagement feels like, or how individuals evaluate their lives. Existing integrative accounts have clarified the relationship between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, but the process through which these different dimensions are generated and connected in concrete action remains less fully specified (Henderson & Knight, 2012; Huta & Waterman, 2014).

This limitation becomes especially apparent when well-being is considered over time. Positive emotion may arise from an action that damages health, relationships, competence, or future opportunity. Conversely, demanding activities may involve effort, frustration, or delayed gratification while contributing to accomplishment, self-respect, meaning, and hope. Research on self-regulation and self-concordant goals indicates that the quality and motivational basis of goal pursuit matter for later well-being, not merely whether a desired outcome is obtained (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). The well-being effects of an experience therefore depend not only on whether it is pleasant, but also on what it means, how it is evaluated, and how it changes the person's future capacity for action.

The central question of this paper is:

> *How is well-being generated, sustained, and renewed through situated processes of motivation and action?*

Three problems motivate this question. First, theories identifying positive emotion, engagement, need satisfaction, meaning, or accomplishment do not necessarily explain how individuals come to recognize and pursue these outcomes. Second, the transformation of present discomfort into longer-term well-being requires further explanation. The regulation of immediate desires may support valued achievement when it is autonomously connected to endorsed goals, but deprivation and coercion should not be romanticized as beneficial (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Third, the recursive relationship between satisfaction and future agency remains underdeveloped. Satisfaction may change self-evaluation, perceived competence, anticipated opportunity, and willingness to pursue further goals. Research on self-efficacy, hope, and prospection similarly shows that past outcomes shape future expectations and action (Bandura, 1997, 2001; Seligman et al., 2013; Snyder, 2002).

To address these problems, this paper develops the 5S model as a recursive process theory of well-

being:

Situation → Salience → Simulation → Selection → Satisfaction → the next cycle.

Individuals begin within socially and materially structured situations. Particular concerns and possibilities become salient, alternative futures are simulated, competing courses of action are selected, and their consequences are experienced and evaluated. Satisfaction is not the endpoint of the process. It feeds back into subsequent cycles by altering opportunities, priorities, expectations, and confidence in future action. The model thus builds on feedback-based accounts of self-regulation and prospective agency while incorporating their social and evaluative conditions (Bandura, 2001; Carver & Scheier, 1998; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

The model does not prescribe a universal list of goals or reduce established theories to five stages. It provides a generative framework explaining how socially and culturally situated individuals recognize what matters, regulate motivational conflict, pursue valued possibilities, and transform outcomes into future agency. Its situated emphasis is consistent with approaches that treat opportunities for valued functioning as socially structured rather than purely internal achievements (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999).

The paper makes three contributions. First, it reconceptualizes well-being as a recursive process in which earlier actions alter later possibilities. Second, it connects satisfaction, self-evaluation, capability, and future expectation, arguing that sustainable well-being depends on whether present satisfaction reproduces the capacity for future valued action. Third, it integrates major theories at complementary explanatory levels: self-determination theory specifies motivational conditions, flow describes an integrated activity state, PERMA identifies multidimensional forms of flourishing, and the 5S model explains how these conditions, experiences, and outcomes become connected.

Happiness, from this perspective, is not attained once and permanently retained. It is continually generated, weakened, and renewed through changing cycles of orientation, action, evaluation, and possibility. Happiness is always in motion.

2. The Fragmented Foundations of Well-Being Theory

Contemporary theories of well-being have expanded the study of happiness beyond simple pleasure or material satisfaction. Hedonic approaches emphasize positive affect and life satisfaction (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1999), whereas eudaimonic approaches focus on meaning, self-realization, personal growth, and valued functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989; Waterman, 1993). PERMA identifies multiple dimensions of flourishing (Seligman, 2011), self-determination theory specifies psychological needs supporting motivation and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017), and flow theory explains optimal experience during demanding activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990;

Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

These theories offer valuable but analytically distinct accounts. Some identify what well-being consists of, others specify supportive motivational conditions, and still others describe distinctive experiences associated with flourishing. This plurality is productive but fragmented. Less attention has been given to the process through which individuals move from socially structured situations to valued action and from action to satisfaction, self-evaluation, and future expectation. A generative process theory is therefore needed to connect these perspectives without reducing one to another.

2.1 Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well-Being

The distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being has organized much of the modern literature on happiness (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Hedonic approaches emphasize positive affect and satisfaction with life (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1999), whereas eudaimonic approaches emphasize meaning, authenticity, personal growth, self-realization, and valued functioning (Ryff, 1989; Waterman, 1993).

These perspectives are distinguishable but need not represent separate forms of happiness. Pleasure and meaning may reinforce one another or diverge. A pleasurable action can weaken health, relationships, or future opportunity, whereas demanding activity may contribute to competence, accomplishment, and self-respect. Their relationship is therefore temporal as well as substantive.

The 5S model interprets hedonic well-being primarily as the immediate experiential quality of action and its outcomes, while eudaimonic well-being arises when valued action contributes to self-evaluation, development, and future agency. Hedonia and eudaimonia can thus be understood as different consequences of the same process of motivated action.

2.2 PERMA as Multidimensional Forms of Flourishing

The PERMA model identifies Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment as distinct dimensions of flourishing (Seligman, 2011). Its central contribution is to show that well-being cannot be reduced to pleasure or life satisfaction alone. Subsequent research has operationalized these dimensions, although substantial overlap with broader measures of subjective well-being has also been identified (Butler & Kern, 2016; Goodman et al., 2018).

From the perspective of the 5S model, PERMA dimensions can be understood as outcomes and qualities emerging across cycles of motivated action. Positive Emotion corresponds most directly to experiential Satisfaction; Engagement reflects sustained organization of attention and motivation; Relationships are both conditions of action and sources of Satisfaction; Meaning connects action to wider commitments; and Accomplishment concerns goal attainment and competence.

These dimensions do not correspond one-to-one with individual 5S stages. Meaning may shape

several stages, relationships form part of both Situation and outcome, and Engagement describes the organization of the process itself. PERMA therefore identifies major patterns of flourishing, whereas the 5S model explains how those patterns are generated and recursively sustained.

2.3 Self-Determination Theory as Motivational Conditions

Self-determination theory identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as basic psychological needs supporting motivation, growth, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Autonomy concerns acting with volition and according to endorsed reasons, competence concerns effectiveness, and relatedness concerns connection and belonging.

These needs specify conditions under which motivated action is more likely to produce sustainable rather than self-undermining Satisfaction. Autonomy influences whether Selection expresses endorsed priorities, competence affects which possibilities appear feasible, and relatedness shapes both Situation and evaluation.

Self-determination theory also clarifies why desire regulation does not necessarily conflict with autonomy. Individuals may autonomously postpone an immediate desire because it conflicts with a more highly valued goal, whereas the same restraint may undermine well-being when imposed through coercion or pressure. Research on self-concordant goals similarly shows that personally endorsed goals sustain effort and produce stronger well-being effects when attained (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001).

Self-determination theory therefore specifies the motivational quality of action. The 5S model complements it by explaining how needs and goal orientations become organized through Salience, Simulation, Selection, and Satisfaction.

2.4 Flow as an Integrated Process Configuration

Flow theory describes optimal experience through concentrated attention, clear goals, immediate feedback, reduced self-consciousness, and a balance between challenge and skill (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1990; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). It demonstrates that well-being can arise during activity rather than only after goal attainment.

From the perspective of the 5S model, flow is an especially integrated configuration of motivated action. The activity possesses high Salience, Simulation becomes rapid and continuous, Selection is translated into action with little experienced friction, and feedback informs immediate adjustment. Satisfaction arises through participation as well as outcome.

Flow is not, however, sufficient for sustainable well-being. Deep absorption can occur in activities that damage health, relationships, or future agency. Its broader value depends on whether the activity is autonomously endorsed, how it relates to other commitments, and what consequences it produces.

The 5S model therefore situates flow within a wider evaluative and temporal process.

2.5 Complementary Explanatory Levels and the Missing Process

The relationship among the principal theories can be summarized as follows:

[Insert Table 1 about here.]

These explanatory levels overlap but should not be collapsed. Need satisfaction may itself be experienced as well-being, flow may strengthen accomplishment, and PERMA outcomes may influence later motivation. The distinction nevertheless clarifies the primary contribution of each approach.

Related research on self-regulation, self-efficacy, possible selves, and hope has examined mechanisms linking present action to future agency. Feedback models describe behavior as ongoing comparison and adjustment (Carver & Scheier, 1998), social cognitive theory explains how efficacy beliefs affect aspiration and persistence (Bandura, 1997, 2001), and research on possible selves and hope emphasizes imagined futures, pathways, and perceived agency (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Snyder, 2002).

What remains insufficiently integrated is the sequence through which socially structured opportunities, motivational salience, prospective simulation, desire regulation, satisfaction, self-evaluation, and future agency become connected. The 5S model provides this common temporal architecture. It does not replace existing theories, but explains how motivational conditions shape situated action, how action produces experience and outcomes, and how those outcomes reshape later possibilities.

The central question is therefore not only what well-being consists of, but how it is generated, sustained, weakened, and renewed through recursive cycles of motivated action.

3. The 5S Model of Motivated Action

The 5S model conceptualizes motivated action through five interconnected processes: Situation, Salience, Simulation, Selection, and Satisfaction. Although analytically distinguishable, these processes do not function as isolated or strictly linear stages. Each shapes the others, and the outcome of one cycle changes the conditions under which later cycles occur. This recursive orientation is consistent with accounts of self-regulation and human agency that understand action as an iterative relationship among goals, expectations, feedback, beliefs, and behavior (Bandura, 2001; Carver & Scheier, 1998).

Applied to well-being, the model rejects two simplifying assumptions: that happiness is a purely

internal psychological state and that it follows automatically from satisfying the strongest available desire. Well-being instead emerges through structured opportunities, personally significant concerns, anticipated futures, motivational regulation, and evaluative responses. The model explains how possibilities for well-being become recognizable, are translated into action, and are revised through their consequences. Figure 1 presents the recursive structure of the 5S model, showing how Satisfaction reshapes self-evaluation, perceived competence, future expectations, and available opportunities, which in turn influence subsequent cycles of Situation, Salience, Simulation, Selection, and Satisfaction.

[Insert Figure 1 about here.]

3.1 Situation: The Conditions of Possible Well-Being

Motivated action always begins within a Situation. Individuals neither choose from unlimited alternatives nor form their desires independently of their environments. Situation comprises the material, social, institutional, cultural, bodily, and temporal conditions that shape what can be perceived, imagined, and pursued. This understanding is consistent with capability approaches, which emphasize that well-being depends not only on internal preferences or resources but also on substantive opportunities to pursue valued forms of life (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999).

Material resources, health, time, relationships, and institutional access influence which actions are practically available. Past experiences shape how present circumstances are interpreted, while bodily and emotional conditions affect attention, energy, and perceived feasibility. Cultural values and social expectations further influence which goals appear legitimate, realistic, or worth pursuing. Individual action is therefore embedded in social environments and culturally formed understandings of agency (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Situation is not merely an external background. It is the structured field of possibilities within which action becomes conceivable. Similar circumstances may be interpreted differently because individuals possess different histories, capabilities, relationships, and expectations. A demanding task may therefore appear as an opportunity, burden, or threat, affecting which aspects acquire motivational importance.

Beginning with Situation prevents the model from reducing happiness to positive attitudes or effective self-regulation. A person may value autonomy, achievement, or connection while lacking the resources or institutional opportunities needed to pursue them. The possibilities of well-being are thus socially distributed and partly formed before individual deliberation begins.

3.2 Salience: What Comes to Matter

Any Situation contains multiple desires, goals, concerns, and possibilities, but only some acquire immediate motivational importance. Salience refers to the process through which particular elements of a situation become focal for action.

The existence or intensity of a desire does not by itself determine behavior. Individuals experience several concurrent concerns, some of which attract attention while others remain peripheral or postponed. Motivation depends partly on how goals are valued, how consequences are anticipated, and how attention becomes directed toward particular possibilities (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Kruglanski et al., 2002).

Salience is shaped by emotion, personal values, past experience, social expectations, and self-understanding. It is therefore both affective and evaluative. An immediate impulse may attract attention through emotional intensity, whereas a less urgent concern may become action-guiding because it reflects a deeply endorsed commitment. Personal values provide relatively durable standards through which goals and actions are judged as important or desirable (Schwartz, 1992). The relevant question is not simply which desire is strongest, but which comes to matter for the decision at hand.

This distinction is important because responding successfully to an urgent impulse does not necessarily support flourishing. Salient desires may strengthen or undermine health, relationships, competence, and future opportunity. Individuals can also reorganize salience by recalling commitments, redirecting attention, seeking support, or reframing circumstances. Salience is therefore one point at which individuals begin to organize rather than merely experience their motivational structure.

3.3 Simulation: Anticipating Possible Futures

Once a concern becomes salient, individuals anticipate possible responses and their consequences. Simulation refers to the construction and comparison of alternative futures. Human motivation is fundamentally prospective: people act partly in relation to futures they imagine, expect, fear, or hope to realize (Seligman et al., 2013).

Simulation may be explicit and reflective, but it may also be rapid, habitual, or emotionally shaped. In each form, it connects present motivation to anticipated future states. Individuals consider not only immediate pleasure and cost but also possible effects on relationships, capabilities, future opportunities, and later self-evaluation.

This connects Simulation to research on possible selves. Possible selves represent what individuals might become, hope to become, or fear becoming, thereby linking present conduct to anticipated identity (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Simulation consequently concerns not only external results but also

prospective self-formation.

Through Simulation, well-being acquires an explicitly temporal structure. Individuals may accept present discomfort because it is expected to support valued achievement or refuse immediate gratification because of its likely future costs. Conversely, anticipated failure, exclusion, or humiliation may discourage actions that could otherwise contribute to well-being. Imagining a desired future is most motivationally effective when connected to realistic obstacles and feasible pathways of action (Oettingen, 2012).

The range of futures available for Simulation is itself socially shaped. Repeated success may make demanding possibilities appear feasible, whereas exclusion or failure may narrow what can credibly be imagined. Cultural narratives and social models also influence which futures appear desirable and attainable. Simulation is therefore not simply private calculation but a situated capacity to envision what may come next.

3.4 Selection: Regulating Competing Desires

Simulation generates alternatives, but action requires Selection. Selection is the process through which one possibility is prioritized while competing desires or courses of action are fulfilled, postponed, under-fulfilled, redirected, or rejected.

This stage distinguishes the 5S model from accounts that equate well-being with aggregate desire satisfaction. Individuals rarely confront a single isolated desire. Because time, attention, energy, and resources are limited, pursuing one goal often restricts another. Self-regulation therefore requires the management of multiple goals and competing demands rather than unrestricted desire satisfaction (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Neal et al., 2017).

Immediate desires are not inherently inferior. Pleasure and rest can contribute importantly to well-being, but their significance depends partly on their relationship to other concerns and future consequences. Present gratification may undermine future opportunity, while temporary frustration may enable a more deeply valued aim.

Selection is therefore a form of motivational regulation. It may involve resisting an impulse, postponing a desire, reducing its urgency, or integrating it into a wider course of action. Regulation supports well-being when it expresses an intelligible ordering of motivations rather than mechanical suppression.

This qualification distinguishes autonomous regulation from externally imposed deprivation. Persistent suppression under coercive conditions can damage autonomy and well-being. Self-determination theory distinguishes action grounded in endorsed reasons from behavior driven primarily by external control or unaccepted pressure (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Research on self-concordant goals similarly shows that goals aligned with personal interests and values tend to sustain effort and produce stronger well-being effects when attained (Sheldon & Elliot,

1999; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). Selection contributes to flourishing when the goal is genuinely endorsed, the sacrifice proportionate, and the action credibly connected to a valued outcome.

3.5 Satisfaction: Experiencing and Evaluating Outcomes

Selection leads to action and consequences, which are experienced and evaluated through Satisfaction. Satisfaction is broader than pleasure and encompasses affective, relational, practical, and evaluative responses.

Satisfaction may arise from positive emotion, goal attainment, recognition, belonging, or meaningful participation even when an activity is demanding. Hedonic experience and eudaimonic functioning can therefore emerge from the same course of motivated action (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 1993).

Satisfaction also involves evaluating how an outcome was produced and what the action expresses about the person. A desirable result may be accompanied by dissatisfaction with the means used to achieve it, while an unsuccessful effort may retain value when it is regarded as responsible or consistent with an important commitment.

This self-evaluative component is central to the model. Individuals assess whether they regulated competing desires, acted according to endorsed goals, and exercised capacities they value. Satisfaction can consequently strengthen self-respect, confidence, and perceived competence. Social cognitive theory similarly emphasizes that successful action affects later behavior by changing efficacy beliefs about one's capacity to organize and execute action (Bandura, 1997, 2001).

Satisfaction may also derive from recognizing that action has expanded future possibilities. It is therefore an experiential and evaluative response to the relationship among action, outcome, and value. This broader conception explains why pleasurable outcomes may fail to produce durable well-being and why demanding activities may nevertheless be deeply satisfying.

3.6 Recursive Feedback

Satisfaction does not terminate the process. The consequences of action feed back into later Situations, patterns of Salience, Simulations, and Selections. The 5S model is therefore recursive rather than linear.

Successful action may create resources, skills, relationships, and opportunities or reveal previously unnoticed possibilities. Satisfaction may reinforce the salience of a goal, whereas disappointment may weaken it or prompt reconsideration. Prior outcomes alter Simulation by changing beliefs about what is feasible and affect Selection by increasing or diminishing confidence in effective desire regulation. Such feedback is central to theories of self-regulation and agency, in which goals, expectations, and behavior are repeatedly revised in light of experienced consequences (Bandura, 2001; Carver &

Scheier, 1998).

Failure and regret also provide feedback. A failed attempt may reveal unrealistic expectations or encourage a revised strategy. Repeated failure, however, may narrow imagined futures, weaken self-evaluation, and promote avoidance, whereas repeated satisfaction may expand perceived possibility and support further valued action.

The recursive structure can be summarized as follows:

Situation → Salience → Simulation → Selection → Satisfaction
→ reconfigured Situation, Salience, Simulation, and Selection.

Well-being is therefore not achieved once and retained unchanged. It is continually renewed, revised, or weakened through cycles of situated action. The 5S model explains how present experience becomes a condition of future agency and provides the process foundation for understanding happiness as an evolving relationship among motivation, action, evaluation, and possibility.

4. Happiness as a Recursive Process of Well-Being

The 5S model becomes a theory of well-being when Satisfaction is understood not as the endpoint of motivated action but as a condition that reshapes subsequent possibilities. Well-being cannot be assessed solely by asking whether a desire has been satisfied at a particular moment. It also depends on what that satisfaction does to the person's capacity to recognize, pursue, and realize valued possibilities in the future. This view is consistent with research that associates well-being not only with positive experience but also with effective functioning, valued agency, and the development of enduring psychological and social resources (Fredrickson, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989).

Satisfaction may strengthen health, competence, relationships, self-respect, and confidence, thereby enlarging later opportunities for well-being. It may also weaken them. Immediate pleasure can reduce future agency by damaging health, eroding trust, narrowing attention, or encouraging a negative evaluation of oneself. Well-being is therefore recursive: earlier cycles of motivation and action shape present experience, while present satisfactions and disappointments alter the conditions of later cycles.

4.1 Beyond Satisfaction as an Endpoint

Desire satisfaction can generate pleasure, relief, enjoyment, and accomplishment. Yet not every satisfaction contributes equally to sustainable well-being. A satisfaction may be locally positive but recursively negative. Repeated avoidance, for example, may provide immediate relief while weakening confidence and making later challenges harder to confront. Similarly, gratification may

undermine health, financial security, or relationships, while an outcome obtained through objectionable means may provide advantage without supporting self-respect.

Conversely, an experience may be locally unpleasant but recursively positive. Study, training, rehabilitation, care, and demanding commitments may involve effort or frustration while developing competence, preserving relationships, and expanding future opportunities. Eudaimonic approaches similarly emphasize that worthwhile functioning can involve challenge, development, and meaningful effort rather than continuous pleasure (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989; Waterman, 1993). The absence of immediate pleasure does not therefore imply the absence of well-being.

Satisfaction should consequently be evaluated along two dimensions. The first is its immediate experiential quality: whether it produces pleasure, relief, engagement, or another positive state. The second is its recursive consequence: whether it preserves or undermines future valued agency. Satisfaction contributes more securely to sustainable well-being when it is positively experienced without systematically damaging the conditions needed for later action.

This argument does not subordinate all present enjoyment to future achievement. Rest, pleasure, recreation, and uncomplicated enjoyment are important elements of a good life. Positive emotions may broaden attention, facilitate adaptive thought and action, and support the development of enduring resources (Fredrickson, 2001). The narrower claim is that present satisfaction cannot sustain well-being when it repeatedly destroys the capacities and opportunities on which future satisfaction depends.

4.2 Three Temporal Dimensions of Well-Being

The recursive structure of the 5S model distinguishes three temporally connected dimensions of well-being: experiential, evaluative, and anticipatory well-being. These dimensions are analytically distinct but dynamically interdependent.

Experiential well-being concerns the affective quality of present activities and outcomes. It includes enjoyment, relief, calmness, interest, engagement, affection, and other positive experiences. Such well-being may arise after an action has achieved its objective or during the activity itself. Conversation, play, creative activity, care, exercise, and skilled performance can be rewarding independently of later accomplishment. Research on experienced utility and momentary affect similarly distinguishes lived experience from broader judgments about life as a whole (Kahneman et al., 2004; Kahneman & Riis, 2005).

Experiential well-being is indispensable, but it does not exhaust happiness. A person may experience frequent pleasure while remaining dissatisfied with the direction of life, the quality of important relationships, or the self expressed through repeated choices. Conversely, an individual may accept difficult experiences as parts of a life regarded as meaningful or worthwhile. Emotional experience and global life evaluation are therefore related but nonidentical dimensions of well-being (Diener et al., 1999; Kahneman & Deaton, 2010).

Evaluative well-being concerns judgments about one's choices, conduct, achievements, circumstances, and developing self. Individuals assess whether an intended outcome was achieved, but they also evaluate the means through which it was produced. They may ask whether they acted competently, autonomously, responsibly, or consistently with valued commitments.

Evaluative well-being is thus broader than global life satisfaction. Life satisfaction concerns a person's cognitive judgment of life according to relevant standards (Diener et al., 1985). Evaluative well-being in the present framework additionally concerns agency, motivational ordering, and self-formation. It asks whether important desires were appropriately prioritized, whether competing motivations were regulated in an intelligible way, and whether recurrent actions express or develop a self the individual can endorse. Well-being depends not only on receiving desirable outcomes but also on being able to approve one's participation in producing them.

Anticipatory well-being concerns positive expectations about future valued experience and agency. It is the present significance of believing that meaningful goals, relationships, and activities will remain attainable. It includes hope, confidence, eagerness, and the enjoyment of looking forward to future possibilities. Research on anticipation and savoring similarly indicates that future-oriented thought can contribute to present well-being before the anticipated experience occurs (Bryant, 2003; MacLeod & Conway, 2005).

Anticipatory well-being is more than the expectation that a pleasant event will happen. It involves the belief that one will remain able to recognize, pursue, and realize what matters. This conception overlaps with hope theory, which emphasizes perceived agency and pathways toward valued goals (Snyder, 2002), but it focuses specifically on the present well-being produced by expected future capacity. A person who perceives meaningful goals and credible opportunities may experience hope before any later satisfaction is realized. By contrast, a person whose future appears closed may experience diminished well-being even when current circumstances have not yet deteriorated.

These three dimensions form a temporal structure rather than an additive list. Experiential well-being concerns present activity and outcome. Evaluative well-being interprets that experience in relation to values, agency, and self-understanding. Anticipatory well-being projects this evaluation into future possibility. These expectations then return to the present by influencing what becomes salient, which futures are simulated, and which actions are selected. Happiness therefore extends across the temporal organization of experience, interpretation, and expectation.

4.3 Self-Evaluation as a Mediating Mechanism

Self-evaluation connects Satisfaction to anticipatory well-being. Goal attainment can directly produce pleasure, but it can also alter what individuals believe about their capacities, commitments, and identities. Through successful action, individuals may come to regard themselves as capable of regulating desires, persisting through difficulty, cooperating with others, or acting consistently with

important values. Research on self-efficacy similarly shows that mastery experiences influence later aspiration, persistence, and willingness to undertake demanding action (Bandura, 1997, 2001).

The relevant object of evaluation is not only the result but also the agency expressed in producing it. The same objective outcome may have different effects depending on whether it is attributed to sustained effort, external control, or chance. Attributional research likewise demonstrates that interpretations of success and failure shape motivation, affect, and future expectations (Weiner, 1985). A success experienced as accidental or externally controlled may provide pleasure without generating confidence. An achievement obtained by violating an important commitment may provide material advantage while reducing self-respect.

The central mechanism can be represented as follows:

Valued Selection → Goal attainment → Satisfaction → Improved self-evaluation
→ Positive future expectations.

The sequence begins with valued Selection because not every successful outcome provides evidence of agency that the individual can endorse. When a person selects an action connected to an important goal, carries it through, and achieves a relevant result, Satisfaction can be interpreted as evidence of a capacity for valued action. Research on self-concordant goals similarly shows that goals aligned with personal values and interests are more likely to sustain effort and produce well-being benefits when attained (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001).

Improved self-evaluation concerns both efficacy and the quality of agency. Individuals may conclude not only “I can do this,” but also “I can act in this way.” They may recognize that they can organize effort, tolerate proportionate discomfort, sustain a commitment, or act according to principles they endorse. Self-evaluation therefore concerns the capacities displayed in action as well as the outcome achieved.

This interpretation reshapes later Simulation and Selection. Past achievement can make demanding possibilities appear feasible, while successful desire regulation can increase confidence in future motivational conflicts. Previously dismissed possibilities may enter the range of imagined futures, and Selection may become less avoidant. Self-evaluation thereby functions as a bridge between retrospective interpretation and prospective agency (Bandura, 2001; Snyder, 2002).

Outcomes do not automatically generate hope. Success interpreted as accidental or unrepeatable may have little influence on future expectation, whereas a modest achievement may have a strong recursive effect when it provides credible evidence of developing agency. Failure can likewise support learning or produce self-undermining conclusions. Its effect depends on whether it is interpreted as information about a specific strategy or generalized into a judgment of overall incapacity.

4.4 Happiness as Capacity Reproduction

The preceding analysis supports the paper's central claim:

> *Sustainable well-being depends not only on present satisfaction but on whether that satisfaction reproduces the capacity for future valued action.*

The relevant capacity includes the ability to recognize what matters, imagine realistic possibilities, regulate competing motivations, select valued action, and learn from consequences. Happiness therefore involves more than repeatedly obtaining desired outcomes. It depends on preserving or expanding the processes through which valued outcomes remain possible.

This argument is related to, but distinct from, the capability approach. Capability theory emphasizes the substantive opportunities individuals possess to achieve valued functionings (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999). Capacity reproduction refers more specifically to the renewal of the motivational and practical ability to enter further cycles of valued action. It concerns not only whether opportunities objectively exist, but whether individuals remain able to recognize, choose, and use them.

A person may repeatedly experience desire fulfilment while becoming progressively less capable of pursuing a valued life. Satisfaction may become dependent on increasingly narrow conditions or may damage health, relationships, confidence, and opportunity. In such cases, desire fulfilment occurs without the reproduction of well-being-producing capacity.

By contrast, Satisfaction reproduces capacity when it strengthens the 5S process. It may improve the Situation by creating resources, knowledge, trust, or support. It may refine Salience by clarifying which concerns remain important. It may broaden Simulation by revealing new possibilities and strengthen Selection by increasing confidence in effective action. Present satisfaction then contributes to the conditions of further valued satisfaction. This logic is compatible with theories of resource gain, which suggest that accumulated resources can facilitate further gains, while resource loss may produce cumulative disadvantage (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001).

Capacity reproduction includes preservation as well as development. Rest, friendship, play, and contemplation need not increase productive performance to contribute to sustainable well-being. They may restore attention, preserve emotional balance, sustain relationships, and maintain access to valued forms of experience. Capacity reproduction should therefore not be interpreted as a demand for continuous achievement, optimization, or self-improvement.

Capacity reproduction is also socially supported. Trust, care, recognition, education, institutional access, and material security shape the ability to pursue future goals. Sustainable well-being depends not only on internal motivation but also on the continued availability of social conditions that make valued action feasible (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999).

4.5 Positive and Negative Recursive Cycles

Because each cycle modifies the next, well-being can develop through positive and negative recursive dynamics. Related theories describe upward spirals of positive emotion and resource accumulation, as well as downward spirals of resource loss, helplessness, and avoidance (Fredrickson, 2001; Hobfoll, 1989; Maier & Seligman, 2016).

A positive cycle can be represented as follows:

Valued action → Satisfaction → Positive self-evaluation → Expanded Simulation
→ Further valued action.

Satisfaction strengthens perceived agency, making further possibilities appear attainable. Expanded Simulation and greater confidence then support further Selection. Small achievements may be especially important when they provide credible evidence of efficacy and gradually enlarge perceived possibility (Bandura, 1997).

A negative cycle can be represented as follows:

Repeated failure → Negative self-evaluation → Restricted expectations → Avoidant Selection
→ Further failure.

Repeated disappointment may weaken self-evaluation when it is interpreted as evidence of general incapacity. The range of credible futures narrows, Selection becomes more defensive, and avoidance reduces opportunities for corrective experience. This dynamic resembles learned helplessness, in which repeated uncontrollable failure alters expectations, motivation, and later conduct (Abramson et al., 1978; Maier & Seligman, 2016).

These cycles are not deterministic. Positive recursion can be interrupted by adverse circumstances, while negative recursion may be redirected through learning, social support, institutional change, or attainable action. The recursive framework thus explains the persistence, deterioration, and renewal of well-being within the same model. Happiness persists when satisfaction reproduces the conditions of valued action, declines when those conditions are repeatedly weakened, and recovers when individuals and their environments reopen credible possibilities for agency.

5. Why Happiness Can Include Difficulty

The recursive account developed above explains why happiness cannot be identified with the continuous maximization of immediate pleasure. Hedonic experience remains an important part of well-being, but eudaimonic and self-determination perspectives show that meaning, autonomous

functioning, personal growth, and valued goal pursuit may involve effort and temporary discomfort (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989; Waterman, 1993). Some pleasant experiences weaken future agency, whereas some difficult experiences contribute to more sustainable well-being. The relevant distinction is therefore not between pleasure and pain as such, but between experiences that preserve the conditions of valued action and those that undermine them.

5.1 Pleasure, Desire Regulation, and Valued Goals

Immediate pleasure contributes to experiential well-being but does not by itself indicate sustainable happiness. Actions that provide short-term relief or gratification may narrow later possibilities by weakening confidence, trust, health, or material security. Such outcomes are recursively negative because they can impair later Situation, Simulation, and Selection. Research on self-regulation likewise shows that short-term affective relief may conflict with longer-term goals (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Hofmann et al., 2012).

This does not make pleasure suspect. Rest, recreation, and enjoyment can restore energy, sustain relationships, and preserve emotional balance, while positive emotions may help build enduring personal and social resources (Fredrickson, 2001). The problem arises when present pleasure systematically consumes capacities required for later valued action.

Because desires compete for limited time, attention, energy, and resources, valued goal pursuit often requires some desires to be postponed, limited, or redirected. Such regulation does not necessarily reduce autonomy. Self-determination theory distinguishes autonomous regulation from controlled motivation: effortful conduct can remain autonomous when it expresses goals and reasons the individual genuinely endorses (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

The 5S model locates this issue within Selection. Individuals compare alternative patterns of satisfaction across time and assess their implications for valued goals and future opportunities. A difficult action may therefore be selected because it contributes to something regarded as more important than the satisfaction temporarily sacrificed. Research on self-concordant goals similarly shows that personally endorsed goals elicit more sustained effort and yield stronger well-being benefits when attained (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001).

Desire regulation supports well-being only under appropriate conditions. The higher-order goal must be genuinely endorsed, the sacrifice proportionate, and progress realistically attainable. Persistent deprivation without credible progress may weaken agency, while well-being may sometimes require disengagement from unattainable goals and reengagement with feasible alternatives (Wrosch et al., 2003). Autonomous persistence and adaptive revision are therefore complementary forms of motivational regulation.

5.2 From Discomfort to Sustainable Well-Being

The connection between difficulty and well-being can be represented as follows:

Present discomfort → Valued achievement → Satisfaction → Improved self-evaluation
→ Future capability and hope.

Present discomfort does not become valuable merely because it is endured. Its contribution depends on what it enables and how the resulting action is evaluated. When individuals accept temporary difficulty in pursuit of an autonomously valued goal, successful action can provide evidence of competence, persistence, self-regulation, or fidelity to commitment. Mastery experiences are especially important because they strengthen self-efficacy and influence later aspiration and willingness to undertake demanding action (Bandura, 1997, 2001).

Such evidence can improve self-evaluation and expand the range of futures that appear attainable. The recursive effect should be strongest when the goal is self-concordant and achievement is interpreted as evidence of endorsed agency rather than chance or external control (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). Difficulty then acquires positive significance through the agency displayed in transforming it into valued action.

The result is anticipatory well-being. Individuals may enjoy what has been achieved while also gaining confidence that further valued action is possible. This connects the argument to hope theory, which links positive future orientation to perceived agency and pathways toward valued goals (Snyder, 2002). Difficulty can therefore contribute indirectly to happiness by strengthening confidence in future action.

This argument must not romanticize suffering. Pain, deprivation, coercion, and exhaustion can damage well-being without compensating benefits. Need frustration and chronic uncontrollable adversity may instead generate passivity and diminished agency (Maier & Seligman, 2016; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Difficulty contributes positively only when connected to an endorsed goal, kept within tolerable limits, and compatible with future agency. The theory values the transformation of difficulty through meaningful action, not difficulty itself.

5.3 Resilience as Process Recovery

The recursive model also allows resilience to be understood as more than a return to a previous psychological state. Contemporary research treats resilience as a dynamic process arising through interactions among individuals, relationships, resources, and environments rather than as a fixed trait (Bonanno, 2004; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2001). Within the 5S model, resilience is the reconstruction of valued action after disruption.

Adversity may alter the Situation, make former goals unattainable, weaken self-evaluation, and narrow anticipated futures. Recovery therefore requires more than restoring positive emotion. Individuals may need to identify what has become newly important, revise priorities, imagine feasible alternatives, and reengage with attainable goals (Wrosch et al., 2003).

Recovery often begins with limited but achievable action. A modest accomplishment can interrupt a negative recursive cycle by providing evidence that effective agency remains possible. Credible mastery experiences may therefore rebuild confidence more effectively than encouragement detached from action (Bandura, 1997).

Through repeated cycles, individuals can rebuild hope without returning to the goals or identity that existed before disruption. Resilience may involve adaptation, reorientation, and new pathways rather than restoration of a prior equilibrium. Happiness can include difficulty because well-being is not defined by the absence of disruption, but by the continuing possibility of reconstructing valued agency under changed conditions.

6. Theoretical Propositions and Research Agenda

The recursive account of well-being developed in this paper generates four propositions for future empirical research. They concern not only whether desires are satisfied, but which desires are prioritized, how they are regulated, how outcomes affect self-evaluation, and whether present satisfaction preserves the capacity for future valued action. The propositions draw on research on self-concordant goals, self-determination, self-efficacy, hope, and resource accumulation while integrating these mechanisms within the 5S process (Bandura, 1997; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Hobfoll, 1989; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Snyder, 2002).

Proposition 1: Valued rather than undifferentiated satisfaction

Well-being is more strongly enhanced by the satisfaction of salient and self-endorsed goals than by the undifferentiated accumulation of desire satisfaction.

The 5S model suggests that satisfactions do not contribute uniformly to well-being. Satisfaction should have a stronger positive effect when the relevant goal is both motivationally salient and personally endorsed. This expectation is consistent with the self-concordance model, according to which goals aligned with personal interests and values elicit more sustained effort and produce stronger well-being effects when attained (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). A frequently satisfied but weakly valued desire may generate pleasure without substantially improving evaluative or anticipatory well-being. By contrast, attainment of a difficult but deeply endorsed goal may be interpreted as meaningful evidence of successful agency. Research should therefore distinguish

the frequency or quantity of satisfaction from its motivational significance and examine how salience interacts with self-endorsement.

Proposition 2: Self-evaluative mediation

The positive effect of valued goal attainment on anticipatory well-being is mediated by improvements in self-evaluation.

Goal attainment may improve future expectations not only because it produces a desirable result, but also because individuals interpret it as evidence of competence, persistence, self-regulation, or fidelity to commitments. Mastery experiences similarly influence later aspiration and persistence by changing beliefs about personal capability (Bandura, 1997, 2001). The same objective achievement may therefore have different consequences depending on whether it is attributed to personal agency, external control, or chance (Weiner, 1985). Achievements regarded as accidental, imposed, or unrepeatable should have weaker effects on anticipatory well-being. The distinctive claim of the 5S model is that self-evaluation serves as the recursive bridge through which past Satisfaction changes later Simulation and Selection.

Proposition 3: Autonomous desire regulation

The regulation of immediate desires contributes to well-being when it is autonomously connected to a more highly valued goal.

Postponing or under-fulfilling an immediate desire does not necessarily reduce well-being. It may contribute positively when individuals regard the regulation as an expression of their own priorities. Self-determination theory distinguishes autonomous regulation from conduct based primarily on coercion, fear, guilt, or unaccepted external pressure (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Similar behavioral restraint should therefore produce different effects depending on its motivational basis. Regulation grounded in endorsed reasons should support autonomy and evaluative well-being, whereas controlled restraint may generate distress without comparable benefits. The effect should also depend on whether the higher-order goal remains realistically attainable. When progress is no longer credible, adaptive regulation may require disengagement from blocked goals and reengagement with feasible alternatives (Wrosch et al., 2003).

Proposition 4: Capacity reproduction

Satisfaction produces sustainable well-being when it expands rather than diminishes the capacity

for future valued action.

Present satisfaction should have more enduring effects when it strengthens health, competence, relationships, confidence, or access to future opportunities. Satisfaction that weakens these conditions may produce experiential well-being without supporting longer-term flourishing. This expectation is compatible with broaden-and-build theory, which explains how positive emotions can generate enduring resources, and conservation-of-resources theory, which emphasizes cumulative processes of resource gain and loss (Fredrickson, 2001; Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). The 5S model defines the relevant capacity as the ability to recognize what matters, simulate realistic possibilities, regulate competing motivations, select valued action, and learn from Satisfaction. Two equally pleasant experiences may therefore differ substantially in their recursive consequences.

6.1 Empirical Implications

These propositions can be examined through complementary methods. Experience-sampling and diary studies could capture within-person variation in Salience, motivational conflict, Selection, Satisfaction, and self-evaluation across everyday episodes (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1987; Kahneman et al., 2004). Participants could report whether a desire was fulfilled, how strongly the goal was endorsed, which alternatives were considered, and whether the outcome changed perceived future capability.

Longitudinal studies could test whether repeated valued attainment predicts anticipatory well-being through changes in competence, self-respect, or self-efficacy. Mediation analysis would directly examine the proposed relationship between Satisfaction, self-evaluation, and future hope. Experimental or quasi-experimental research could compare similar difficult activities performed under autonomous and controlled motivational conditions, assessing subsequent autonomy, satisfaction, self-efficacy, and willingness to pursue further valued action.

Flow research could examine whether the longer-term effects of absorption depend on value alignment, psychological need satisfaction, and capacity development rather than on experiential intensity alone (Abuhamdeh, 2020; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Cross-cultural studies could investigate how the content of salient and endorsed goals varies while testing whether the recursive relationships among Salience, Simulation, Selection, Satisfaction, and later agency remain structurally similar (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Uchida et al., 2004).

Together, these approaches would permit the 5S model to be evaluated as a testable process theory rather than only as a conceptual synthesis.

7. Discussion: Happiness in Social and Cultural Motion

The 5S model places major theories of well-being at complementary explanatory levels and shifts attention from the components of well-being to the process through which they become connected over time. Its contribution lies less in proposing another list of well-being dimensions than in explaining how socially situated individuals recognize valued possibilities, organize action, evaluate outcomes, and renew the conditions of later well-being.

7.1 Theoretical Implications

The processual perspective clarifies why no single condition, experience, or outcome is sufficient for sustainable well-being. Psychological need satisfaction may create supportive motivational conditions without ensuring that valued action is pursued. Flow may generate intense engagement without contributing to broader flourishing, while positive emotion or accomplishment may arise through actions that weaken future capacity. The conceptual and empirical overlap among established well-being models therefore supports distinguishing their explanatory functions rather than treating them as mutually exclusive theories (Goodman et al., 2018; Huta & Waterman, 2014).

The 5S model connects motivational conditions, organized activity, experienced outcomes, and recursive consequences. It shifts attention from whether well-being is present at a given moment to how it is generated and whether its conditions remain reproducible. In this respect, the model extends process theories of self-regulation and agency by incorporating experiential, evaluative, social, and anticipatory dimensions of well-being (Bandura, 2001; Carver & Scheier, 1998).

The framework also recasts hedonic and eudaimonic well-being as different temporal and evaluative aspects of motivated action. Hedonic satisfaction concerns the immediate quality of experience, whereas eudaimonic well-being concerns valued functioning, meaning, and self-development (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989). They may reinforce one another, but they may also diverge when immediate pleasure conflicts with longer-term growth or when valued action requires temporary discomfort (Henderson & Knight, 2012; Huta & Waterman, 2014).

Such tension creates the need for Selection. Sustainable well-being does not require rejecting pleasure, but integrating it into patterns of action that preserve valued agency. Happiness is therefore not a stable equilibrium. Situations, desires, relationships, abilities, and goals change, while Satisfaction alters both the person and the conditions of later action. *Happiness in motion* captures this continuing organization of experience, evaluation, and future possibility.

7.2 Social, Cultural, and Relational Conditions

The capacity to generate well-being is not purely individual. Material, relational, and institutional conditions shape every stage of the 5S process. They constitute the Situation, influence what becomes

salient, affect which futures can be credibly simulated, and constrain which selections can be implemented. This argument is consistent with the capability approach, which emphasizes that well-being depends not only on preferences or psychological states but also on substantive opportunities to pursue valued forms of life (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999).

The model should therefore not be interpreted as assigning individuals responsibility for producing happiness regardless of circumstance. Restricted well-being may reflect limited opportunities rather than defective motivation or poor self-regulation. Inequality may restrict not only resources but also the futures individuals can realistically imagine and the actions they can credibly select. The 5S model explains action within structured situations; it does not assume equivalent possibilities across individuals.

Culture likewise shapes the substantive content of well-being. Different societies may assign different meanings and importance to autonomy, achievement, relational harmony, community, or spiritual fulfilment. Cultural understandings of self and agency influence which possibilities become salient, which sacrifices appear legitimate, and which outcomes generate satisfaction or self-respect (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Uchida et al., 2004).

The model does not assume that the same goals define happiness everywhere. What it generalizes is the process through which culturally situated goals become salient, simulated, selected, and evaluated. Structural similarity in the production of well-being can therefore coexist with substantive diversity in valued goals. Cross-cultural research should examine both differences in goal content and variation in how the 5S processes are interpreted and organized.

Well-being is also relationally produced. Trust, care, recognition, cooperation, and belonging contribute directly to Satisfaction while improving the conditions of subsequent action. Supportive relationships reveal possibilities, provide resources, sustain Selection under difficulty, and strengthen confidence that valued goals remain attainable. Research consistently identifies social relationships as important sources of happiness and resilience, while self-determination theory treats relatedness as a basic condition of healthy motivation (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryff & Singer, 2000).

Relational Satisfaction is therefore recursive: it is both a valued outcome and a condition of later agency. Relationships remain supportive when interaction preserves sufficient trust, recognition, and willingness to continue cooperation.

7.3 Boundary Conditions

The 5S model has several important limits. It does not provide a complete list of objective goods or determine which goals individuals ought to value. It explains how valued goals become connected to action and well-being, but judgments about their substantive goodness require additional normative theories, including capability and objective-list approaches (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999).

Nor does the model reduce PERMA, self-determination theory, flow theory, or eudaimonic approaches to five stages. These theories retain substantive claims about psychological needs, optimal experience, and flourishing. The 5S model instead provides a temporal architecture within which their insights can interact.

Severe psychological or physical conditions also cannot be explained or remedied solely through motivational regulation. Chronic illness, trauma, deprivation, and psychiatric disorders may impair agency in ways requiring clinical, relational, social, or institutional intervention. Restricted Simulation or avoidant Selection may therefore be reasonable responses to genuinely constrained circumstances rather than evidence of deficient motivation.

Finally, the framework does not imply that well-being requires continuous achievement or self-development. Renewal may involve rest, preservation, relational support, goal revision, or disengagement from unattainable possibilities (Wrosch et al., 2003). Its central claim is narrower: well-being is generated, maintained, weakened, and renewed through situated processes of motivation and action. A happy life is not one without disruption or disappointment, but one in which the capacity to recognize and pursue valued possibilities can be sustained or reconstructed under changing conditions.

8. Conclusion

This paper has argued that well-being cannot be adequately understood as positive emotion, desire satisfaction, or life evaluation at a single point in time. These remain important dimensions of happiness, but their significance depends on how they are connected to valued action and future possibility. A pleasant experience may weaken enduring well-being when it damages health, relationships, competence, or agency, whereas a difficult experience may contribute to flourishing when it supports meaningful achievement and preserves future capacity.

The 5S model explains this dynamic through the recursive sequence of Situation, Salience, Simulation, Selection, and Satisfaction. Individuals act within socially and culturally structured circumstances, recognize particular concerns as important, imagine possible futures, regulate competing desires, and evaluate the consequences of action. Satisfaction then reshapes later cycles by altering self-evaluation, perceived capability, expected opportunity, and confidence in future choice. Sustainable well-being therefore depends not only on present satisfaction but also on whether it reproduces the capacity for future valued action.

The model also connects major theories at complementary explanatory levels. Self-determination theory identifies motivational conditions, flow theory describes an optimally integrated activity state, and PERMA specifies multidimensional forms of flourishing. The 5S model places these insights within the process through which well-being is generated, weakened, and renewed.

Happiness is therefore not a fixed state but a recursively sustained capacity to recognize what matters, pursue valued possibilities, learn from outcomes, and remain open to a worthwhile future.

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Table 1

Table 1. Complementary explanatory roles of major well-being theories and the 5S model

Theory	Primary explanatory focus
Self-determination theory	Motivational conditions supporting well-being
5S model	Situated and recursive process generating well-being
Flow theory	Optimally integrated experiential configuration
PERMA	Multidimensional forms and outcomes of flourishing

Figure 1

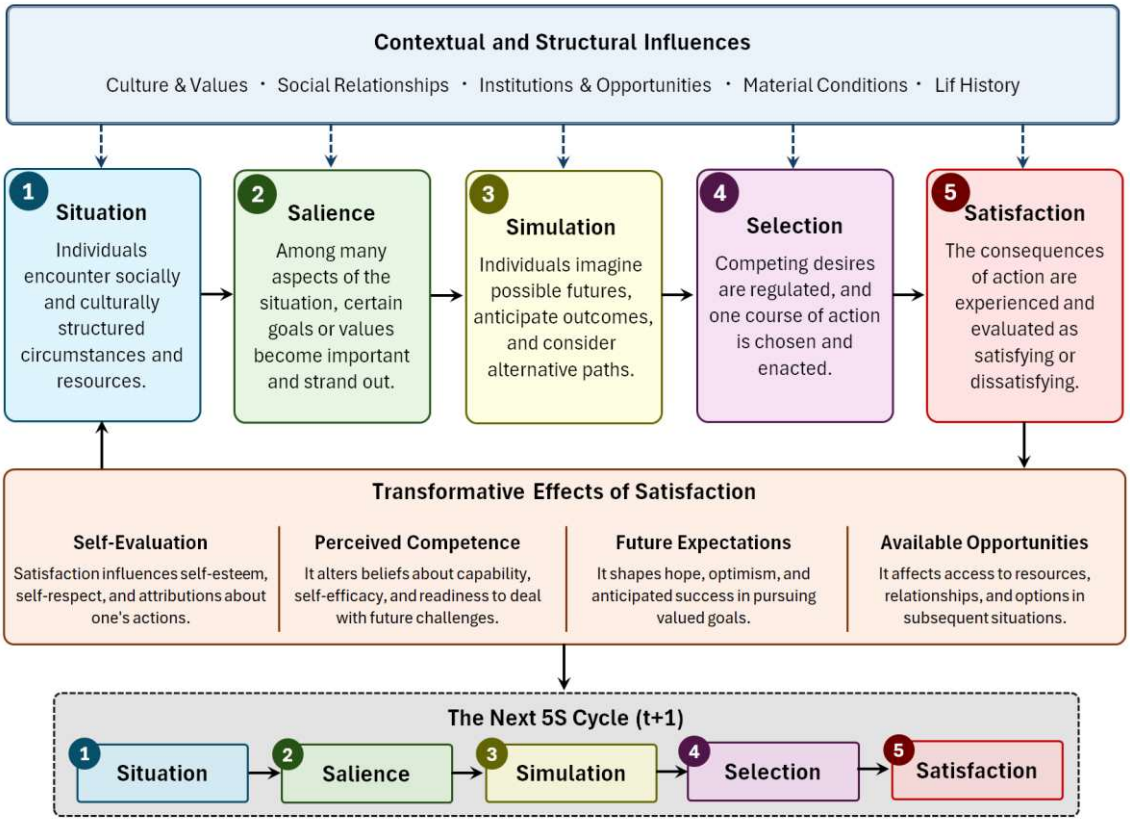


Figure 1. The recursive 5S process of well-being.

The figure illustrates how Situation, Salience, Simulation, Selection, and Satisfaction form a recursive process of motivated action. Satisfaction affects self-evaluation, perceived competence, future expectations, and available opportunities, which in turn reshape the conditions of the subsequent 5S cycle. The process is also embedded in broader social, cultural, institutional, material, and biographical conditions that influence what individuals can perceive, value, imagine, choose, and experience as satisfying.