

# Well-being Evidence for Policy

ALICE RAP, 23 April 2013

Laura Stoll

Centre for Well-being, new economics foundation



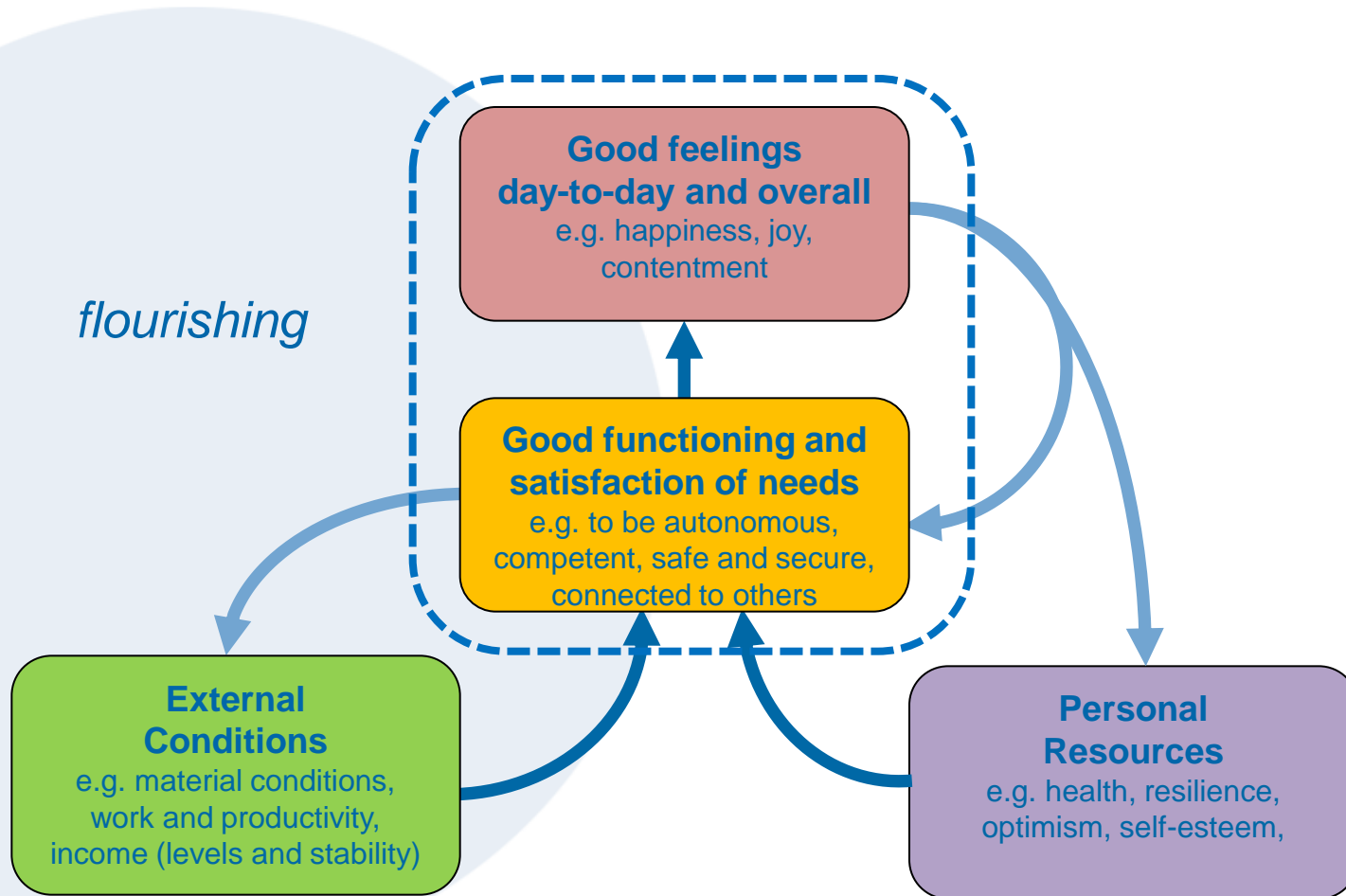
# About nef



- An *independent* UK think-and-do-tank – a ‘bridge’ between researchers and policy-makers
- Well-being programme set up in 2001 to ask: *What would policy look like if it focused on improving well-being*
- Currently working with a number of bodies to advise on well-being measurement and policy, including UK Office for National Statistics, Eurostat, Eurofound, the Local Government Group, Department of Health, European Social Survey.

# Understanding well-being

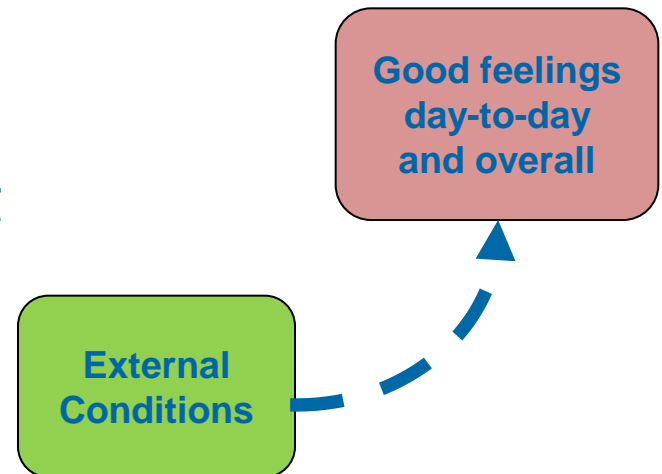
# The dynamic model of well-being



# “Wellbeing economics”

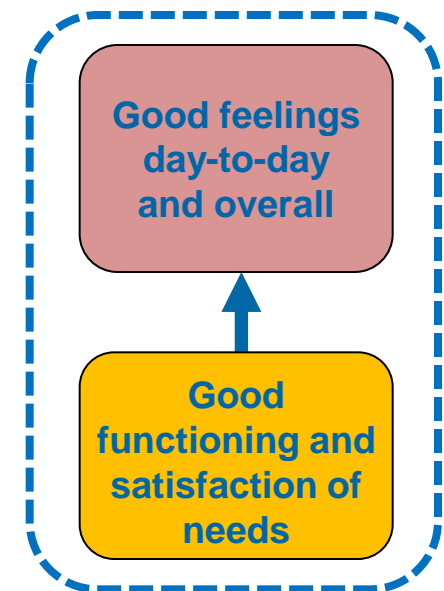
Extensive exploration of what objective factors are linked with reported life satisfaction.

- Income
- Work and time use
- Social relationships and trust
- Personal characteristics
- Natural and immediate environment
- Regional factors



# 'Flourishing' views of well-being

- **Corey Keyes: The two continua model of mental health and illness**
- **Felicia Huppert: the operational definition of flourishing**
- **Martin Seligman: 'Flourish 51' and 'Perma'**
  - Positive emotion
  - Engagement
  - Relationships
  - Meaning
  - Accomplishment



# What is involved in 'eudaimonia'?

Some suggestions:

- Self-determination theory: basic psychological needs – autonomy, competence, relatedness, security lead to *intrinsic motivation* (Deci and Ryan, 2000)
- Flow: undertaking challenging but controllable tasks that require skill and are *intrinsically motivating* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)



# Causes & benefits of positive emotions

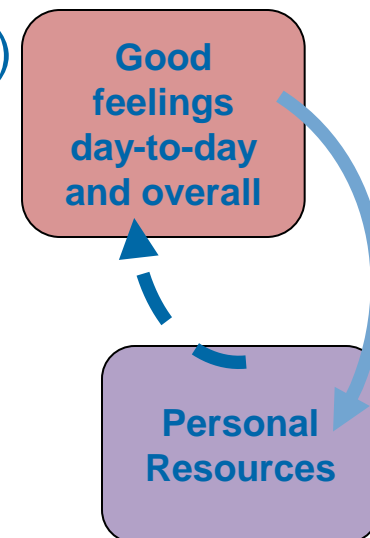
While 'personal resources'  $\approx$  fixed character traits....

...now evidence from positive psychology about what we can change, e.g.:

- 'Learned optimism' as an explanatory style (Seligman 1998, 2002)
- Using character strengths, focusing on the positive, expressing gratitude (Seligman et al, 2005)

..also :

- The 'Broaden-and-Build' theory of positive emotions' (Frederickson, 2001)





The evidence base: what  
we already know about  
policy and well-being

# Policy areas we reviewed

## Unemployment

### Health

- **Relationship in both directions:** Poor self-reported health is associated with lower subjective well-being and better self-reported health is associated with higher subjective well-being; higher subjective well-being is associated with improved health and longevity.
- Poor **objective health and disability** are associated with lower subjective well-being, although this relationship is weaker than that of self-reported health and subjective well-being.
- Although people may adapt somewhat to chronic illness, **complete adaptation does not seem to occur.**
- **Psychological health** has a very strong relationship with subjective well-being
- **Physical activity** has a beneficial effect on well-being (as well as on health).
- **Sleep problems** are associated with lower life satisfaction, lower happiness and a reduction in other measures of subjective well-being.

in high-unemployment regions.

# Policy areas we reviewed

## Local environment

- Hour
- **Community**
    - **Strong social networks** and time spent socialising are positively associated with subjective well-being.
    - There appears to be a positive relationship between **volunteering** and subjective well-being, and altruistic behaviour promotes subjective well-being.
    - There is a positive relationship between subjective well-being and membership of (non-church) **organisations**.
  - Regular engagement in religious activities is positively related to well-being.
  - Social trust (trust in other people) and trust in key public institutions is found to be associated with higher life satisfaction and happiness
  - Being **single** is worse for well-being than being in a stable **relationship**.
- Pe  
ag  
ge

# Using the results in policy-making

**Use subjective well-being measures to:**

- Estimate effects of policy outcomes on overall well-being
- Provide a common currency to assess and compare different policy impacts
- Compare the costs of intervention to the well-being outcomes

**Use subjective well-being evidence to:**

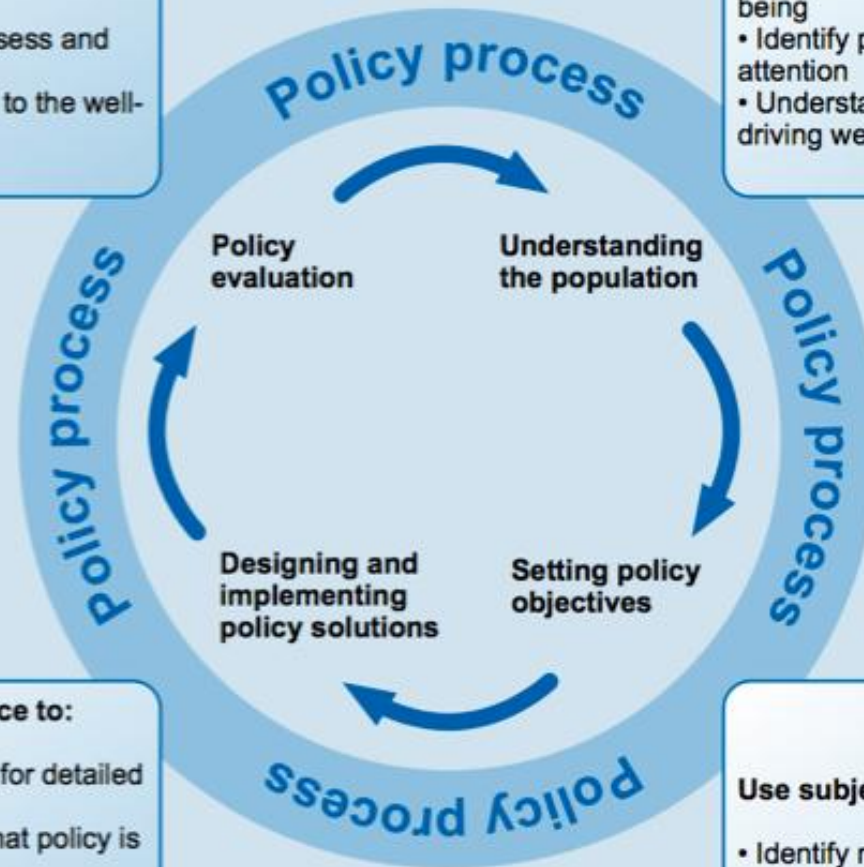
- Assess overall levels of and changes in well-being
- Identify population groups in need of policy attention
- Understand key policy-relevant factors driving well-being

**Use subjective well-being evidence to:**

- Create evidence-based principles for detailed policy design
- Pay attention to how as well as what policy is delivered
- Provide a common currency to assess and compare different policy impacts
- Compare the costs of intervention to the well-being outcomes

**Use subjective well-being evidence to:**

- Identify new priorities
- Make trade-offs between existing priorities



# Five ways to well-being

Commissioned by the UK government's Foresight Project – the brief was to “build on the findings of the outputs of the Mental Capacity and Wellbeing Project, and develop an evidence-based wellbeing equivalent of the health promotion dictum “five fruit and vegetables a day”.



# Thank you



[laura.stoll@neweconomics.org](mailto:laura.stoll@neweconomics.org)

[www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org)

[www.neweconomics.org/programmes/well-being](http://www.neweconomics.org/programmes/well-being)