



# MASTER'S THESIS

## Improving virtual team's well-being and productivity by following Seligman's PERMA model

(Cómo mejorar el bienestar y la productividad del equipo virtual  
siguiendo el modelo PERMA de Seligman)

**Author:** Ms. Jovana Ružić

**Tutor:** PhD. Javier Martínez del Río

### **Master in International Business Administration and Languages**

Faculty of Economics and Business Studies

UNIVERSITY OF ALMERIA

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this thesis is threefold. Firstly, it aims at extending the knowledge on positive psychology in general and positive psychology interventions based on Seligman's Well-Being Theory that suggested five elements of well-being (positive emotions, engagement, meaning, relationships, and accomplishment). Our results show the relationship between the well-being of the workforce and higher business outcomes. Secondly, it gives an overview of organizational and workforce changes, followed by the appearance of virtual teams and companies. The third aim was to verify whether the level of well-being depends on the type of the team in which one works (traditional team vs. online team) by conducting research based on PERMAH profiler. The research showed that online teams generally score higher, but with a rather small difference. Finally, the last part of the thesis represents a collection of adapted positive psychology interventions and best practices, which can be used as a tool to foster the well-being and productivity of the remote teams.

*Key words: well-being, PERMA model, productivity, positive interventions, positive psychology, virtual team*

## **RESUMEN**

Esta tesis tiene tres objetivos. En primer lugar, pretende ampliar el conocimiento sobre la psicología positiva en general y las intervenciones de psicología positiva basadas en la Teoría del Bienestar de Seligman que sugería cinco elementos de bienestar (emociones positivas, compromiso, significado, relaciones y logros). Los resultados muestran la relación entre el bienestar de la fuerza laboral y los mejores resultados empresariales. En segundo lugar, se ofrece una visión general sobre los cambios organizativos y laborales seguidos de la aparición de equipos y empresas virtuales. El tercer objetivo consiste en verificar si el nivel de bienestar depende del tipo de equipo en el que se trabaja (equipo tradicional vs. equipo en línea) mediante la realización de una investigación basada en el perfilador PERMAH. La investigación mostró que los equipos en línea generalmente obtienen mejores resultados, pero con una diferencia bastante pequeña. Finalmente, a la última parte de la tesis se presenta una serie de intervenciones psicológicas positivas adaptadas y un conjunto de mejores prácticas que pueden ser utilizadas como una herramienta para fomentar el bienestar y la productividad de los equipos online.

*Palabras claves: bienestar, modelo PERMA, productividad, intervenciones positivas, psicología positive, equipo virtual*

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This thesis will treat the possibility of improving well-being and increasing the productivity of virtual teams by focusing on Seligman's PERMA model and positive psychology interventions.

This branch of psychology is still rather young, and since it is not an exact science, there is still much research to be done about it. On the other hand, a purely virtual team is also a quite young "organizational structure" that is becoming a crucial part of the continually changing work environment. Literature and research within the topic of improving virtual team's well-being by implementing positive psychology's findings are still scarce, but very relevant and important for the digital world and period in which we live.

The present thesis has various objectives. First of all, it intends to extend our knowledge about a relatively new branch of psychology called Positive Psychology and its pioneers. The thesis will focus on the work of one of them, an American psychologist Martin Seligman and his Well-being theory with the PERMA model. On the other hand, this dissertation will also broaden our knowledge about the constant changes in the work organization and environment; it will explain what virtual teams are, when and why they appeared as well as how different they are compared to the traditional teams.

For the purpose of this thesis, a survey was conducted with the intention to see if there is any correlation between the well-being of the employees and the type of team they are part of. Lastly, we will provide a guide with best practices and positive interventions that can be used for online teams but can also be adapted for traditional teams or even individuals.

The present thesis has the following structure: chapter 1 will focus on the literature review and psychological background of the topic. It will explain the "happy worker=productive worker" hypothesis and the emergence of positive psychology as such. The next chapter will treat more deeply Dr. Seligman's well-being theory. In the third part of the thesis, we will get more insight from the literature about the elements of the workplace that influence people's mood, well-being, and productivity. Chapter 4 will be dedicated to the explanation of the virtual teams, how and why they appeared. In the following chapter, we will see the research that was conducted and its results. Lastly, the sixth chapter presents a compilation of the best practices and positive interventions that can improve our psychological health if done regularly and adequately.

The idea for this theses came from the author's personal experience in working as a part of the virtual team for the last year and a half, in an American company called Nobel Coaching & Tutoring ([www.nobelcoaching.com](http://www.nobelcoaching.com) and [www.nobeexplorers.com](http://www.nobeexplorers.com)) which is a completely online company with its employees all over the world.

The author wanted to compare virtual teams to traditional ones, assess their well-being, and see if the work environment has something to do with it. The ultimate goal was to find suitable positive interventions and adapt them to the online environment so that the author's team or any other remote team could benefit from them.

## **1. PSYCHOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

### **1.1. Happy worker = productive worker hypothesis**

Almost a century ago, organizational scholars became interested in finding out what is it that makes workers more productive. A set of experiments called the Hawthorne studies took place in the 1920s intending to look into whether environmental conditions, such as better lighting, were the reason for employees to become more responsive and efficient. However, Mayo and Roethlisberger got surprised to find that social factors were of greater importance than environmental ones (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939).

During the Hawthorne studies, workers that were observed responded positively to special attention from their managers because they felt that their managers actually cared about them, and that they were interested in their work. Even though it is essential to make sure the monetary incentives and working conditions are fair and just, this experiment highlighted that they are not the only factors predicting employee's productivity. Meeting an individual's needs, desire to belong to a group and be included in the decision-making process is something that significantly influences the level of job satisfaction and, eventually, workers' productivity. When employees felt they were respected and cared about, they were happier, more satisfied, and their performance improved (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939).

Based on this, the *happy worker = productive worker hypothesis* appeared.

From that moment on, whenever researchers wanted to work on this hypothesis, they did it by correlating employees' self-ratings of job satisfaction with the performance ratings designated by

their managers. Therefore, many applied researchers started using the notion of happiness and job satisfaction interchangeably, although they are not identical constructs (Wright & Doherty, 1998).

Firstly, because job satisfaction refers only to one's job and does not include other aspects of one's life that also play a part in someone's happiness. Secondly, Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) noted that job satisfaction is an attitude which is composed partially of what someone feels (emotional or affective component) and what someone believes (the cognitive component) about their job. Whereas, happiness, as the term is usually understood, is primarily an emotional experience. In other words, happiness does not contain a cognitive component; happiness is about what people feel, not think (Warr, 1990).

As a consequence, many researchers started thinking that neither job satisfaction nor happiness is an adequate measurement for predicting worker's performance. Instead, they became concerned with the role of well-being. Depression, loss of self-esteem, hypertension, alcoholism, and drug consumption were proved to be related to work-related dysfunctional psychological well-being (Ivancevich and Matteson, 1980). Parting from that finding and the fact these variables affected the decline in work outcomes, Wright and Cropanzano (2000) conducted two studies in order to examine the relationship of psychological well-being and job satisfaction as predictors of employees' performance.

Both studies provided the same results; psychological well-being was shown to be a better predictor of performance than job satisfaction. This finding supported the initial hypothesis that "happy" workers often have higher performance, but "happiness" should be operationalized or measured as psychological well-being.

At the beginning of this century, Wright and Cropanzano (2000) concluded that even though well-being plays an essential role at the workplace, it should not be pursued only because of employee's productivity, but also for its own sake. They also observed that the psychological publications in this field were outnumbered by the ones only treating diseases and "wrong" things about people without focusing on developing what is right. In order to fill in this gap, more psychologists became interested in this topic and started to conduct researches in this field, which led to the emergence of the new psychological branch called *positive psychology*.



## 1.2. The Emergence of positive psychology and well-being theory

Throughout history, psychology has mostly studied and been focused on negative and wrong things in life, such as depression, mental illnesses, suicide, schizophrenia, or traumas. While working on learned helplessness, a psychological term that refers to people who become permanently passive and negative after experiencing some uncontrollable unfortunate events, American psychologist Martin Seligman observed that there was always a certain number of those people who would not become helpless even after facing extremely horrible things. During his research, he found out that the trait those people possessed that made them immune to the helplessness was *optimism* (Seligman, 2011).

It turned out that during their life, optimistic people tended to look positively and with hope at smaller life's setbacks. By continually repeating to themselves that "It is temporary, one-time-thing, and I can do something to change it," they literally trained their brains and prepared themselves not to collapse when terrible events occurred to them. While, on the other hand, people who were prone to become helpless after tragic events, had a pessimistic view of the problems in general and would always think that "Negative things are going to last forever, undermine everything I do, and I cannot do anything to prevent it."

After concluding that both helplessness and optimism can be learned, Seligman started thinking that other positive traits and behaviours could also be thought and developed. It was the moment when a new branch of psychology started to emerge - *positive psychology*. Instead of being focused only on trying to repair "damaged" people, this branch is concerned with making people's lives more fulfilling by coming up with different techniques and interventions that should help us augment positive traits which are proved to make life happier and easier and not only to reduce misery (Seligman, 2011).

Peterson (2008) defines positive psychology as a scientific approach to studying human thoughts, feelings, and behaviour, with a focus on strengths instead of weaknesses, building the good in life instead of repairing the bad, and taking the lives of average people up to "great" instead of focusing solely on moving those who are struggling up to "normal".

At first, the primary target of positive psychology was increasing happiness, and the measurement of it was "life satisfaction." During the years to come Seligman realized that life satisfaction was a somewhat unreliable measurement, since, as Ruut Veenhoven (2006) suggested, when asked

about their life satisfaction, people base more than 70% of their answers on their current mood and how good they feel at that very moment and less than 30% of their answers represent how they feel about the conditions of their life, again, at the moment when the question is asked, but not in general. Seligman then decided that positive psychology should not be "happiology" based on the temporary mood in which people were. Therefore, he changed the target from happiness and life satisfaction to *well-being*, or as he calls it, *flourishing*.

Seligman explains well-being as a construct rather than a unidimensional thing. In order to understand it, he compares well-being to the weather, which is not a tangible thing itself, but a sum of different operationalizable and measurable elements such as temperature, humidity, wind speed, etc. Just like the weather, well-being is composed of several elements which contribute to, but not define well-being individually (Seligman, 2011).

## **2. PERMA MODEL - THE ELEMENTS OF WELL-BEING**

Well-being consists of 5 elements, all of which share three crucial characteristics that enabled them to be counted as an element:

1. It contributes to the well-being
2. It is usually pursued for its own sake
3. It is defined and measured independently of the other elements

These five elements are positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment. This theory is also known as the PERMA model theory (Seligman, 2011). In the following sections, we will take a closer look into each of the five elements in order to understand them better and see how they affect our lives. In the last part of this paper, we will provide particular interventions that can help us take care of these elements, strengthen them individually, and consequently improve our well-being and productivity at the workplace.

### **2.1. Positive emotion**

The first element is a *positive emotion* or in other words, a pleasant life. Researchers have discovered that the kind of heart-felt positivity that comes from experiencing emotions like joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, awe, and love helps us to feel more optimistic,

resilient, open-minded, accepting and driven by purpose. A positive and optimistic view of one's past, present, and future can help build fruitful relationships, and it makes us more productive when it comes to working. Our positivity can also inspire others to be more creative and take more chances. We can divide positive emotions into pleasure and enjoyment. Whereas pleasure comes from satisfying our bodily needs for survival, such as thirst, hunger, and sleep; enjoyment comes from intellectual stimulation and creativity. Strengthening our positive emotions is crucial because it can help people enjoy daily tasks and optimistically and calmly face future challenges and eventual outcomes (Fredrickson, 2009).

## **2.2. Engagement**

The second element is *engagement* or the state of "flow". The flow is about an activity that completely absorbs us and makes us lose self-consciousness or feel as if the time stopped. One of the main differences between positive emotion and engagement is the fact that people, when in flow, usually do not feel any kind of emotion, but we are learning, growing, and evolving in ways that leave us more confident, energized, and satisfied. All the cognitive and emotional resources that make us think and feel are required in order to reach the full concentrated attention during the state of flow. That is why we usually feel "nothing" when we are fully engaged in the activity. Getting into the flow often is rather tricky, and to do so, we need to deploy our highest strengths and talents (Seligman, 2011).

From the business perspective, engagement is the feeling we get when our strengths, those things we are good at, and enjoy doing, are well-matched with a clear goal and regular feedback. Studies find that employees who have the chance to do every day what they do best feel up to six times more engaged in their work, up to three times more satisfied with life and report lower levels of stress and higher levels of well-being. What is more, when teams have the chance to use their strengths, turnover is lower (by up to 50%), productivity is higher (by up to 38%), and customer satisfaction is higher as well (by up to 44%) (Robson, 2014).

How to identify your strengths and how to use them will be covered in the following chapters of this paper.

### 2.3. Relationships

The letter R in the mnemonic PERMA stands for *relationships* or how they are more commonly referred to - *positive relationships*. Christopher Peterson (2008), one of the founders of positive psychology, summed up what positive psychology is about in just two words: "other people". Our brains are biologically wired to need and thrive on connecting with other humans and cultivating strong emotional and physical interactions based on love and intimacy. Positive relationships with one's parents, siblings, peers, co-workers, and friends are a crucial ingredient to overall joy. Healthy relationships also provide support in stressful times that require resilience. Whenever we fulfil our biological need for social support and joyfully connect with another person, the feel-good hormone, oxytocin reaches our brain, immediately reducing anxiety and improving concentration. It turns out that each social connection also bolsters our cardiovascular, neuroendocrine, and immune systems. Consequently, the more connections we make over time, the better we function.

### 2.4. Meaning

*Meaning* represents the fourth pillar of Seligman's "well-being theory", and it is basically the answer to "why are we on this earth?" - a question that everyone poses themselves at some point. According to this theory, having the answer to this question is a critical ingredient that can drive us towards fulfilment.

There are many ways people can reach a point when they feel they have a higher meaning. Some of us turn to religion and spirituality; others find purpose working for a good company, raising children, volunteering for a more significant cause, or expressing themselves artistically.

Many people are in constant pursuit of money, thinking that having much money is the only way to reach a state of happiness. That is true to some extent. We do need money to meet our basic needs, but once they are satisfied and people are not stressing about their finances anymore, money is not what will provide genuine happiness. This is why we should look for it in different places as well.

Looking through the eyes of an employer, who wants their business to flourish, it is vital to have employees who understand the impact of their work and why they chose to "show up at the office". Managers and HR departments should help employees relate more to their work, which should

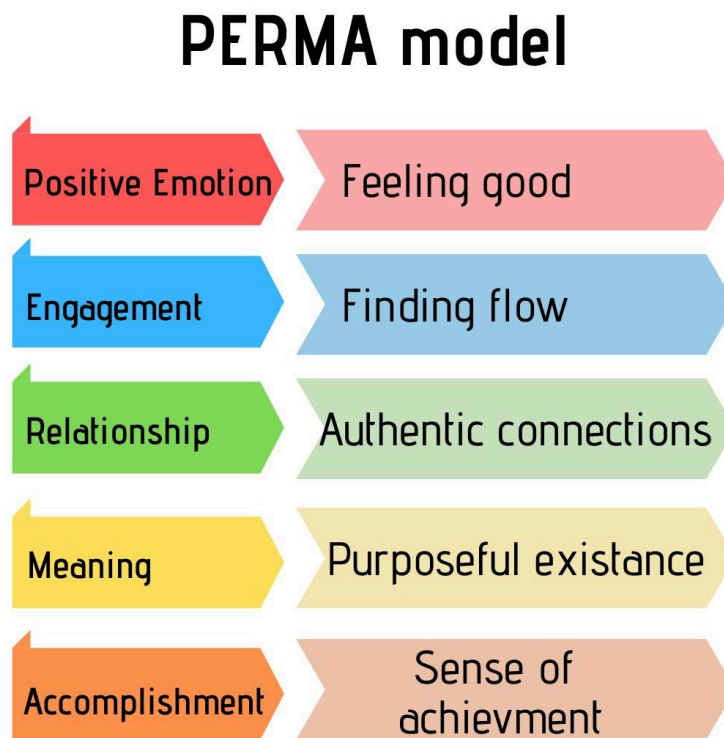
help them enjoy their daily tasks and become more satisfied with what they do in the company (Seligman, 2011).

## 2.5. Accomplishment

The fifth pillar, *accomplishment*, suggests that people often pursue winning, achievement, and success for their own sake, even when it brings no positive relationship or emotion and no meaning. This kind of behaviour can be noticed among gamblers or wealthy people that either like to donate their wealth later on or accumulate it.

On the other hand, accomplishments do provoke some positive emotions. Everyone likes a sense of achievement, especially if it is work-related. Luckily, this is something that can be easily reached by applying goal-setting methods within teams at the workplace. As long as the goals are realistic and achievable, employees will already feel satisfaction while working towards them. Once the goals are met, employees tend to feel proud, fulfilled, and motivated to keep working in order to accomplish the next one (Seligman, 2011).

**Figure 1 PERMA model**



*Resource: Own elaboration, based on Seligman 2011.*

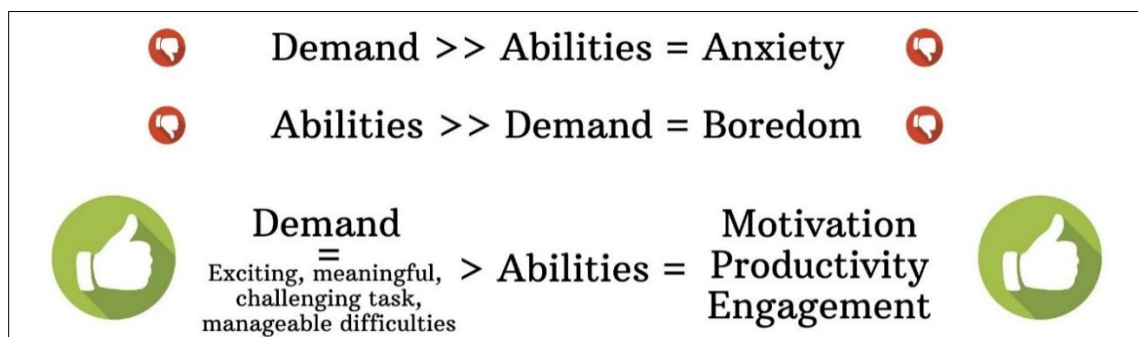
### 3. WELL-BEING IN THE WORKPLACE

Just like workers' private life and personal events can influence their emotional and psychological well-being and their productivity, the organizational environment and the workplace itself can also have effects on their quality of life and performance. We can look at this from two perspectives.

The first one is based on the study of stress and health and the theory of person-environment fit. The followers of this theory claim that when demands exceed or fall below the individuals' abilities, they tend to experience undesirable states that hinder the quality and quantity of performance as well as their well-being. In order to have a healthy workforce, the workplace should be strain and boredom free (Edwards, Caplan & Van Harrison, 1998).

The second perspective is known as well-being perspective, and it underlines behavioural, cognitive, and health benefits of positive feelings and positive perceptions on workers' quality of life and performance. The relationship between a worker and his or her workplace has to be positive in order for him or her to be productive, and it is reached when the environment provides exciting, meaningful, and challenging tasks that provoke in individuals manageable difficulties, which Csikszentmihalyi (1997) described as optimal states. Basically, when demand matches or slightly exceeds workers' capabilities, they feel pleased, joyful, and energized, and they get the feeling of growth, engagement, and productivity (Waterman, 1993). According to the well-being perspective, a healthy workforce requires the presence of positive feelings in the workers, which should result in happier and more productive workers.

*Figure 2 Demand - Abilities relation*



*Resource: Own elaboration, based on Csikszentmihalyi, 1997 and Waterman, 1993.*

This paper will focus on the 2<sup>nd</sup> approach and will offer some of the best practices which promote the well-being of workers, thus their productivity.

### 3.1. Gallup studies

Gallup researchers made a meta-analysis about the relationship between employees' workplace perceptions and business-unit outcomes. The results obtained showed that higher business-unit customer loyalty, higher profitability, higher productivity, and lower rates of turnover are related to the positive feelings and perceptions of the workplace. The emergence and confirmation of the happy worker = productive worker hypothesis positioned organizations and companies to invest in changing trends in the workforce that is increasingly looking for a higher purpose and growth through their work. Also, nowadays the workforce is more open to frequent job changes, which usually result in money loss for a company.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1999) claims that the workplace should share the public's health mission when it comes to preventing mental illness and promoting well-being since it was proved that the nature of work is linked to a person's sense of control and depression.

However, the well-being of employees is also in the best interest of employers, because they are the ones spending significant resources on hiring and retaining employees that will offer services or generate products, bring profits, attract and maintain loyal customers. Up until recently, tangible benefits like pension and high salary and bonuses were the top priority of the employees. However, surveys of the most recent generations showed that the trend has changed. Younger generations have begun to see their work as a calling and want it to be enjoyable, fulfilling, and socially useful (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002).

Spector's (1998) review suggested something new back in 1998, which nowadays may seem pretty logical; more satisfied employees are more cooperative, more willing to help their colleagues, more punctual, and time-efficient. They show up for more days of work, willingly work long hours if necessary, and stay with the company longer than the employees who feel dissatisfied. Moreover, those who report experiencing more positive emotional symptoms over negative ones received higher performance ratings from their supervisors (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000).

Although the results of conducted studies clearly showed the benefits of employees' well-being and the need for changes at the workplace, the term *well-being* itself was broadly defined, and it was not intuitive nor actionable for managers (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002). This lack of specific definition provided a favourable framework for the appearance of Seligman's PERMA theory and model, as well as the 24 strengths division.

### 3.2. How can managers influence employees' well-being and job satisfaction at the workplace?

The last chapter of this thesis will provide examples of best practices and positive interventions that can be used at the workplace within teams (or even home individually). The proposed interventions will follow Seligman's PERMA model, and therefore, their purpose is to improve employees' well-being as something intangible. Nevertheless, before we get there, it is worth mentioning that managers and leaders can influence their employees' satisfaction and happiness in a more tangible way, even without intentionally applying psychological interventions.

As it is said in the previous chapter, positive emotions are vital for the well-being of both employees and their companies, but not all of them relate equally to the business outcomes. According to Fredrickson (1998), the four positive emotions that relate most highly are *joy* (happiness, amusement, elation), *interest* (curiosity, intrigue, excitement or wonder), *contentment* (tranquillity or serenity), and *love or caring* (emotions felt towards specific individuals).

Having observed many different high-performing workplaces across industries and job types, researchers concluded that high cognitive and emotional activity was the definition of employee engagement across companies, organizations, and even cultures. All these emotions that can lead to bonding of individuals between themselves, relating to their work and their organization can be brought and provoked by daily occurrences and events. It is the managers' and HR departments' duty to create an environment in which their employees can flourish. When basic needs are met, and positive emotions are present at the workplace, the employees' attention, cognition, and actions in areas related to the welfare of the business are broadening. In that way, their needs and the needs of the organization are fulfilled simultaneously (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002).

After conducting a number of qualitative and quantitative studies, Gallup researchers came up with a list of 12 statements which are used as a survey when verifying the employees' job satisfaction and at the same time they represent 12 things which managers can and should influence and be responsible for (Harter, Schmidt & Keyes 2002).



The statements are as follows<sup>1</sup>:

1. I know what is expected of me at work.
2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.
3. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
5. My supervisor or someone at work seems to care about me as a person.
6. There is someone at work who encourages my development.
7. At work, my opinions seem to count.
8. The mission/purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
9. My associates (fellow employees) are committed to doing quality work.
10. I have a best friend at work.
11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

### **3.2.1. Clear expectations and basic material and equipment (1&2)**

First of all, expectations must be clear and basic material, and equipment must be provided. If this is fulfilled various things happen; the credibility of the company to the employee will be stronger, and the employee will always (or almost always) know what he/she is supposed to do and will not waste time doing nothing while waiting for the next task. And it is well known that *time is money*. Also, positive emotions, such as interest, may result. In contrast, if expectations are not clear and necessary materials and equipment are not provided, it is common that negative emotions such as boredom or resentment may appear, which causes the employee to focus on "surviving" the day rather than on thinking how he can contribute and help his company succeed (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002).

### **3.2.2. Contribution, relationships, and appraisal (3, 4, 5 & 6)**

Secondly, employees need to feel that they are contributing to the organisation and that, while doing so, their biggest strengths are activated. In other words, workers should have the opportunity to do what they do best, what they enjoy, use their talents, knowledge, and skills and be appreciated

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<sup>1</sup> These 12 statements are proprietary and copyrighted by The Gallup Organization.

and respected for them (Fredrickson, 1998). Workers need to socialise, communicate their success among themselves and praise each other for at least two reasons; lack of interaction with people usually result in boredom, and on the other hand, hearing about others' success stories seem to open workers' minds and broaden their thinking about how they can do more. Managers should recognise the hard work of their units frequently and pay attention to their employees' needs individually and the needs of the organisation; when they are aligned, it leads to more positive emotions and consequently, higher productivity (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002).

### **3.2.3. A sense of purpose and friendships (7, 8, 9 & 10)**

Communicating the organisation's mission properly and having employees identify themselves with it, to at least some extent, provokes the sense of belonging to something beyond oneself. This helps people feel they have a higher purpose and make them more engaged (two elements of the PERMA model). These employees are likely to have higher levels of interest and ownership for organisational outcomes. When it comes to teams, friendships also appear to play a vital role in differentiating between successful teams and less successful workgroups. Why? When unpleasant situations happen at work that is accompanied by negative emotions, stable friendships can undo the effect of negative emotions.

Additionally, friendships create fun and pleasant atmosphere that stimulates creativity and communication, which is very important, especially if the unit is in direct contact with customers; customers love the positive atmosphere and tend to come back to the places where they felt well treated. In order for friendships to occur, managers need to continually create opportunities for people to get to know each other (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002). They can set up exciting team building activities, have a particular room for taking coffee together, or a game room where employees can rest, have fun and socialise during breaks or when they feel stressed.

### **3.2.4. Progress and development opportunities (11 & 12)**

As already mentioned in this paper, younger generations are more motivated by growth and development opportunities, and it is managers' duty to create an environment in which their employees can discuss their progress and learning path freely (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002). If managers provide opportunities for learning and growing, employees will feel appreciated and

thankful because their organisation is investing in them. Consequently, they will feel the need to give back to their organisation and apply newly acquired knowledge, which can only result in better performance and higher productivity rates.

## **4. THE EMERGENCE OF VIRTUAL TEAMS**

In this chapter, we will review the changes in the work environment, and it will be explained how those changes led to the appearance of virtual teams. Also, the following paragraphs will treat in more details differences between online and traditional teams.

### **4.1. Globalization and changes in the work organization**

In the last few decades, the world has been changing at a rapid pace. Many technological breakthroughs brought inevitable changes to the environment we are living in as well as in the workplace. These changes are continually reshaping the world of work, which causes the need for the workforce to change and progress much more often than before. However, not only the workforce has to follow new trends, but researchers and academics in business schools and wider also need to understand the contemporary and future dilemmas in the business world in order to prepare their students and future leaders properly.

According to Friedman (2005), during human history, there have been three important eras, or Globalizations, as he calls them.

Globalization 1.0 began in 1492 when the trade between the Old and the New World started, and it lasted until about 1800. Globalization 2.0, or the second era, happened between 1800 and 2000 and was fuelled by technological changes and improvements such as steam engines, the telegraph, the first PCs, satellites and early version of the World Wide Web. This was when multinational companies started appearing. Goods and information were more easily transported around the globe, and this took companies to another level. In 2000 we entered Globalization 3.0, which brought considerable changes to the way of delivering intellectual work. With the appearance of the internet, individuals' became able to deliver their intellectual work from anywhere. Work can now be disaggregated, delivered, distributed, produced, and put back together again. Yet in 2005 Friedman noticed, “...it is now possible for more people than ever to collaborate and compete in

*real-time with more other people on more different kinds of work from more different corners of the planet on more equal footing than at any previous time in the history of the world."* (p. 8)

To sum up, era 1.0 was about *countries* globalizing, 2.0 was about *companies* globalizing, and 3.0 is about *individuals worldwide* globalizing, which brings us to the emergence of *virtual or remote teams*, which are becoming more and more popular and efficient every year.

A constant level of change requires the workforce to be more flexible and adaptable, which is something that not everybody is comfortable with. Nevertheless, continues changes, uncertainty, new challenges, new tech skills that everybody is expected to possess, the clash of traditional older generations and digital younger generations can have a negative influence on workers' overall well-being. This is why more and more organizations should include HR departments that would take care of their employees by measuring and fostering all the elements of their well-being.

#### **4.2. The difference between traditional and virtual teams**

*"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."*

- African Proverb

Although depending on other people many times might result frustrating and many of us would rather do things ourselves because it would be faster, nowadays there are fewer and fewer job positions that could be handled by only one person. Teams and teamwork have become an inevitable part of getting the work done in almost every organization (Hackman, 2002).

***What is a team?*** A team is a group of people with different types of expertise, experience, and knowledge that were brought together and are supposed to interact interdependently in order to complete tasks or achieve specific goals (Klein & Kleinhanns, 2003). Having people around you who will hold each other accountable increases workers' capabilities, responsiveness, and flexibility (Maynard, 2006). It is also an excellent practice to have people in the team who share some of the expertise or skills because, in that case, the work that is being done is continuously being checked and improved by at least two pairs of eyes.

The increased use of computer-mediated communication technologies has changed the way members collect and distribute data, as well as the dynamics and relationships between

organizational members (Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004). These technologies also enabled companies to create virtual or online teams (May & Gueldenzoph, 2006).

***What is a virtual team?*** Members of a virtual team can be located across the office, as well as across the country or across the world; there are really no boundaries. They may rarely or perhaps never meet face to face. Townsend, DeMarie, and Handrickson (1998) define online teams as “*groups of geographically and/or organizationally dispersed co-workers that are assembled using a combination of telecommunications and information technologies to accomplish an organizational task*” (p. 18).

Nowadays, it is almost impossible to imagine a team that does not use any form of available technology, but the use of technology alone does not make a virtual team. Every team that uses a telephone, e-mail, chat groups, electronic databases, and similar is virtual to some degree. The determinant of virtuality is simply the amount of time that members spend working through computer-mediated communication instead of face-to-face communication. The virtuality increases as the degree of reliance on electronic communication increases. Teams formed by members who live geographically dispersed and have no choice but to communicate only electronically on a daily basis represent the highest degree of virtuality (Cohen & Gibson, 2003).

However, it is usually complicated and it takes time to choose the most effective or efficient communication technology. The choice depends on various factors such as nature and type of team, its tasks, members' access to technology or team members' and team leaders' experience in doing virtual work (Berry, 2011).

## **5. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY**

### **5.1. Research objective and hypotheses**

Our research aims to verify whether there is any (and if there is - how strong) correlation between one's well-being and the type of team/environment in which they work. Our goal is to explore the relationship between virtual teams and well-being. In particular, the objective is to see how the virtual team scores in each element of well-being compared to the traditional team and to provide an explanation for that.

We part with four hypotheses:

H1) Virtual teams will score higher in Loneliness

H2) Virtual teams will score lower in Relationships

H3) Virtual teams will score lower in Health

H4) Virtual teams will score higher in Overall Well-being

H1 and H2 are both based on the idea that remote workers do not interact live with other people during the work hours, as the employees in traditional teams do, which can provoke a sense of loneliness or result in fewer number of relationships.

H3 is inspired by the image of the less active work lifestyle of remote workers and the fact that people who interact less with other people daily tend to become ill more often because of a weaker immune system.

H4 is based on the belief that people working virtually can connect and do their job from wherever (their home, bar, holiday, etc.), which provides them with a greater commodity. Also, in many cases, online workers are able to organize their own schedules, which results in higher satisfaction.

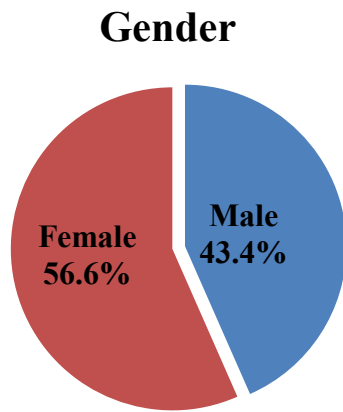
### **5.2. Methods and sample**

This survey was done in the format of a Google Form anonymously by 106 participants of different nationalities and across different industries.

The survey was sent out to personal connections of the author, but only to the ones who are employed and currently working in a team. The author also reached out to more people who are working virtually through special internet forums and groups dedicated to freelancers. It took around a month to gather all the answers.

The demographic information was collected in case some more in-depth research is done in the future. However, the most interesting variable for the present research is the question about the type of team our participants work in since this is the variable with which we are going to correlate our results.

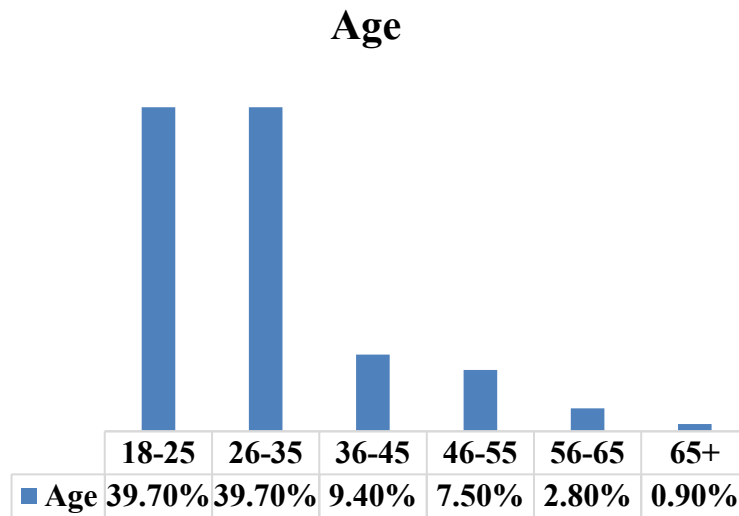
*Figure 3 Gender of Participants*



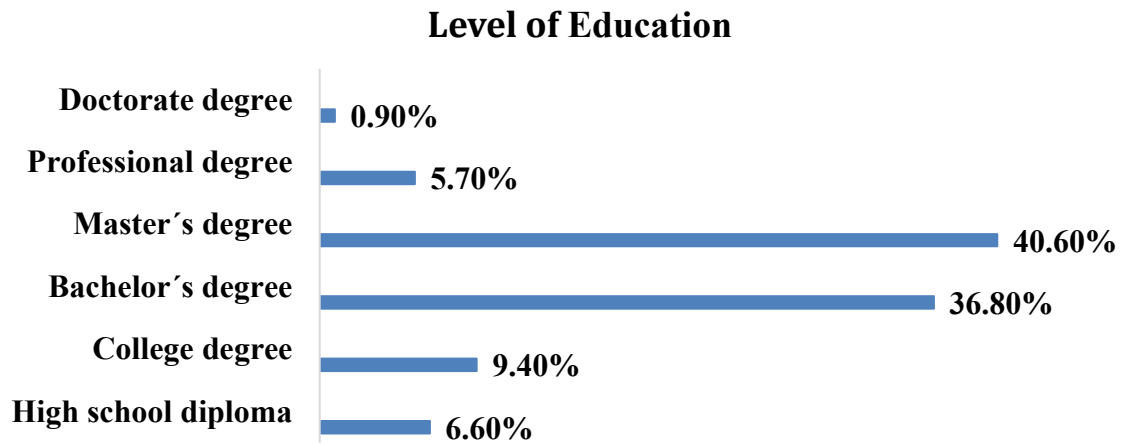
As we can see in the figures, 46 male (43.4%) and 60 female (56.6%) participants filled in the survey. The most common age group were 18-25 and 26-35, with 42 participants both. Most of the participants marked the master’s degree as their highest level of education (43), which was followed by the bachelor’s degree (39).

This sample is not fully representative because the author did not have access to the same number of participants according to their age, education level, or gender.

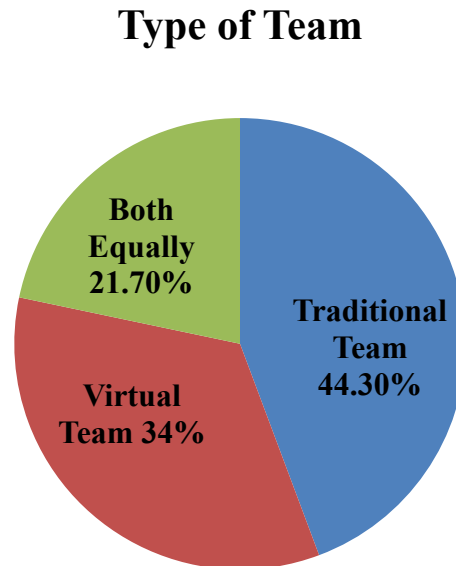
*Figure 4 Age of Participants*



*Figure 5 Level of Education of Participants*



*Figure 6 Type of the Team*



We already mentioned in the previous chapters of this paper that almost all of the teams nowadays are virtual to some extent, and that is why apart from options 1) Online teams and 2) Traditional teams, we offered a third option - Both equally. Therefore we will be comparing results based on three team types.



### **5.3. Measure - PERMAH Profiler**

For the purposes of this research, the author used the PERMAH profiler in a format of a Google Form. Questions were divided into various blocks in the order creators suggest. An 11-point scale was used, ranging from 0 to 10, with endpoints labelled. Scores are calculated as the average of the items comprising each factor (see appendix 1).

The PERMAH profiler is a result of the work of two psychologists, Butler and Kern, from the University of Pennsylvania. They worked together on creating a questionnaire that would help with measuring people's well-being.

This questionnaire consists of 23 items; 15 PERMA questions (3 questions per element) and 8 additional questions about health, negative emotions, loneliness, and overall happiness, which serve as fillers, but provide valuable information. For brevity, the shorter 15 PERMA questions survey can be used, but using the full measure is recommended (for the full list of questions in their specific order, see Annex 1).

### **5.4. Results and discussion**

In this chapter, the results will be presented based on two types of analysis – descriptive and linear regression analysis.

The first table shows overall results - how all three types of teams scored on average in each element of well-being as well as in loneliness, happiness, health, and negative emotions. This table also includes a standard deviation.

It will be seen if these results confirm the hypotheses, and we will try to provide a brief explanation for it.

Secondly, we will use linear regression analysis in IBM SPSS Statistics to verify whether the hypotheses are supported by the results and if there really is a correlation between the type of the team a person work in and their results regarding well-being.

For both types of analysis, the questions regarding the same element were gathered, transformed, and computed into a single variable per sector (see appendix 1).

### 5.4.1. Descriptive analysis

*Table 1 Survey Results - overall*

<b>Total 106 respondents</b>	<b>Virtual Team (Total 36)</b>		<b>Both equally (Total 23)</b>		<b>Traditional Team (Total 47)</b>	
	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>STANDARD DEVIATION</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>STANDARD DEVIATION</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>STANDARD DEVIATION</b>
Positive emotion	7.33	1.82	7.25	2	7.17	1.89
Engagement	7.85	1.87	7.52	2.21	7.43	1.69
Relationships	7.75	2.09	7.58	2.16	7.23	2.26
Meaning	7.51	1.95	8.26	1.27	7.17	1.67
Accomplishment	7.86	1.74	8.10	1.36	7.50	1.46
Happiness	7.72	1.73	8.09	1.68	7.47	1.68
<b>Overall Well-being</b>	<b>7.67</b>		<b>7.80</b>		<b>7.33</b>	
Health	7.07	2.19	7.64	1.61	7.39	1.69
Negative emotion	4.46	2.24	4.52	2.19	4.91	2.2
Loneliness	4.56	2.52	4.74	2.75	5.13	2.58

Despite hypothesis 1 and the reasoning behind it (virtual teams will score higher in Loneliness because they do not interact live daily with their team members), the obtained results are quite the opposite. Traditional teams scored highest in Loneliness, 0.57 more than virtual teams.

This can be attributed to the fact that people usually when asked about how lonely they feel, tend to think about the affection and the time they spend with their loved ones, rather than the time spent with colleagues at work. By working virtually, from the comfort of your home, and possibly according to their personal schedule, they can dedicate and spend much more time with their family and friends, which consequently reduces the feeling of loneliness.

Although all three groups scored pretty high in loneliness (4.75/10) on average, in the table above, we can see that the standard deviation is fairly high for all three teams. This indicates that there were few outliers in our sample whose results differ significantly from others', which have probably caused the high average results.

Scoring generally high in Loneliness is something to be concerned about, but unfortunately, not something that managers and HR departments can considerably influence. In the next chapters of this paper, we will provide a couple of activities with the aim of enhancing interaction between employees, but those activities usually do not influence Loneliness as much as the Relationship variable, which brings us to our hypothesis 2 (*virtual teams will score lower in Relationships*).

The obtained numbers do not support this hypothesis either, and we can explain it similarly as we did for Loneliness. People working virtually from their homes, usually have more free time that can spend with their loved ones; thus they feel more satisfied when it comes to their relationships. Standard deviation is also reasonably high, so we concluded that respondents who scored high in Loneliness, probably scored low in Relationships, causing the present results.

Now, let us have a look at health. Health, as such, is not a part of a PERMA model but it does represent a critical aspect of everyone's life and is connected to the rate of sick-leave, and therefore, to the productivity of the worker and the organization.

Hypothesis 3 regarding health (*virtual teams will score lowest in health*) is supported by the obtained results. However, we cannot prove if it is really connected to their weaker immune system due to not interacting that often with other people.

The last one, hypothesis 4, says that *virtual teams will score higher in Overall Well-being*, and we supposed so based on the commodity of their work.

If we look at the table we can observe that the virtual team actually scored higher in Overall Well-being than the traditional team, as expected, but lower than the ones who marked option *Both equally*, which does not support our hypothesis completely. Nevertheless, the difference between all three types is rather small.

#### **5.4.2. Linear regression analysis**

Each table represents results for one of the four aforementioned hypotheses. We can see whether our independent variables (gender, age, education and virtual/traditional team in each case) can predict dependent variables (loneliness, relationship, health and overall wellbeing).

Coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) indicates the proportion of the variance in the dependent variable that is predictable from the independent variable. If  $R^2$  is close to 1, the results can be considered positive, and if it is close to 0, the results are not significant.

The t statistic is the coefficient divided by its standard error. It can be thought of as a measure of the precision with which the regression coefficient is measured. The results can be considered significant if  $t > 1.96$ . Also, if significance (sig = p value) is less than 0.05 it can be said that the results are significant.

*Table 2 Results for dependent variable - Loneliness*

Variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	t	Sig.	t	Sig.
Gender	.559	.577	.503	.616
Age	-.493	.623	-.526	.600
Education	-.839	.403	-.778	.438
Traditional Team			.833	.407
Virtual Team	-.782	.436		
$R^2$	.023		0.23	

*Table 3 Results for dependent variable - Relationship*

Variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	t	Sig.	t	Sig.
Gender	-2.703	.008	-2.617	.010
Age	-1.329	.187	-1.272	.206
Education	.070	.944	-.033	.974
Traditional Team			-1.189	.237
Virtual Team	1.251	.214		
$R^2$	0.89		.087	

*Table 4 Results for dependent variable - Health*

Variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	t	Sig.	t	Sig.
Gender	-1.354	.179	-1.354	.179
Age	-.178	.859	-.312	.755
Education	.131	.896	.222	.825
Traditional Team			.377	.707
Virtual Team	-1.086	.280		
$R^2$	.031		.021	

*Table 5 Results for dependent variable - Overall wellbeing*

Variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	t	Sig.	t	Sig.
Gender	-2.501	.014	-2.410	.018
Age	.236	.814	.188	.851
Education	.742	.460	.695	.489
Traditional Team			-1.367	.175
Virtual Team	.681	.497		
R <sup>2</sup>	.079		.092	

As it can be observed from the results provided in the tables, none of them are significant, which means that our hypotheses are not statistically proved.

Although descriptive analysis did confirm some of our hypotheses, statistically, none of the tested variables (loneliness, relationship, health and overall wellbeing) can be predicted by only knowing to what kind of team a person belongs.

However, it should be noted that variables such as age, gender and education are variables of control, and are not something that can usually be used as a predictor.

Even though this research did not prove the correlation between the kind of a team and employees' well-being it does not mean they are not related at all if some other factors are taken into account.

After all, employees' well-being is something that should be cared about regardless the work environment. Consequently, the following chapter of this thesis will provide specific exercises and best practices that represent a handy tool when it comes to fostering each element of well-being at the workplace.

## **6. HOW TO IMPROVE WELL-BEING IN VIRTUAL TEAMS?**

Positive psychology interventions, or PPIs, are a set of scientific tools and strategies that focus on increasing happiness, well-being, and positive cognitions and emotions (Keyes, 2002). Similarly, Sin and Lyubomirsky (2009) defined PPI as a psychological intervention that primarily focuses on raising positive feelings, positive thoughts, and positive behaviour. According to Sin and Lyubomirsky, all positive psychology interventions have two essential components; focusing on enhancing happiness through positive thoughts and emotions and sustaining the effects for the long-term.

A study conducted on the effectiveness of PPIs revealed that the two operating factors that contribute to the success of these interventions are – a shift of attention from negative to positive and internalization of positive emotions. The study was conducted on a sample size of 695, and the results showed that subjective feelings of well-being significantly improved from pre- to post-intervention, indicating the effectiveness of the PPIs in real life (Wellenzohn, Proyer, Ruch, 2016). However, why they work so well, and how their effects are so deep-rooted is still a vast area of study.

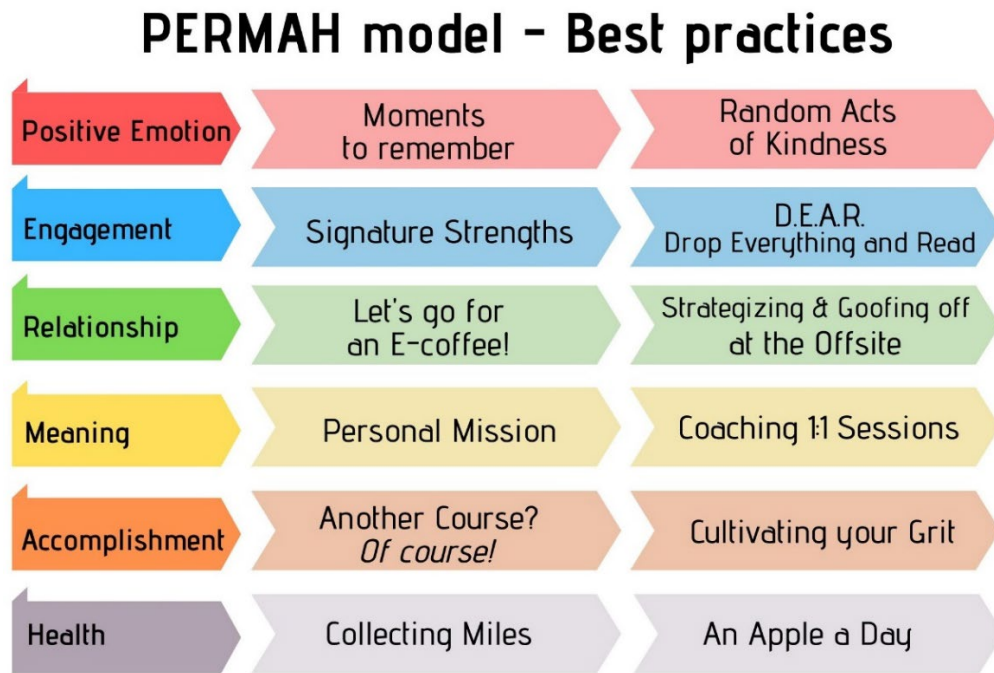
Since there are obvious differences between traditional and virtual teams, not all the interventions would have the same effect, nor could they be conducted properly if applied to the virtual team. For the purpose of this paper, the author has selected 12 interventions, 2 for each element of PERMAH model (health included), and adapted them to the online environment.

This short guide is a handy tool for the future CEOs and managers who are planning on establishing virtual teams or companies, or for the existing ones whose intention is to foster the well-being and the productivity of their employees.

Some of the following best practices were taken from the literature and polished so they could fit the needs of the online teams. Others, which do not refer to any written resource, are the product of the author herself and are based on her own experience when it comes to working in the online environment and remote teams.

For the easier understanding and clearer overview, the table below shows how the guide is organized and structured.

Figure 7 PERMAH Model - Best Practices



Resource: Own elaboration

### 6.1. Positive emotion

Managers or team leaders cannot force their employees to feel positive emotions all the time. They can treat them well and with respect and intervene if they notice that conflicts occur among team members and try to mitigate them.

What they can do is put in practice easy and not much time consuming positive interventions that will subconsciously train employees' brains to feel positive emotions more often.

#### 6.1.1. Moments to remember

Frederickson (2009) identifies the ten most common positive emotions, which are joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love. She also noted that we need a 3:1 ratio of positive to negative in order to have a good life.

This intervention goes as follows; Every Friday (frequency is subject to change according to the needs and preferences of the HR/manager), before calling a day, all team members have to fill in a document with a list of 10 moments during the past week when they felt the 10 aforementioned positive emotions (during work hours or after work). They should give a brief description of the

moment when a positive emotion occurred, and tag people that were present or maybe even were the reason for feeling them. By doing this, employees are reliving those moments and in a way, "recycling" positive feelings. This way, people train their brains to look for positive and good things and moments (Fredrickson, 2009).

And, of course, who would not feel proud and happy to know they were the reason that someone felt good?

### **6.1.2. Random acts of kindness**

Studies have shown that when we feel down and pessimistic, the best way to stop the negativity is to engage in doing something that will help others.

Luckily, we do not usually feel negative every day, but it does not mean we should not try to be kind to others without reason. In fact, happiness and kindness go hand in hand and complement each other (Aknin, Dunn, & Norton, 2012). Therefore, by making random acts of kindness, we can make others feel better as well as ourselves.

This exercise is an adaptation of one of the best practices and core values of the company Zappos.com (Hsieh, 2010). This best practice suggests that every Monday (the timeframe can be different), each team member comes up with one random act of kindness for their peers to do during the following week, making for them a kind of a to-do list. They also revise the previous week, talking about which acts were done, how and when, and looking into why some of them could not be realised and why some of the members failed to do them.

Here are some ideas:

- ❖ Give up your seat
- ❖ Hold a door open for someone
- ❖ Give a (sincere) compliment
- ❖ Make someone laugh
- ❖ Give someone a hug
- ❖ Have a conversation with a stranger
- ❖ Pick up litter as you walk
- ❖ Let someone in front of you in the supermarket queue
- ❖ Tell someone they mean a lot to you



- ❖ Offer your change to someone struggling to find the right amount
- ❖ Tell someone if you notice they are doing a good job
- ❖ Buy an unexpected gift for someone
- ❖ Donate your old things to charity
- ❖ Give food to a homeless person and take time to talk with them
- ❖ Give blood
- ❖ Get back in contact with someone you've lost touch with

The goal of this activity is twofold; on the one hand it serves to create psychological safety and to make bonds between team members by getting them to talk about non-work related topics, and on the other hand, gestures of kindness promote happiness and positive emotions through altruistic and selfless contentment (Howell, Pchelin, & Iyer, 2012).

## 6.2. **Engagement**

In the early 2000s, Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, pioneers in positive psychology, conducted 3-year-long research that involved more than 55 distinguished social scientists. The result of the research was the discovery of a "common language" (scientifically speaking, a "consensual nomenclature") for understanding and discussing these core capacities in human beings. This "common language" is composed of 24 character strengths divided into 6 categories or virtues, which are universal across nations and cultures. Every person possesses all 24 character strengths, but in different degrees, so each person has a truly unique character profile. We can see the full character strengths in the list below.

### ❖ **WISDOM**

1. **Creativity** (originality, adaptive, ingenuity)
2. **Curiosity** (interest, novelty-seeking, exploration, openness)
3. **Judgment** (critical thinking, thinking things through, open-mindedness)
4. **Love of Learning** (mastering new skills and topics, systematically adding to knowledge)
5. **Perspective** (wisdom, providing wise counsel, taking the big-picture view)

❖ **COURAGE**

1. **Bravery** (valour, not shrinking from fear, speaking up for what's right)
2. **Perseverance** (persistence, industry, finishing what one starts)
3. **Honesty** (authenticity, integrity)
4. **Zest** (vitality, enthusiasm, vigour, energy, feeling alive)

❖ **HUMANITY**

1. **Love** (both loving and being loved, valuing close relations with others)
2. **Kindness** (generosity, nurturance, care and compassion, altruism, niceness)
3. **Social intelligence** (aware of the motives/feelings of self and others, knowing what makes other people tick)

❖ **JUSTICE**

1. **Teamwork** (citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty)
2. **Fairness** (just, not letting feelings bias decisions about others)
3. **Leadership** (organizing group activities, encouraging a group to get things done)

❖ **TEMPERANCE**

1. **Forgiveness** (mercy, accepting others' shortcomings, giving people a second chance)
2. **Humility** (modesty, letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves)
3. **Prudence** (careful, cautious, not taking undue risks)
4. **Self-regulation** (self-control, disciplined, managing impulses and emotions)

❖ **TRANSCENDENCE**

1. **Appreciation of beauty and excellence** (awe, wonder, elevation)
2. **Gratitude** (thankful for the good, expressing thanks, feeling blessed)
3. **Hope** (optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation)
4. **Humour** (playfulness, bringing a smile to others, light-hearted)
5. **Spirituality** (religiousness, faith, purpose, meaning)

It is said that in order to fully engage in an activity and to reach a state of flow, one should employ their signature strengths, the traits that come naturally to them, and feel fully confident when using them (Peterson, Park, and Seligman 2005).

### **6.2.1. Signature strengths**

This intervention suggests that all the employees do a short test on the webpage [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org) which will help them determine which characteristics are their signature strengths. After getting the report, HRs or managers should go through the list with their employees and see how and when those strengths can be used during the work hours. It is advisable to write down the specific moments and any idea that may occur during the conversation.

Once a month, the list should be revised, and it should be commented if the strengths could be successfully implemented and come up with different strategies if not.

It is suggested to talk about the moments when the employer may have underplayed his or her strengths, when he or she was lacking in confidence or procrastinating and putting things off. Which strengths could they dial up in the future to make these tasks more engaging and energizing?

Note if there were moments when they felt like they were doing their best work, but it left them feeling exhausted or unappreciated by others. Which strengths might they have been overplaying? Could they dial these back a little bit in the future?

In the end, talk about the moments when they felt engaged, energized, and enjoying what they were doing. Which strengths were they drawing upon? Can they do a little more of that in the period to come? (Linley, 2008)

### **6.2.2. D.E.A.R. - Drop Everything and Read**

Apart from using signature strengths to reach the state of flow, there are also other ways to practice mindfulness and engagement, like doing yoga, meditating, or even reading. Every great leader knows that he has to invest in his employees and offer them opportunities to learn and develop. This best practice connects educational aspects, pleasure, and a sense of engagement.

Every year employees are asked to provide input about which books they believe everyone should read and why. Books can be of any genre, from educational to poetry. The final say will, of course,

have the manager or the HR department, but asking workers for their ideas makes them feel included in the decision-making process.

As the name suggests, every day during work hours, employees have the right to drop everything they are doing and spend 20 minutes reading a book that was provided before. Additionally, the company can give an eBook reader as a gift to all its employees or include it as part of the "welcome package" for the newbies.

Employees can daily update the tables with the chapters they have read and their observations, and in that way, follow their progress. Every month (or more often), there should be a "Reading club" meeting where the teammates discuss that month's book, key takeaways, and how it can be related to their work if possible.

### **6.3. Relationship**

Our biological need for social support means that each time we joyfully connect with another person, our brain is flooded with the feel-good hormone, oxytocin, immediately reducing anxiety and improving concentration. In fact, it turns out each social connection also bolsters our cardiovascular, neuroendocrine, and immune systems, so the more connections we make, the better we function.

#### **6.3.1. Let's go for an E-coffee**

Creating social relationships may be more difficult or at least slower to develop in the virtual environment since there is no casual chit-chat in the hallways or during the lunch break. The absence of physical presence is considered to be the major drawback of virtual teams and virtual work. That is why it is imperative to allow employees some free e-coffee time during work hours.

This practice encourages creating friendly relationships with one's teammates. An app randomly makes pairs every two weeks, and employees are supposed to set a 30-minute-E-coffee-break during which they are obliged to really have a cup of coffee, tea, or a snack while chatting about determined topics considering their private lives, hobbies, experiences, favourite books, movies, etc. When their meeting is done, they are supposed to write a post for the rest of the team, stating what they have learned about each other.

This is an enjoyable and easy way for remote employees to get to know their mates and start making relationships.

### **6.3.2. Strategizing and goofing-off at the Offsite**

If a company is well-off, it should consider organizing offsite at least twice a year for their employees.

Offsite is a unique opportunity for remote teams to have some face-to-face experience and spend some time together. Having a team vote, pick up destination, create an agenda for live meetings and come up with ideas for team building is a great practice that makes employees feel excited and motivated because they get to choose and plan their trip.

Offsite can be organized in many different ways, depending on the needs and the nature of the company or a team. They can consist only of workdays or fun days, or they can be a mixture, which is recommended. These face-to-face meetings should serve to make major decisions, updating the team about new strategies or changes within a company and strategizing for the next period, usually a period before the next offsite.

It is imperative to include some fun activities for the after-work-hours; cocktail night, board games night, escape rooms, walking tours, etc. Additionally, doing some exercise every morning before the sessions or in between them serves to improve concentration and attention.

Offsite is a great way to motivate employees by doing something out of the ordinary and refreshing. These trips enable them to see that their mates are real people and are a perfect moment for relationships and friendships to arise.

### **6.4. Meaning**

This category of positive psychology interventions helps in understanding what is meaningful to us in life and why, and what we can do to achieve the things that matter in life. A person who has clarity of goals and expectations is more likely to feel happier and content (Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009).

### 6.4.1. Personal mission

*What matters is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment.*

- Viktor E. Frankl

Not all people have a job with a higher purpose or meaning to the world, such as doctors, for example, nor many people would describe their role at work as very meaningful. Therefore, connecting this category of interventions to the work environment is rather tricky. However, managers or the HR department can show that they care about their employees' life in general and not only during work hours.

The idea of this exercise is to have all the employees fill in their Personal Mission Sheet. The company should provide a template with an attractive, fun design which is appealing to the eye.

It is suggested that the Personal Mission Sheet include the following:

It is my mission:

- ❖ To live....
- ❖ To work...
- ❖ To continue...
- ❖ To love...
- ❖ To be...
- ❖ To become...
- ❖ To believe...
- ❖ To promote...
- ❖ To strive...
- ❖ To seek...<sup>2</sup>

Any additional statements are welcome to be included.

Employees should pin this list somewhere visible in their work surroundings. Looking at it on a daily basis, whenever they feel down or frustrated by work, will help them reduce their doubts and remind them that they have a higher purpose in life outside of the office hours. This list should emphasize what is important to them, so they can focus on it daily and work towards their goals.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from *First Things First* by Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, Rebecca R. Merrill

#### **6.4.2. Coaching 1:1 sessions**

If the people are to be managed correctly, coaching should be a natural part of one-on-one meetings between employees and managers or the HR department. Having the mind that in this case we are dealing with remote employees, these meetings are naturally held by phone, or even better by a video call via computer. They can last as long as necessary, but 30 minutes a week is suggested so that the employee would not feel overwhelmed and would have enough time to make progress step by step.

In those meetings, leaders are supposed to give constructive feedback, guidelines, and guidance about how the worker is doing their job, talk about their responsibilities, and communicate their expectations.

Managers should consider how they can help their employees build and grow on what:

- ❖ Drives and interests them
- ❖ Comes naturally
- ❖ Will be most applicable to their career aspirations

People are most motivated and engaged when they are making progress at something that's meaningful to them. It is also likely that employees' career growth will come from their strengths, making it a wise investment of the coaching time. Their leaders should also support them in filling gaps in their skills. Coaching on people's strengths is a smart place to start working on the development of the trust and rapport that is necessary for an effective coaching.

Regular coaching allows both parties to address new priorities, opportunities, or challenges, learn from experience, build on success, share insights and discuss goals, growth, and future challenges.

*Resource of the idea - Harvard Business School Publishing*

#### **6.5. Accomplishment**

A sense of accomplishment can be easily achieved by setting goals and milestones. Goals need to be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely). There is a great variety of goals that managers and HR departments can come up with for their business units. They can be short or long term; they can be for fun, for educational purposes, for boosting company's sales or productivity, they can be turned into competitions or have a more significant cause. Here are two ideas.

### **6.5.1. Another course? *Of course!***

Nowadays, there are many courses available on the internet about every topic possible. Managers can choose among the websites that offer free or really affordable courses (like [udemy.com](https://www.udemy.com) or [coursera.com](https://www.coursera.com)), or they can go further and buy professionally designed courses by prestigious business schools. They should come up with a list of courses related to their business and let the employees know that there will be exclusive rewards or even bonuses for the ones who complete and successfully pass all of them in a determined period.

They can create milestones and personal certificates for every course completed or digital badges and photo frames for the profile pictures of the employees who successfully finish them.

By being offered a free opportunity to grow and develop, employees feel cared for and appreciated, which augments their motivation. Also, by completing new modules and celebrating it, a sense of achievement is awakened, which makes people proud and willing to take up new tasks and challenges.

### **6.5.2. Cultivating Your Grit**

Grit is your passion and perseverance to achieve long-term goals. It entails working consistently toward challenges and being able to maintain interest and effort over the years despite failures, setbacks, and plateaus in progress. Studies suggest that grit can predict individual's success, over and beyond measures of talents and intelligence, because gritty individuals approach the journey to mastery like a marathon rather than a sprint.

One can cultivate his or her levels of grit by setting meaningful goals, practicing a 'growth mindset' by focusing on opportunities for learning and development, deliberately building their skills and seeking feedback, and ensuring they have good social support.

This intervention is rather done individually than in a group environment. Leaders can provide explanation and steps of this intervention to their team members but are not supposed to control it fully.

Everyone should make sure they have a meaningful goal they would like to work towards and share this with someone (a colleague or a friend) who can hold them accountable and encourage them to keep going forward when they want to give up. Then for at least 10 minutes each day, they



should do one thing that will help them move towards this goal, and that probably sits just outside their comfort zone. When they are done, they should take note of how it went. If it went well, it is suggested to stretch a little further tomorrow. If it did not work out as expected, they should think about how they might try it again tomorrow to get a better result. When they want to give up, asking a colleague or a friend to remind them of why they are doing it is very important.

At the end of the month, during a team meeting, a leader should raise a question: What have you accomplished or did well this month? What are you grateful for or proud of?

Then the team can celebrate it by applauding, sending virtual fireworks, or something else. It is vital to make sure people's grit is rewarded.

The idea for this exercise stemmed from <https://www.michellemcquaid.com/> and was adapted by the author of the thesis.

## **6.6. Health**

One of the best practices among traditional companies is signing contracts with local gym clubs and allowing their employees to become members free of charge. By doing this a company can achieve two positive outcomes - on the one hand, its employees will be healthier and have less sick-leave, and on the other hand, in many countries (like the UK or the USA) there are tax benefits if the gym memberships and sports facilities are offered to staff.

### **6.6.1. Collecting miles**

While having a friend for exercising in many cases results in higher motivation, and they can hold each other accountable for going to the gym regularly, this practice is somewhat more difficult for the companies that operate virtually and have employees all over the world. Since one might be the only worker from their city, or their schedule is different every day, it may be impossible to have anybody control their exercising habits. So, if their company is paying for their gym membership, but they are not using it, it is a loss for a company. In order to avoid this, an excellent practice for virtual teams is making "Mile competition".

The ones who want to participate in it get their gym membership paid, but they have to commit to their team. Every month the team gets a monthly goal - miles or hours that have to be accumulated

by walking, running, cycling, swimming, or in some other way. Team members have the liberty to divide and allocate these miles/hours as they want among themselves. They have to track their time/miles and make regular logs with photos as proof. The team that meets the monthly goal or comes closest to it gets the reward.

Rewards can be of a different nature, such as books, cinema or museum tickets, vouchers for dinner or beauty salons, accessories, etc. The HR department should make sure they come up with an attractive offer of rewards and find a way they reach all the members of the winning team.

### **6.6.2. An apple a day**

The following exercise is pretty simple and straightforward.

Having in mind that the workers in a virtual team or a company are physically dispersed, it is impossible to organize lunch break with healthy lunch packages as it is usually done in big international corporations. Also, it is impossible to track the dieting habits of all remote workers, so this is something that cannot be fully controlled.

The idea of this best practice is to have a list of fruits and vegetables randomly generated for every month so that one is assigned to each day of the week. Fruits and veggies can be repeated in sequences or not.

The reminder for the "fruit/veggie time" should be set for every day, and the employees are expected to really have a healthy snack at that time and preferably send a fun photo of them with it in a "Water cooler chat", a special place where all the employees can talk about things that are not related to work. This kind of action is encouraged if it is aligned with the culture of the organization. In case it would not be appropriate to send those photos, the only thing that is left is to trust that the people will respect it.

## 7. CONCLUSION

### 7.1. Conclusion

The first objective of this thesis was to provide knowledge about Positive Psychology and its pioneers with the focus on Dr Martin Seligman. Basing on the literature, we introduced and explained the notion of Well-being and flourishing, how important it is for people's daily life and work-life as well.

This thesis also provided an insight into the constant changes in the workplace, workforce, and the ways leaders and managers can influence the productivity of their business units. After reviewing the available literature, it can be concluded that *workplaces with engaged employees, on average, do a better job of keeping employees, satisfying customers, and being financially productive and profitable. Workplace well-being and performance are not independent* (Harter, Schmidt, and Keyes, 2002, p. 16). Instead, they are complementary and dependent components of a financially and psychologically healthy workplace (Harter, Schmidt, and Keyes, 2002).

We tried to see whether there is a significant correlation between employees' well-being and the type of team they work in (virtual or traditional). However, the obtained results do not support our hypotheses, and, based on the research conducted for the purpose of this thesis, it can be concluded that the type of the team cannot be a predictor of the well-being of the worker.

Nonetheless, as previously mentioned, productivity and well-being go hand in hand. For that reason, the last chapter of the thesis offers a tool for improving virtual teams' well-being and performance. In order to help leaders manage their virtual teams efficiently, the author proposed a compilation of 12 best practices and positive interventions (adapted to the online work environment) based on the PERMAH model.

### 7.2. Research limitations and avenues for further research

When it comes to the research that was conducted for the purpose of the present thesis, it should be noted that the sample of 106 respondents is rather small. It is suggested that in the future, a similar investigation could be done, but with more participants. That way, the results may give a broader picture and turn out more interesting and statistically significant.

Also, the idea of this research was to focus on the type of team i.e., work environment, without taking other factors into account, which proved to be statistically insignificant.

This field is still very young and scarce in research and modern literature. Therefore it is proposed to repeat a similar survey for future research, but with a greater sample and introducing more variables such as type of the job or industry in which respondents work, their educational background, where they come from, marital status, incomes, and others.

As already mentioned, some researches confirm and show positive differences in the individual's well-being before and after applying positive interventions. However, so far, none was conducted in a team environment, let alone in a virtual team. Therefore, the author proposes this research as a starting point for the more in depths investigations in the future.

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## 9. APPENDIX

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### Appendix 1: Survey and original PERMA Profiler

The questionnaire consists of nine blocks. The first block of questions is composed of the next demographic questions:

#### **D1 - Your sex?**

- Male - 1
- Female - 2

#### **D2 - Your age?**

- 18-25 - 1
- 26-35 - 2
- 36-45 - 3
- 46-55 - 4
- 56-65 - 5
- 65+ - 6

#### **D3 - What is your highest level of education?**

- High school diploma - 1
- College degree - 2
- Bachelor's degree - 3
- Master's degree - 4
- Professional degree - 5
- Doctorate degree - 6

#### **D4 - At your workplace, do you mostly work in...?**

- Traditional teams - 1
- Virtual teams - 2
- Both equally - 3



The next eight blocks are actual PERMA Profiler in the suggested order:

#	Label	Question	Response Anchors
Block 1	<b>A1</b>	How much of the time do you feel you are making progress towards accomplishing your goals?	0 = Never 10 = Always
	<b>E1</b>	How often do you become absorbed in what you are doing?	
	<b>P1</b>	In general, how often do you feel joyful?	
	<b>N1</b>	In general, how often do you feel anxious?	
	<b>A2</b>	How often do you achieve the important goals you have set for yourself?	
Block 2	<b>H1</b>	In general, how would you say your health is?	0 = Terrible 10 = Excellent
Block 3	<b>M1</b>	In general, to what extent do you lead a purposeful and meaningful life?	0 = Not at all 10 = Completely
	<b>R1</b>	To what extent do you receive help and support from others when you need it?	
	<b>M2</b>	In general, to what extent do you feel that what you do in your life is valuable and worthwhile?	
	<b>E2</b>	In general, to what extent do you feel excited and interested in things?	
	<b>Lon</b>	How lonely do you feel in your daily life?	
Block 4	<b>H2</b>	How satisfied are you with your current physical health?	0 = Not at all 10 = Completely
Block 5	<b>P2</b>	In general, how often do you feel positive?	0 = Never 10 = Always
	<b>N2</b>	In general, how often do you feel angry?	
	<b>A3</b>	How often are you able to handle your responsibilities?	

	<b>N3</b>	In general, how often do you feel sad?	
	<b>E3</b>	How often do you lose track of time while doing something you enjoy?	
Block 6	<b>H3</b>	Compared to others of your same age and sex, how is your health?	0 = Terrible 10 = Excellent
Block 7	<b>R2</b>	To what extent do you feel loved?	0 = Not at all 10 = Completely
	<b>M3</b>	To what extent do you generally feel you have a sense of direction in your life?	
	<b>R3</b>	How satisfied are you with your personal relationships?	
	<b>P3</b>	In general, to what extent do you feel contented?	
Block 8	<b>hap</b>	Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?	0 = Not at all 10 = Completely

Scores are calculated as the average of the items comprising each factor:

Positive Emotion:  $P = \text{mean}(P1, P2, P3)$

Engagement:  $E = \text{mean}(E1, E2, E3)$

Relationships:  $R = \text{mean}(R1, R2, R3)$

Meaning:  $M = \text{mean}(M1, M2, M3)$

Accomplishment:  $A = \text{mean}(A1, A2, A3)$

Overall Well-being:  $\text{PERMA} = \text{mean}(P1, P2, P3, E1, E2, E3, R1, R2, R3, M1, M2, M3, A1, A2, A3, \text{hap})$

Negative Emotion:  $N = \text{mean}(N1, N2, N3)$

Health:  $H = \text{mean}(H1, H2, H3)$

Loneliness: Lon (single item)

## Appendix 2: Survey responses

ID	D1	D2	D3	D4	A1	E1	P1	N1	A2	H1	M1	R1	M2	E2
1	2	1	2	1	8	4	8	3	8	9	8	8	9	8

2	1	2	4	2	8	6	8	7	9	6	4	4	6	8
3	2	4	4	3	9	7	10	2	10	9	9	10	10	10
4	2	2	4	2	10	10	7	7	6	7	7	7	7	5
5	2	2	4	2	7	7	7	4	8	7	7	9	9	9
6	1	2	4	1	7	6	8	4	7	8	7	7	7	9
7	1	4	5	2	10	10	9	2	10	7	10	9	10	10
8	1	2	1	2	7	10	9	5	7	9	9	8	6	10
9	2	1	4	1	8	7	6	5	7	7	7	10	8	6
10	2	1	4	2	9	7	8	3	9	7	9	9	7	8
11	2	1	4	a	5	7	5	4	8	7	8	6	7	5
12	2	2	4	2	3	5	8	7	8	8	8	9	7	9
13	1	1	3	1	6	8	8	7	7	8	6	6	7	7
14	1	1	3	1	7	9	6	4	6	8	6	8	7	7
15	1	1	3	1	7	5	6	4	10	10	7	10	10	8
16	1	1	3	1	10	10	5	7	5	5	5	2	7	8
17	1	1	3	1	7	7	5	8	8	9	6	8	8	8
18	2	1	4	3	6	8	4	7	6	6	7	5	7	7
19	2	1	3	1	7	8	7	6	8	8	8	8	8	8
20	2	4	2	1	5	5	3	10	7	5	6	8	7	6
21	2	1	4	1	6	7	8	3	9	10	8	9	7	8
22	1	2	4	1	7	8	3	7	5	5	1	1	2	3
23	2	1	3	2	8	7	6	9	10	9	8	7	7	10
24	2	2	4	2	5	5	5	4	5	8	8	5	6	7

25	2	2	4	1	8	7	7	5	7	7	9	8	8	7
26	1	1	3	2	8	8	7	5	10	8	7	6	6	9
27	2	3	1	2	10	10	9	6	9	9	10	10	10	10
28	2	3	2	2	9	8	7	6	9	5	8	6	8	9
29	1	1	3	1	5	7	7	3	6	8	8	8	5	8
30	2	2	4	2	7	8	8	4	9	7	10	9	9	9
31	2	4	4	1	9	9	9	2	8	9	9	8	10	9
32	2	2	5	3	6	6	6	3	8	9	9	9	10	10
33	2	1	3	3	8	9	8	8	9	9	8	9	8	9
34	1	3	1	2	8	8	6	8	8	6	7	4	8	9
35	1	2	2	2	6	4	8	2	7	9	8	2	8	7
36	1	1	4	3	10	10	9	2	9	8	8	10	10	10
37	2	2	3	2	8	8	5	8	10	7	7	3	7	7
38	2	1	3	3	8	7	9	7	8	10	10	9	9	10
39	2	1	4	3	7	10	2	7	7	8	7	7	7	6
40	1	2	2	1	9	8	9	8	7	8	8	8	8	8
41	2	1	3	1	8	9	8	9	7	8	8	8	8	8
42	2	1	2	1	8	9	7	5	6	8	8	8	7	7
43	2	1	3	1	9	9	6	8	9	8	8	6	9	7
44	1	1	3	1	4	5	2	8	5	4	3	7	4	2
45	2	2	3	2	4	6	4	7	6	9	7	5	5	6
46	1	1	2	3	7	6	9	8	7	8	7	8	9	6
47	1	2	3	1	2	4	3	4	5	1	2	4	5	4

48	2	4	3	1	6	6	3	3	7	9	6	2	8	5
49	2	3	4	2	10	10	10	6	10	3	7	3	10	8
50	2	3	6	1	7	7	6	6	7	7	8	5	7	8
51	2	2	3	3	6	7	6	5	9	8	8	8	9	9
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