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# THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF EUDAIMONIC WELL-BEING IN A RELIGIO-ECONOMICAL ROLE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

*This phenomenological study aimed to identify and describe the general meaning structure of eudaimonic well-being experience in performing the role of halal executive. We interviewed three halal executives about their lived experiences with eudaimonic well-being and analysed the data with Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method. The general meaning structure describes eudaimonic well-being in performing the role of Halal executive as a phenomenon that interweaves three constituents: (1) awareness of an urgency for change, (2) striving for excellence in a malleable mind-set and (3) confrontation and intense involvement with inner potencies. We discuss these findings in relation to relevant literature on change, eudaimonic well-being, and inner potencies.*

**Keywords***: eudaimonic well-being, halal executives, inner potencies, growth mind-set.*

## INTRODUCTION

Confronting a novel situation that questions one's autonomy and competence in a religio-economical role is a challenging life event, where one is pushed into a realm of intense uncertainty, a feeling of being threatened, and a need to move into a new desired state. *Halal* executives are Muslim personnel by virtue of their position (Jais, 2014), but are employees of companies largely owned by non-Muslims (Rashid, 2016) whose interest is in maximising profits by venturing into the booming *halal* business, but generally do not understand the depth of the concept of lawful and legal in the Islamic context (Soraji, Awang & Yusoff, 2016). *Halal* refers to something that is good and beneficial to a person's physical well-being and religion (Said & Hanapi, 2018). *Halal* in the context of the *halal* industry, is a value proposition that exists within the key elements of the supply chain of the intersecting industry sectors that relates to safety and hygiene while for the food and beverage sector, it demands the element of wholesomeness. The Malaysian standard (MS) 1500:2009 has standardise the *halal* definition as 'food and drink and/or their ingredients that are permitted to be consumed under the Sharia law and fulfill several conditions as stated in the standard.' Though the certification is voluntary in nature, many had opted for certification as a marketing tool (Dahlan & Sani, 2017). The *Halal* executives (HE) is Malaysia's way of ensuring integrity of the system in the wake of the Islamic revival and heightened demand for *Halal* compliant products and services. Today, HEs are the most sought after profession in the Halal industry (YADIM, 2019).

The significance of the *halal* industry in the Malaysian context lies in the fact that Malaysia is a Muslim country positioned to be the centre for the promotion, distribution and production of *halal* food (HDC, 2019). It has the best developed ecosystem for *halal* food and beverage (Superfood Asia, 2019), and aspires to be the Global Reference Centre for *Halal* Integrity, and Centre for Innovation, Product and Trade (SME Magazine, 2016). Cautioned though, that it may lose its lustre as a leading *halal* hub in the world if the local industry players do not move fast into a higher value chain (Yunus, 2019), and may also lose its position as the leading Islamic economy as more countries attach strategic economic importance to the Islamic economy (Tan & Tani, 2019). The spectacular growth of the *halal* industry according to Riaz and Chaudry (2018) brings with it concerns

about authenticity and safety, and requires the development of professional capabilities of food professionals competent to ensure integrity of the *halal* value chain. To develop a more sustainable competitive advantage, one that upholds integrity and excellence, Malaysia has to go beyond bureaucratic solutions in law enforcements, it has to look into the person of the *halal* executives, and to help them discover and empower their latent elements and inner potencies - of their eudaimonic well-being (EWB). When the religio-economic challenge is understood in this way, promotion and prevention initiatives targeting integrity and excellence of HEs can be essential. EWB is defined in this study as the identification of a person's best potentials in any of a variety of domains of identity concern, the development of skills and talents necessary for the realisation of those potentials, and the use of those skills and talents in pursuit of personally meaningful goals. Activities consistent with the development and expression of our best potentials are accompanied by a distinctive set of subjective experiences that I have termed 'feelings of personal expressiveness' (Waterman, 2017, 315-316).

An integral part of the concept of EWB are the Greek injunctions: 'Know thyself' and 'Become what you are' (Aristotle, 1998) interpreted as 'activity expressing virtue' (Waterman, 1995, 260) or 'activity of the soul in accordance with virtue' (Ryff & Boylan, 2016, 55). Viewing eudaimonism as 'a philosophy in which the moral priority is assigned to the individual in terms of promoting self-realisation', Waterman (1995, 255) contends that eudaimonia should be interpreted as the interrelated psychological processes by which one's potentialities are recognised and becomes personal goals to be actualised. In short, 'from an ideal to actuality' (Ryff & Singer, 1996, p. 16). The eudaimonistic activities can thus be translated into two sets of observable constructs, the aptitudes and talents of the person, and the purposes in living that he or she is committed (Waterman, 1995, 2011, 2017). Waterman's idea of EWB as the feelings of self-expressiveness is in Figure 1.
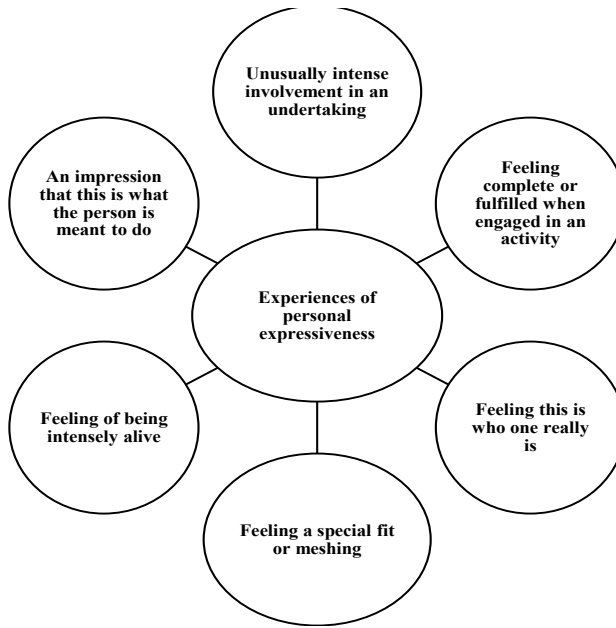
**Figure 1: Waterman's Experiences of Eudaimonic Well-being**

While Waterman views EWB as the experience of self-expressiveness, Ryff opines that there is no feeling element attached (Thorsteinsen & Vittersø, 2018, p. 91). It is a trait focused at objectively realising one's potentials and flourishing in the face of life's existential challenges. Measured as psychological well-being, eudaimonic well-being comprise of six core components according to Ryff and Keyes (1995). These elements are personal growth, purpose in life, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, and self-acceptance. Ryff (2018, 2019), believes that the time has come for the behavioural and social sciences and other sciences to broaden their purview about well-being by bringing the arts and humanities such as theology and philosophy into their endeavours as they will illuminate external inputs that nurture experiences of eudaimonic well-being. Carol D. Ryff (2018), whose research on EWB spans over 25 years refers to EWB as 'well-being with soul'. It is also seen as a well-being capable of promoting the development of a fully functioning person (Straume & Vittersø, 2017; Waterman, 2017). Joshanloo (2018), who is among the negligible few with global well-being research that extends into

the realms of Muslims, suggests that thinking of well-being in the mode of EWB facilitates the design and evaluation of more efficient policies. The conceived causal link between EWB and psychological health (Fowers, 2017; Friedman *et al*., 2019; Keyes, 2015; Carol D. Ryff, 2018), and creativity, change and personal enhancement (Bauer, Graham, Lauber & Lynch, 2018; Thorsteinsen & Vittersø, 2018; Vittersø, 2018) makes this an ideal research for initiatives aiming to enhance EWB competence of HEs.

To effectively promote integrity and excellence in HEs' important role, current research has been directed at describing HEs as a critical component of the halal assurance system (Ahmad, Rahman, Othman & Abidin, 2017), but there is no visible research on how their role affects their overall well-being or the effects of their well-being on their role performance. Some studies have demonstrated a significant need for *halal* food professionals with integrity and professionalism, such as the HEs (Shahwahid, Othman, & Saidpudin, 2017). Researchers such as Hashim and Shariff (2016), were inclined to look into supply chain management, while Noordin, Noor, and Samicho (2014) in the *halal* certification system, and Alina, Rafida, Syamsul, Mashitoh and Yusop (2013); (Jais, 2014); Nain *et al*. (2013); and (Othman, Md Shaarani & Bahron, 2017), in the areas of training. The most current is by Fujiwara and Ismail (2018) on supplier management, and from Idris, Anwar, Mastor, Sham, and Hassan (2018) on volunteerism among HEs. The case of HEs and the *halal* industry is only one of many questions so far almost totally disregarded in EWB or the *halal* industry research, even though eudaimonia is an opportune situation to move away from the heavily trodden paths of previous research on well-being (Frey, 2019).

The studies mentioned here have primarily investigated the *halal* assurance system or EWB using quantitative methods. Few have to our knowledge explored well-being qualitatively, more so with respect to an individual playing a religio-economic role. In this article, our interest lies in the qualitative understanding of EWB of *Halal* executives while performing their roles as *halal* executives. We used a phenomenological research approach that teases out the structure of psychological meanings that constitute this phenomenon.

## METHOD

### Participants

*Halal* executives serving three different *halal* certified food and beverage companies operating in the central region of Malaysia were recruited through personal contacts with *halal* executives in the researcher's line of duty. The researchers took heed of the suggestion by Englander (2012), that the choice of subject must be made after first asking, "Does he/she have the experience that I am looking for?". The researchers are also reminded of Waterman's notion that "everyone has experienced eudaimonic well-being in varying degrees at one time or another, and that the daimon is believed to be universal, possessed and expressed in widely varying forms and intensities" (Waterman, 1990, pp. 52-53). "In all humans there resides a kind of unique spirit, known as the daimon. Our central task in life is to come to know our unique capacities and then to strive to realise them" (Ryff, 2019) or to achieve the best that is within us. The challenge for the researcher thus, was to identify *halal* executives that had an intense experience of eudaimonic well-being so as to provide a rich and an in-depth description of the experience. Sampling was therefore highly purposive in nature. Even though every person would have experienced eudaimonic well-being one time or another, not everyone is able to describe it well. We spoke to many halal executives and conducted many preliminary meetings and interviews before deciding on the final three participants. Preliminary meetings provided the avenue for participants recall and the time to dwell and ponder on the experience thus facilitating the actual research interview session (Englander, 2012, p. 27).

As this was a phenomenological study to outline the meaning structure of EWB, we provided a written description of Waterman's *personal expressiveness* to potential participants and that they needed to have experience with the phenomenon in question. There was no way that we could determine that their experience were fresh in their mind, and as such, the resultant eight interviews conducted before we finally settled at three participants as data had reached saturation. Interviews from five potential participants were rejected for want of rich data. Our final selection of three participants consisted of two females and one male. There have

all served their present companies for more than six years and are highly experienced in their roles as *halal* executives. P1 used to be Company X's human resource manager who decided to champion the *halal* movement in the company and became their *halal* executive. P2 is a food technologist trained in halal and responsible for the company's *Halal* Assurance System, while P3 is a sharia scholar with a major in science and very much involved in training. All participants were auditors by virtue of their appointment as *halal* executives.

## INTERVIEWS

Interview is by far the most dominant method for data collection in phenomenological research. It has its foundation in the presence of a subject as researcher to another subject. As suggested by Englander (2012, p. 26), the first interview question was phrased like this, "Can you please describe as detailed as possible a situation in which you experienced eudaimonic well-being." The remaining questions had followed the responses of the interviewee with a focus on the phenomenon researched. Englander's (2012) protocol for interviewing was adopted as he had used the same phenomenological theory for interviewing as the one used by Giorgi (2009) for data analysis. Here the researcher was reminded that the phenomenon is the subject of investigation and not the person, and collecting descriptions is an attempt at a discovery of a human scientific meaning of a specific phenomenon not only how it appears to an individual subject but also how it appears to an inter subjective community. Research is therefore an occasion to become acquainted with the phenomenon and not the person in all his complexities; an attempt to encounter the phenomenon via the person's description.

This study is part of a larger study that explores HEs' experiences of EWB in a religio-economic role. We first conducted a preliminary interview, and after a period of five to 14 days returned and conducted in depth phenomenological interviews. These latter interviews form the basis of this article. In the phenomenological interviews, we had one opening question as mentioned above, while intermittent reminders were the norm such as, 'can you please go back to the room/ the place or the time and describe as detail as possible the experience'. Other questions

asked were intended to solicit the meaning of words they said that were not well described. There were yet additional questions composed in a three-dimensional interviewing recommended by Bevan (2014) that began with (1) contextualisation of themes of experience (How did you first knew that you were going to perform the activity?). This had assisted the researcher to get into accounts of places, events, actions and activities important to descriptive phenomenological investigation. This is followed by (2) apprehending of the phenomenon (What were the things you did prior to experiencing eudaimonic well-being?). This activity was intended to place the participant in the driver's seat and take the researcher all the way into the experience. The last stage is (3) clarifying the phenomenon (If it had been the same activity but the situation somewhat was different, would it have changed anything?). This involves the use of imaginative variation allowing the participant to concretise his or her experience, giving rise to new meanings and clarity of the elucidated experience. The questions were generated reflectively and was an aspect of the structure of the experience. It added consistency and dependability to the research and assisted the researcher to maintain her epoche, heightened her curiosity and interest and enticed the participants to provide richer descriptions of the experiences in their life world. What is important according Giorgi (2009, p. 122) is for the participant to describe it 'as complete a description as possible of the experience that a participant has lived through'.The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 65 minutes.

## Data analysis

The transcribed raw data from the interviews were analysed using Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological psychological method, a method largely anchored on Husserl's philosophical phenomenology and further developed and modified by Giorgi (2009) to fit into the demand for a scientific research method.  The method entails the need for the researcher to bracket or suspend his or her personal experiences and any theoretical assumptions concerning the phenomenon in question or epoché, before attempting to analyse the data (Giorgi, Giorgi, & Morley 2017), thus providing a fresh lens to view the data, while at the same time allowing the researcher to study intentionality instead of causality.  "Utilising the epochē does not mean that one forgets everything one previously knew to arrive at a kind of blank state, but rather that one brackets one's natural attitude; that

is, one invites a shift in attitude in order to look at the subject matter (i.e., the phenomenon) in a new way" (Englander, 2016, p. 4).

As proposed by Giorgi (2009), a phenomenological interview should meet the criteria of description, and this can be achieved by asking for a situation in which the participant has experienced the phenomenon. This question is very important since the discovery of the meaning of a phenomenon needs to be connected to specific context in which the phenomenon has been experienced, noting that a situation is not an objective time related situation, but an experientially determined concept. The interviewer had begun the interview by reiterating the meaning of eudaimonic well-being and bringing the participant into being present to the experience that he/she will be describing. The researcher is reminded that the ''raw data is taken to be how the objects were experienced by the describer, and no claim is made that the events described really happened as they were described'' (Giorgi, 2009, p. 99). This frame of mind was maintained throughout the analysis process. In previous publications, Giorgi had referred to his data analysis as a four step process, but had in more recent literature (Giorgi *et al.*, 2017, p. 182) given more emphasis on 'scientific phenomenological reduction' by highlighting it as a distinct step, and thus, the resulting five-step process.

The five steps are: (1) Read the entire transcription or description in order to grasp the basic sense of the whole situated description, (2) Assume the attitude of the scientific phenomenological reduction (SPR), (3) Remaining within the SPR, create parts by delineating psychological meaning units, (4) Still within SPR, the researchers intuit and transform participants' lifeworld expressions into expressions that highlight the psychological meanings lived by the participant. This requires the use of free imaginative variation as well as rendering implicit factors explicit, and (5) Based upon the transformed meaning units, and still within the SPR, the researchers use the transformed meaning unit expressions as the basis for describing the psychological structure of the experience (Giorgi *et al.*, 2017, p. 182). Zahavi had taken issue with Giorgi's method which he described as complex and unjustified (Zahavi, 2019), but we believe the tedious task underlined in the steps provide support for ensuring credibility of the research.

## RESULTS

The descriptive psychological phenomenological method was able to illuminate a distinct general psychological meaning structure of EWB of HEs while performing their roles as HEs. This structure is a general description representing all of our participants' experiences with the phenomenon. Here we first present the meaning structure of the phenomenon and followed by the constituents of the phenomenon. Since phenomenology is concerned with attaining an understanding and proper description of the structure of our mental/embodied experience within a living context, and since intentionality is fundamentally relational (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008), we invite readers to be mindful that the experience is found within a basic temporal structure of protention-primal impression-retention. Describing 'primal impression' as the component of consciousness that is narrowly directed toward the now, Husserl contends that it never appear in isolation but is accompanied by a 'retention'. Retention is the component that provide the consciousness of the just-elapsed and sinking in the past, and is accompanied by 'protention', the component that relates to consciousness of what is about to occur and is the unreflective anticipation of what is about to happen as experience progresses (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2014, p. 3). The structure of the experience is therefore interrelated and experienced as a flow. The structure, according to Giorgi (2009), is the relationship among the constituents. As practiced by Giorgi, we denote the compound person or participants in general by the letter 'P' while each participant is recognised by their participant number P1, P2 and P3.

### The general meaning structure of HE's EWB

The general structure of an experience is generally determined through a slow reflective process that seeks to establish what is essential to each description. This is so because psychological essenc es are typical and not universal and there is no 'perfect descriptions' rendering the phenomenological analyses not only slow, but also challenging. Getting the descriptions to fit into one structure will be ideal but is seldom is the case and must not be forced upon (Giorgi *et al*., 2017).

For P, the experience of EWB begins with a preliminary alert that a threatening situation is unfolding due to uncertain and complex conditions

generated by significant other(s). For P1, her significant other(s) was the Mufti (a Muslim legal expert who is empowered to give rulings on religious matters) and officers from the state religious office of a state in which her company operates. For P2, it was the manager of her company's logistics agent, while for P3 they were trainees attending a course on *Halal* organised by his company. The situation had threatened P's integrity, autonomy, and competence and demanded that P re-evaluate their existing goals and develop plans to normalise the situation, and bring them to a new preferred state. This had involved conscious intense strivings and the anchoring of a malleable mind-set for P to appear competent, autonomous, and excellent in the eyes of their significant other(s). Amidst the strivings and anxiety, P found himself/herself thrown into an unfamiliar space that was both enchanting and delighting; a new autonomy manifests itself, a free will and a freedom to be; a new competence and potencies they never knew existed. The emergence of increased autonomy and competence solicit P's agency experienced as enlivening. The emergence of P's daimon left P to endeavour reliving the experience and developing their newly discovered potentials.

As the event unfolds in its opening phase, P realise a need to move into a new preferred state and position to take actions intended to normalise the situation within heightened awareness that existing limiting beliefs are impeding current goals. As P actualise the plan, significant other(s) appear to threaten P, and P respond with circumventing actions that normalise the situation, triggering P to lunge into self-expressiveness and engagement in inner potencies. P's self-expressiveness brings closure to the situation providing him or her with a sense of relief from the threat while concomitantly experiencing strong emotional responses from the ecstasy experienced in eudaimonia that culminates in the desire to relive the EWB experience.

## Constituent 1: Awareness to an urgency for change

The HEs were quick to pronounce that the experience had begun with a state of anxiety and stress. P was alerted to respond to a highly unanticipated, challenging and novel situation. P1 responded to an unexpected invitation from a significant other who was the *Mufti* (a person in charge of sharia or Islamic religious matters) of State A by agreeing to conduct a briefing session within the next two days. The session was to enlighten the mufti

and the team from the state religious office on matters of an urgent and grave public concern regarding her company's *halal* status, as she was the head of *halal* affairs of Company X. The call had come at a time when she was in dire need of help to appease the overt distrust some quarters of the public have of Company X. P1 sensed that her current goal in ensuring public acceptance of her company's *halal* brand has been impeded due to strong opposing forces from the 'extreme public'. She believed that the novel opportunity presented by the Mufti was a way out and was therefore too valuable to decline. P1's description of the threatening situation and her concrete goal, "The day of the presentation, I wasn't too sure, mufti's office is all man I am a woman trying to convince the *ustaz* and all", but later contends, " No matter what, I need to attract and convince the *mufti*." The situation was very different for P2 whose mission had begun as any ordinary audit assignment that had suddenly turned ugly. As a *halal* auditor with Company B, P2 was assigned to audit a third party company that provided logistics services to Company B. Unlike previous assignments, P2 was at that time responding to an unresolved emotion about her role as a HE, a role that was no longer motivating and was unfulfilling, "Before this, when I got a task, I do, just do, but that time I'm just thinking from my house, the long journey, I kept thinking 'why me'? Why not other persons. I'm getting bored, because every supplier which is nearest by BBB, especially in BBB, they give to me." Discovering the need to address the immediate issue of serious non-compliance, she said, "I think, when I didn't do like that, they can do anything. Maybe they think just only Muslim. Maybe can bargain. No, not with me." P3 responded to a situation that appeared to impinge and frustrate his immediate goal of maintaining his status-quo and comfort as an auditor in company A that do not entail speaking in front of a crowd; something that he feared greatly. P3's manager had assigned P3 with his first trainer assignment a day before the training was to commence. P3 was reminded that it was an assignment tied to his career development. P3 describes the experience:

*"... I am afraid ... I do not like to talk or speak in front of audience. [...] When I got the assignment, first thing was I rejected it, but my GM said, "Until when do you want to do the same thing, keep on doing only audits?" He asked me to try and do training, he said it is good for my career development." But, P3 found himself face to face with disinterested and bored participants, and was worried, "I was also worried about the*

*evaluation form. What if they gave me negative comments? Are they thinking that I am not good enough?"*

P1 acknowledged that she was the head of *halal* matters for her company but had never had an audience with the *Mufti*, what more present before him or his team. Her role was to ensure that the *halal* assurance system works, and to ensure that requirements for *halal* certification underlined by the state religious office were fully adhered to. P2 and P3 were trained *halal* auditors with predetermined roles that were designed to work according to tight procedures and schedules. Nevertheless, contingent aspects of their situations called for some adjustments to P's roles as the events unfolded. P1 reflected upon the frustration of dealing with the public and saw the significance of removing the walls and developing collaborative efforts between Company X and the religious authorities.

P2 felt the incongruence between her held values and that of the third-party logistics company and was deeply frustrated as P2 was instrumental in their appointment. P2 identified with her role as HE as being crucial in ensuring integrity of the *halal* quality system throughout its value chain while P3 sought to provide interesting and valid knowledge on *halal* to trainees. P had extended the paradigms of their roles and redefined their parameters. P3's role quickly grew into auditor disseminator, P2 into auditor steward, and P1 into halal liaison. P's respective roles in their events shifted as new information came into perspective through communications and observations during the unfolding events. As initial roles emerged from the initial alerts, and information gathering activities became fully activated, P strive to appear competent before their significant others.

## Constituent 2: Striving for excellence in a malleable mind-set

The threats became more apparent for P as the event unfolded. P strive to normalise the situation and master the environment while seeking to maintain sustained effortful activities and flow of feedbacks. The preparation for the event was highly effortful for P as it brings together extensive physical, mental and emotional strengths. P1 and P3 spent many man-hours to prepare their presentation decks both at the office and at home with their spouses. P2 spent unusually high physical efforts inspecting the grounds. The novel situation and the apparent threat appear to have jolted

P into a 'receiving mind-set' and an openness to possibilities. Because of her significant others' coldness, P1 believed that she needed to make them feel her presence and to solicit their feedback because throughout her life as HE of Company X, the public had persistently refused to listen to her explanations with regards to Company X's *halal* status. At that time, P1 greatly needed her significant other(s) to listen and she wanted them to tell her their concerns. The learning that happened when they finally listened was a new experience in the development of a distinct competence for P1. These 'strangers' had provided her with a fresh lens to view the world. P2 decided that the audit assigned to her that morning would not be another normal mundane audit. She felt 'the calling' that there was more to it and had intentionally declined her significant other's request to check the documents and proceeded to inspect the building instead, to the displeasure of her significant other. The meticulous inspection led to the discovery of a major non-compliance of the *halal* certification; the presence of empty alcohol cans among her company's goods. She was filled with guilt for failing to perform her role as an agent of the Muslims in general, that is to ensure food certified as *halal* are indeed *halal* according to sharia or Islamic law. P2 however understood the experience as a path to mastering her role as a HE. In the case of P3, faced with the threat of a stalled career and the chance of learning something new had literally made him 'think in the future' despite his self-limiting beliefs. Being forced into the assignment was challenging enough for P3, but facing a group of people who were not interested was derogatory for him. His significant others drooping off were indications of disinterest and boredom. P3 believed that the stakes were high and he cannot afford to foul out. The situation had been difficult since he started the session, but he was determined to make it work. He quickly took the break time as an opportunity to seek their feedback and worked on them. His future in front of him, his freewill in place, his knowledge and his significant others' needs clarified, P3 plunged in and found a mesh between his abilities and the needs of his significant others. The situations for P had unfolded in hard and effortful time-consuming activities and timely feedbacks, to which they were prepared to commit. In times of transition and uncertainty P appear to be able to tolerate ambiguity and to welcome others' dialogical offerings and those of their own. The striving for excellence structure of the process was concomitant with the participants' intense involvement in the activity and the discovery of their inherent potentials.

## Constituent 3: Confrontation with, and an intense involvement with inner potencies

As mentioned earlier, there appear to be an initial practical level that P approached and responded to the situations before them. As the event unfolds, P became highly involved in the assignment. The assignment had provided P with a novel situation that was challenging and complex but appears to fit comfortably with P's abilities and skills spurred by newly discovered competence in a space and time when P can 'just be themselves'. Up to the actual encounter with their significant other(s), P had been open to, if not preferring, that they could be in control of the event and be able to mitigate the situation. Instead, they came face to face with anxiety, experiencing tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry. As soon as P interpreted the unfolding event as determined by the response of significant other(s), each took a proactive stance. P1 began soliciting for questions and felt the unusually intense engagement with the activity when she was able to answer her significant other(s) first question satisfactorily, while for P2, it was when she was able to get them to resolve the problem of the noncompliance immediately. As for P3, it was the time when he was able to get the full attention of his significant others. What followed from the intense engagement was the feeling of a special fit or meshing with the activity.

There seemed to be an enhanced awareness in P's abilities to perceive the effects of their actions. P1 described a clearer personal identity and the freedom to be herself. The situation also marked an achievement of a new potential and personal growth, and the thrill of success expressed as "*Somehow, I managed to be myself. With my character a bit tomboyish. It's like I'm with friends, I'm myself at that time. It's like, how do you describe … ya … I am me […] then I am proud because I would be the pioneer in developing all halal procedures to Company X […] The feeling is ahhhh it's like fireworks in Disneyland.*" For P2, the magnitude of the feeling when she experienced autonomy was definitive, compelling and satisfying. Describing the feeling as "*I feel powerful like a … only me. When I found the situation, I feel so brave, I feel nobody… brave … I can talk, I can give instruction anytime. When you say no…I want" […] like I have own power like authority body … like JAKIM.*" P2 believed that she was the first person who detected a case for non-compliance of that nature. She felt the freedom to act and believe that she could be herself without any fear. Like P1, P2

also found a new potential, that she was more than just 'normal'. She was an expert auditor and a referral for halal matters in the related areas. P3 shared the same feeling of success and meshing, and expressed his feeling of awe at the discovering of his potential in training as 'wow' and 'waaaah'. In all three cases, the participants experienced the discovery of a new potential that have eluded them thus far. P1 experienced enhanced understanding and appreciation of her significant others, specifically the overt respect for the Mufti and her personal transformation, and her enhanced belief system as regards to the position of man and women in Islam. Meanwhile, both P2 and P3 submitted to the belief that their position as HEs was the will of the Divine, a gift attached with clearly outlined responsibilities and must be upheld as such. These responsibilities for them are beyond the need for human supervision for they seek the pleasure of the Divine creator with hope, and feared His wrath. Therefore, the emotional, spiritual, and overall aspects of the experiences seem to have been the 'nerve centre' of P's emotional transformation. P seemed to have found themselves as 'new' people in a different life-world after the peak experiences. Perhaps it was a felt sense of discovery into greater possibilities about their religio-commercial roles as HEs. All the HEs described a desire to relive the experience and to regularly use their new found 'signature strengths'. P1 says, *"After the experience, I have met six or seven muftis. Moving forward I want all the 14 muftis to see us. I felt one part of my burden, the burden that I cannot convince people are all gone."* P2 believed the experience left her feeling useful and confident of herself;

*"I am so useful, because before this I feel just normal person. Useful which is I can show my reputation, my skill in halal position, useful I can show everything in halal scope. I feel so wonderful because I can attend to new issues, because before this I don't have any experience on that issue, then I can share to my colleague. I feel so useful […] when I got some tasks to audit supplier, I ask my lead auditor and my boss, I don't want anybody with me, I can handle, I can do myself. I like to do it again, since I saw the situation, I know how to handle, I know how to solve for the situation. I don't want to, I can go alone."*

P3's desired to become a professional trainer and looked for opportunities to hone the skill by positively soliciting and looking forward to any training jobs, "The event really changed the way I feel about exploring

new things. Even if I need to give sermons also I am prepared to go but with time to prepare before it. I believe that I can reach another stage as a professional trainer. I think that I have a talent towards speaking. I have the ability to speak to people … I have that skill actually."

## CONCLUSION

An integral part of the concept of well-being is the notion of 'living well and doing well', and thus the global awareness that "Well-being can and should be measured and then used as a bottom line for public policy" (Diener & Seligman, 2018, p. 172). The conceived causal link between well-being, health and performance says Ryff (2018)   makes it ideal for establishing behaviours and initiatives aiming to enhance well-being of P. With the world giving voice to the importance of well-being, Malaysia must be mindful that well-being has far-reaching implications. Employment is one of the most important determinants of well-being and eudaimonia lends a more complete picture of well-being at work (De Neve, 2018).  In this article, we have focused on HEs who are individuals performing religio-economic roles inherent to the Malaysian *halal* industry through the experiences of three *halal* executives. Their position in the *halal* industry is an ideal ground for promotion of integrity and excellence initiatives in general and EWB specifically. To enhance our understanding of EWB in such challenging role, we have in this study, bracketed established theories of EWB and set out to explore EWB from the perspectives of the HEs themselves. Based on their first-hand experience of EWB, a general meaning structure of EWB was developed. The structure had three interrelated constituents. We had separated them for the sake of presentation and discussion. Although the structure had observed similarities with other concepts and approaches, we argue that the structure contributes to the field with nuanced and rich descriptions the came from the HEs themselves. We conclude that the insights condensed in the general meaning structure and its constituents are valuable contributions to initiatives that aim to promote experiences of EWB of HEs.  Future research may seek to develop measures for the constructs found in the structure of experience.

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