

2023 World Agreements for Ecosystem-Wide Flourishing Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2023 World Agreements for Ecosystem-Wide Flourishing Report provides an initial description of the global social topography of human agreements that empower Ecosystem-Wide Flourishing (EWF). Surveying the health of human agreements in groups from across the globe, this report shows that the world is far more equipped to address its massive problems than many realize.

From over 164,000 descriptions of group experiences gathered in 126 countries, an underlying pattern emerges. The data shows a clear distribution of the quality of experiences of relationships in a group, along a continuum from very weak to very strong. Groups from across the entire continuum, including the very low and very high, can be found everywhere around the globe. Where a group falls on the continuum predicts the elements of EWF, including their level of whole-human health, their outputs, and their capacity to regenerate that level of health. Groups can shift their agreements and, thus, their capacities for regenerative health, leading to different experiences and EWF outcomes. Through these shifts, people are able to take the initiative to change what they do, towards their deeper shared purpose.

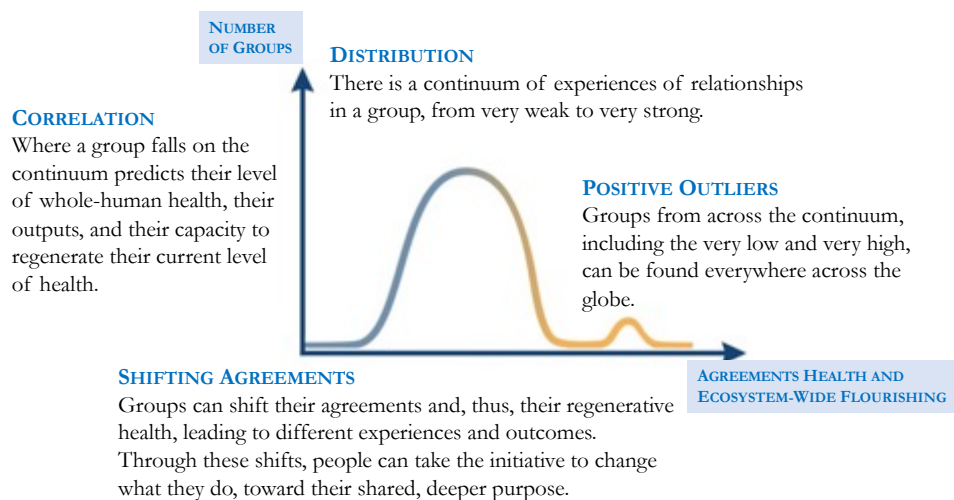


Figure 1: Patterns from the Data

The emerging pattern shows that the agreements that achieve, sustain, and evolve the desired level of EWF partly center on the individual experience of flourishing of the human beings in the agreements, through a process of consciously choosing the agreements. These agreements reflect the regenerative health of the group: its current state of whole-human health, its capacity to regenerate that health, and its capacity to contribute to EWF.

The opening challenge of the 2023 World Agreements for Ecosystem-Wide Flourishing Report is for people to take the initiative to change their agreements to support their shared purposes. The study of over 164,000 groups, through surveys and fieldwork, highlights solutions for finding and learning with local groups who have already discovered how to flourish within their local context and to then discern how to scale these processes beyond local contexts.

AGREEMENTS FOR ECOSYSTEM-WIDE FLOURISHING

The 2023 World Agreements for Ecosystem-Wide Flourishing Report provides an initial description of the global social topography of human agreements that empower Ecosystem-Wide Flourishing (EWF). This entails the flourishing of individuals, groups, and their broader contexts, inclusive of subjective perceptions (e.g., self-reports of happiness) and objective indicators (e.g., Environmental Performance Index). Here an “agreement” is a set of implicit and explicit values that guide an interaction between two or more people. These values are the inputs that inform the interaction. Every human interaction includes a set of agreements, which is accepted when one enters the interaction, whether or not the person is aware of this consent. Surveying the human agreements that support EWF, this report shows that the world is far more equipped to address its massive problems than many realize.

Why We Care

The challenges facing every individual, group, and all of humanity, every day, have a common ingredient. They depend on people taking the initiative to change what they do, towards some purpose. Individuals face this challenge at work, at home, in the communities where they live, and with their friends. Global studies find that most people say they are disengaged and lonely, and their collective attempts to change the situation fail. And, they fail within the context of seemingly insurmountable structural challenges like climate change, epidemics, and systemic inequities.

The disaster of weak performance and high disengagement, a huge waste of human creativity, as well as unnecessary environmental degradation, inspired this research. Overcoming these individual, organizational, and global challenges requires a change in how people take on these challenges. This is a daunting task most feel they are unable to address.

What if we found out there was already a massive movement of people figuring out how to make this shift? What if it does not require herculean efforts? What if very normal people have already figured out how, and they have been doing it in plain sight for decades?

The World Agreements for Ecosystem-Wide Flourishing Report describes what humanity is learning about what to do from these millions who have figured out how.

What Every Human Knows, From Their Own Experience

At the core of the World Agreements for Ecosystem-Wide Flourishing Report is a simple observation. People know innately what experience they are having. They know whether they are having an enjoyable experience, or not. They know whether they are having an engaging, life-strengthening experience or a disengaging, life-weakening experience.

Researchers in the Global Initiative confirmed this by asking thousands of groups in dozens of countries. Starting in 2004, everywhere they went, in many different languages, they found that people could describe, often with great nuance, the differences between life-enhancing and life-debilitating experiences. When they listened and wrote down what they heard, they started to see a pattern. People were describing what they experienced relationally—in their relationship to their own self, in relationship to another individual, to the group as a whole, to the group’s creative process, and to the group’s source of creativity (including the natural world). From these descriptions similarly described, over and over again, the researchers developed a set of questions about these experiences.

What That Experience Describes

Since the researchers began, three ways to frame these questions have emerged (see Figure 2):

1. Frame #1: the experience of an interaction
2. Frame #2: the consciously chosen and unconsciously accepted agreements determining the experience of the interaction
3. Frame #3: the underlying agreement structures framing the agreements and the ecosystemic impact of the agreements, experiences, and outputs.

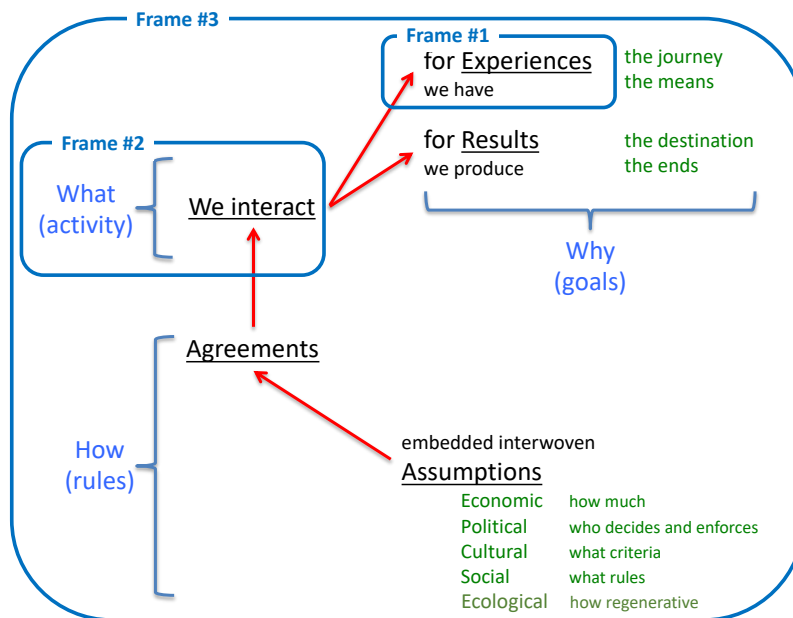


Figure 2: Three Ways to Frame These Questions

Patterns from the Data

From over 164,000 descriptions of group experiences gathered in 126 countries, the Global Initiative has identified an underlying pattern, highlighted in Figure 3.

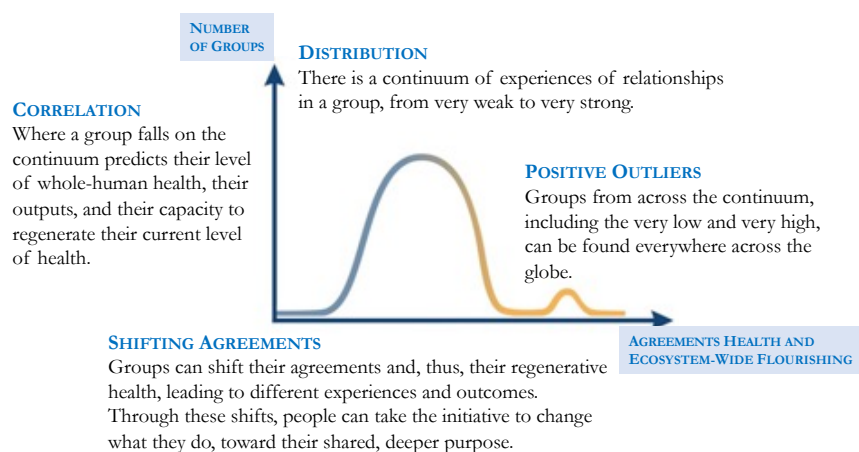


Figure 3: Patterns from the Data

Distribution. There is a distribution of levels of agreements for individual well-being and EWF. People experience groups that range from very weak to very strong agreements. Most groups fall within the weak range of 1-4 on a 10-point scale. The global mean is 2.0 on a 10-point scale, with a standard deviation of 1.5. Most groups score very low on survey items, such as “Our group looks for inspiration in everyone, in everything, all of the time,” “I step further into my aspirations and gifts because of this group's support,” and “I am aware of talents and deeper gifts other members can contribute.”

- The average experience of agreements and EWF described, globally, is one of an efficiency-focused *transaction* (see Figure 4), where people are seen for the proven capacities they bring and are asked to contribute from those already-developed capacities towards the group’s work, in exchange for clear compensation, whether monetary or experiential.
- At the lower end, people describe an *extractive* experience, where they are completely replaceable cogs in a machine that focuses on just getting the work done, feeling disengaged and depleted at the end of the interaction.
- At the upper end, people describe an *engaging* experience, where they appreciate the many capacities brought to the work by themselves and others, usually in cordial, respectful, and highly productive processes.

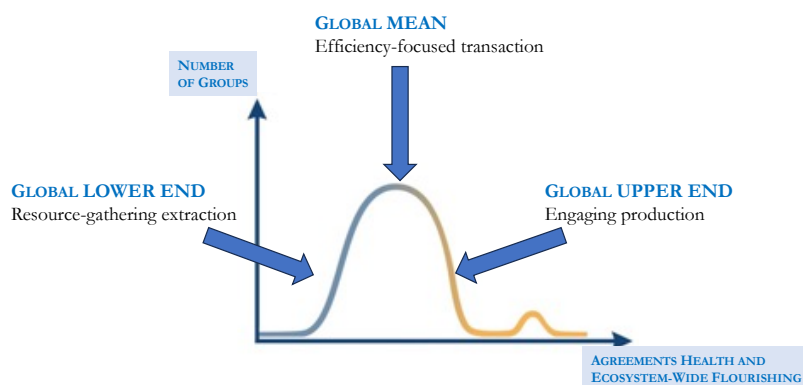


Figure 4: Global Mean, Lower and Upper Ends

Positive outliers. There are groups with agreements levels over 3 standard deviations above the global average. These positive outliers show up everywhere, in all countries surveyed. Wherever there are people, there are peaks of agreements for individual well-being and EWF. This suggests looking locally for how groups achieved high-level agreements for significant aspects of EWF within the local context.

There is evidence for a bi-modal distribution of agreements, meaning that there is a “normal” distribution (mean=2.0 ± 1.5) for most groups, and there is a higher “normal” distribution for the positive outliers (mean=7.5 ± 1.5). While the global-normal agreement structures support jobs getting done by people as *Homo habilis*, the positive-outlier-normal agreement structures engage creative people as *Homo lumens* in service to a deeper purpose.

- The average positive-outlier experience is one of development-focused, partial flourishing (see Figure 5), with continuous development of each individual’s capacity to contribute their best to the group’s efforts to serve its deeper purpose, resulting in highly innovative and impactful initiatives throughout their ecosystem of stakeholders (Ritchie-Dunham & Dinwoodie, 2023).
- The lower end experience of the positive-outlier distribution is transformational, focused on learning and developing new capacities, together, in service to the highly productive work of the network of people collaborating in service to a shared purpose.
- The upper end of the positive-outlier experience focuses on ecosystems of sacred hospitality, where people are in highly creative structures continuously evolving what they do and how they do it in service to their deeper shared purpose, impacting the regenerative capacity of their whole ecosystem, with positive ripple effects into surrounding ecosystems.

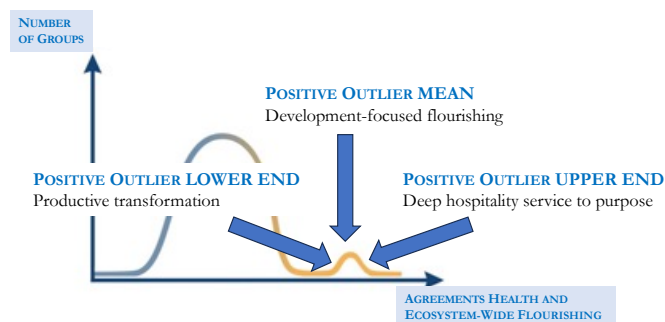


Figure 5: Positive Outlier Mean, Lower and Upper Ends

Correlations. Statistical analysis of the survey data (frame #2) finds that the five primary relationships (self, other, group, creative process, creative source) are highly correlated. Deeper statistical analysis and in-depth field studies suggest this high correlation is due to a unifying cause, the group’s agreement structures. The strength of the agreement structures (frame #3) guides the level of the primary relationships.

In simple terms, the spectrum of a group’s agreements health is based on a mindset, elsewhere described as the mental model at the base of the well-known “iceberg of systems thinking.” At the low end of the spectrum, a scarcity mindset of extraction focuses on outcomes. At the top end of the spectrum, an abundance mindset of EWF focuses on an evolving cycle of potential, development, and outcomes.

Field studies with hundreds of these positive outliers suggest common characteristics that (1) define different levels of agreements health along the whole continuum, and (2) differentiate the underlying mindset of the bi-modal distribution into scarcity and abundance mindsets (Granville-Chapman et al., 2023).

Shifting agreements. Field studies have also identified processes positive outliers have evolved for shifting their underlying agreements field. In essence, they clarify the deeper purpose, its current status, and the shared intention to shift it. They then agree on whose unique perspectives need to be included and how they integrate those perspectives into action toward the deeper shared purpose. They also realize that the agreements needed to achieve interactions that would close the gap are

different from their current agreements, so they have evolved processes for finding the agreements they need:

1. Clarify the Purpose Gap. Make visible the deeper shared purpose that brings a group together, so that they can collaboratively see and commit to closing the gap between the current and the collectively desired state.

A broad set of stakeholders in the US state of Vermont came together to see and collaboratively contribute to Vermont’s energy future, committing to shifting from 0% to 90% of the energy for electricity, heating, and transportation coming from within the state by 2050 (Colnes, 2013; Ritchie-Dunham, 2014).
2. Engage the Required Perspectives. In service to a deeper shared purpose, engage the unique voices required to see, understand, commit to, and close the gap to that deeper shared purpose.

Employees in a textile mill used this process for the company as a whole, recommitting to the charter of each group, as cross-company groups to share and decide on cross-functional issues on a weekly basis, and within each team meeting to stay on purpose.
3. Identify Those Living at the Next Level. The agreements that support the next level, the desired state of the deeper shared purpose, and eventually with that purpose inclusive of serving more complete forms of EWF, are not part of the existing agreement structure. If they were, the group would already be closing the gap. The positive outliers have found ways to identify those who are experiencing the desired results and experiences reflected in the deeper shared purpose. When they find these groups, they meet with them to uncover the differences in their agreement structures that enable that group to achieve the desired experiences and results.

A farmer in Bolivia showed up at the annual market with fatter cows than everyone else, year after year. When his neighbors asked for his secret, he told them that he did not know what he did that was different, so he could not give them the secret recipe. They were welcome to visit to figure it out for themselves. What the others knew was that the farmer was consistently getting a different and better result than they were, so he must be doing something different. They visited him and, while many things he was doing were the same, they quickly saw what he was doing that was different. They went home and applied it immediately with great success.

Potential Solutions

Agreements that achieve, sustain, and evolve the desired level of EWF center on the human beings in the agreements, through a process of consciously choosing the agreements. These agreements reflect the regenerative health of the group: its current state of whole-human health and its capacity to regenerate that health. The Regenerative Health Index for Ecosystem-Wide Flourishing integrates the subjective experience and objective outputs of those agreements.

The opening challenge of the 2023 World Agreements for Ecosystem-Wide Flourishing Report is for people to take the initiative to change their agreements to support their shared local and global purposes. The study of over 164,000 groups, through surveys and fieldwork (see Methodology), highlights solutions for finding and learning with local groups who have already discovered how to flourish in your local context (see Figure 6).

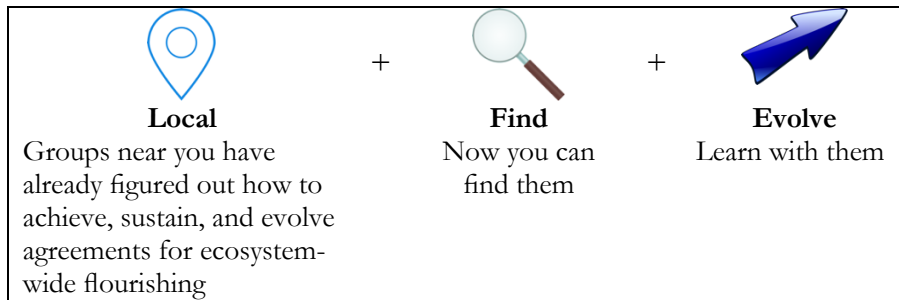


Figure 6: Potential Solutions

The Global Flourishing Goals Agenda 2050, presented by UNESCO on May 16, 2023, in India at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development, propose a process for globally addressing human flourishing on a massively local basis in a way that leans towards the realization of greater EWF (Karthikeya et al., 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This section describes the measures and instruments used for the 2023 World Agreements for Ecosystem-Wide Flourishing Report. The Report assesses the regenerative health of people’s agreements. Whether the agreements are unconsciously accepted or consciously chosen, these agreements structure the human interactions that determine the regenerative health of human well-being and EWF. A set of measures and instruments has been developed to make these agreements visible so that people can both assess whether the existing agreements generate the desired experiences and outcomes and choose the agreements they want.

Measures

The measures used in the Report describe agreements, well-being, and agreements for EWF, all in terms of regenerative health.

Agreements. An agreement is a set of implicit and explicit values that guide an interaction between two or more people (Ritchie-Dunham, 2023a). These values are the inputs that inform the interaction. Every human interaction includes a set of agreements, which is accepted when one enters the interaction, whether or not the person is aware of this consent.

The word “agreement” comes from Latin *ad* “to” and *gratus* “pleasing, welcome, agreeable.” Other languages highlight the connection using other analogs, such as a heart-to-heart connection in the English *accord* and the French *accord*.

Ecosystem-Wide Flourishing. At the individual level, whole-human well-being is a desired end, whereas the fullest forms of flourishing (EWF) would include the flourishing of contexts in which individuals are embedded, including, for many, spiritual or sacred contexts (Lee et al., 2021; VanderWeele et al., 2023). The word “flourish” comes from the Latin *florere* “to flower.”

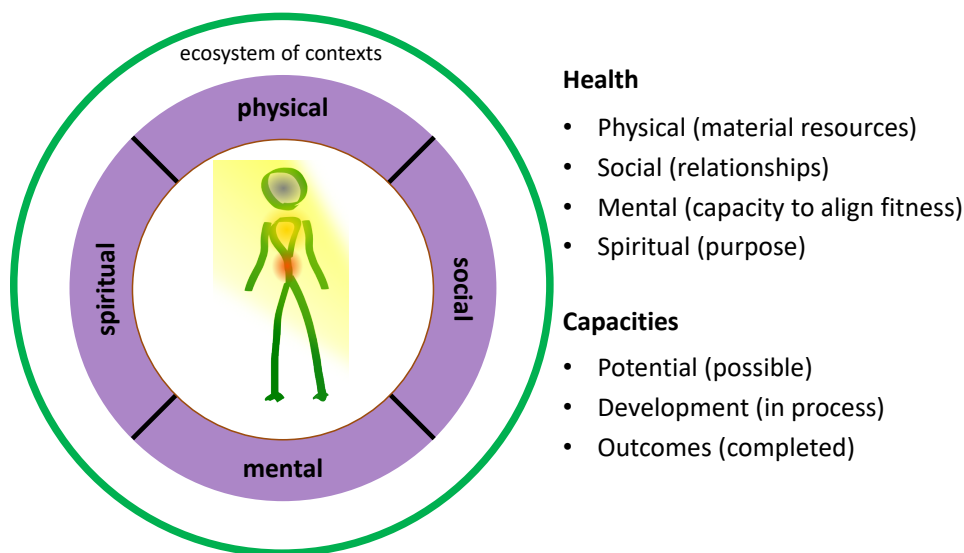


Figure 7: Flourishing as Whole-human Well-being

Agreements for Partial Well-Being and Ecosystem-Wide Flourishing. Agreements support the achievement of actual values, according to the existing organizing principle. The system is perfectly designed to achieve its outcomes. To change the experience and outcomes, change the system (the underlying set of agreements and related system dynamics).

Regenerative Health. The agreement structures and interactions influence the experience and outcomes, as described in Figure 2. The outcomes, as assessed with the model for EWF in Figure 7, assess the current-state health and the future capacity to regenerate that health. The “Regenerative Health” of an ecosystem combines the two components of Health and Regenerative Capacities (Ritchie-Dunham & Dinwoodie, 2023). Health assesses the current levels of physical, social, mental, and spiritual (meaning and purpose). Regenerative Capacities assesses the agreements structures supporting the potential, development, and outcomes levels of interactions (Ritchie-Dunham, 2023c).

Instruments

Since 2005, the Global Initiative (see Contributors) has engaged 164,000 people from 126 countries in describing a group’s experience of their agreements.

Experiences

The experience of an interaction can be described by answering the following questions. Do you know what experience you are having when you are in a group? Do you know whether it feels engaging or disengaging? Can you tell the difference between the two and do you have a preference? People describe experiences they have had across the spectrum, from deeply disengaging experiences of scarcity to deeply engaging experiences of abundance, stating a clear preference for engaging experiences (Dinwoodie et al., 2022; Ritchie-Dunham, 2023a).

Interactions

On the continuum from scarcity to abundance, the agreements guiding human interactions influence the experience one has in that interaction, the experience of being engaged and contributing of one’s unique creativity. These agreements can be described as behaviors in a set of relationships with the self, other, group, the creative process, and the creative source. The Agreements Health Check survey (Ritchie-Dunham, 2014, 2015) measures the frequency that a person experiences, in a group, a set of attributes describing the experience of their relationship to their own self (*self*), to other individuals in the group (*other*), to the group as a whole (*group*), to the group’s creative process (*nature*), and to the group’s source of creativity (*spirit*). Available for free online [<https://isclarity.org/pages/surveys>], the survey questions are provided in the book *Ecosynomics: The Science of Abundance*.

The experience of scarcity in an interaction is seen in the inner circle of Figure 8, where one experiences not seeing their own gifts, not being seen by others, and being a replaceable cog in the machine of the group, which focuses only on outcomes as described in “the book” of knowledge handed down from others. The experience of abundance in an interaction is seen in the outer circle, where one experiences the plentitude of their self-expression, fully supported by and supporting of the other in the exploration of this creative expression, making a required unique contribution to the group, where the process evolves from seeing possibilities that are enacted and lessons learned from results, engaging the creativity available in everyone.

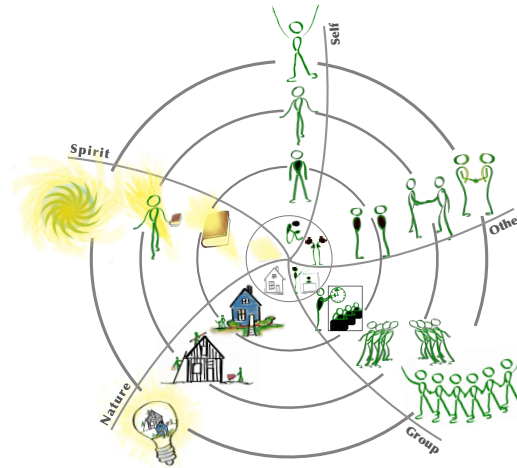


Figure 8: Agreements in the Experience of a Group

Agreement Structures

The agreements that guide human interactions are supported by a structure, analogous to the infrastructure in a building, that determines the content of the rules that govern behavior in the interaction and the process of how those rules are established in an interaction (Ritchie-Dunham, Gonçalves, et al., 2023). Total value generated provides a framework and measures for assessing whether the ecosystem of stakeholders is “better off,” in experiences and outcomes, because of an organization’s participation in the ecosystem, based on the value systems of each stakeholder (Aguilera & Ritchie-Dunham, 2022; Ritchie-Dunham, 2023b; Ritchie-Dunham, Flett, et al., 2023; Ritchie-Dunham et al., forthcoming). “Better off” can be assessed in terms of a narrow or more inclusive set of stakeholders. The latter moves the assessment in the direction of EWF.

Data

The Global Pactoecographic Collaborative has gathered initial evidence for Agreements for Ecosystem-Wide Flourishing from across the globe using the three frames of experiences, interactions, and agreement structures.

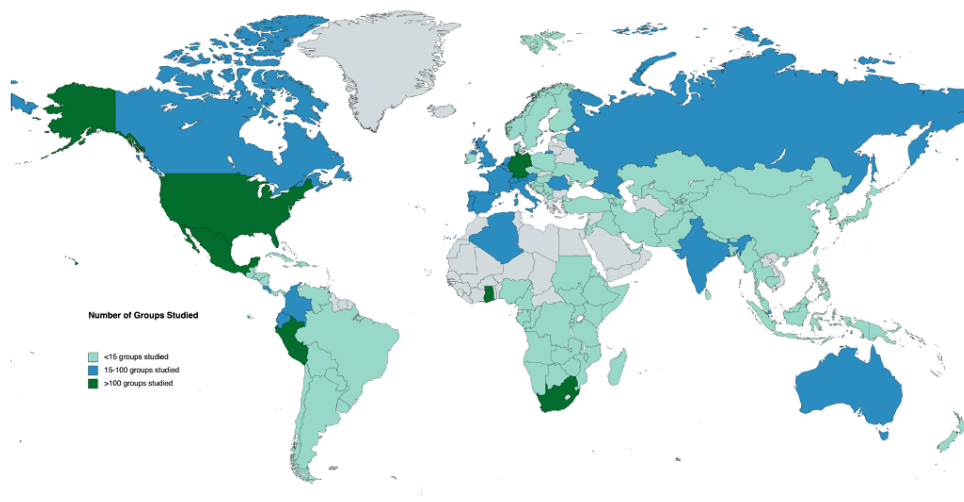


Figure 9: Global Data Sources

Complementary Studies

Our colleagues have developed complementary studies of humanity's flourishing. Taken as a whole, these studies approach EWF, but no single study has operationalized this global construct.

- Global Flourishing Study
<https://hfh.fas.harvard.edu/global-flourishing-study>
- Human Development Report (UNDP)
<https://hdr.undp.org>
- Inclusive Wealth Report (UNEP)
<https://www.unep.org/resources/inclusive-wealth-report-2018>
- Thriving from Work (Harvard CHWH)
<https://centerforworkhealth.sph.harvard.edu/research/research-projects/thriving-workers-thriving-workplaces-study-identifying-relationships>
- World Economic Outlook Update (IMF)
<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2022/01/25/world-economic-outlook-update-january-2022>
- World Happiness Report (UNSDSN)
<https://worldhappiness.report>

CONTRIBUTORS



Global Pactoecographic Collaborative

The Global Pactoecographic Collaborative (GPC) was founded to map the global social topography of human agreements. Just as explorers have explored the world mapping the mineral geology, plant and animal life, and

human communities, the GPC is chartered to map the levels of human agreements across the globe, showing what those agreements generate in experiences and results.

EDITING

James L. Ritchie-Dunham, President, Institute for Strategic Clarity (ISC). Thanks to Matthew T. Lee (Professor at Baylor; Research Associate at Harvard; ISC Fellow) for additional editorial assistance, including suggesting the term Ecosystem-Wide Flourishing.

DATA GATHERING

The data for the *2023 World Agreements for Flourishing Report* has been gathered since 2005 through members of the Global Pactoecographic Collaborative, co-hosted by the Institute for Strategic Clarity (ISC). This includes:

- *ISC Fellows:* ISC Fellows brought the Agreements Health Check survey to many of the organizations with which they work. ISC Fellows include Hernando Aguilera, Vanessa Arméndariz, Jenn Berman, Orland Bishop, Lourdes Garay, Conrado García Madrid, Ana Cláudia Gonçalves, Carol Gorelick, Christoph Hinske; Annabel Membrillo Jimenez, Luz Maria Puente Kawashima, Maureen Metcalf, Hal Rabbino, Leslie Ritchie-Dunham, Ruth Rominger, Alexandra Sacher, Scott Spann, Anne Starr, and Lourdes Zenteno.
- *Global Pactoecographic Collaborative Members:* Collaborative members used the Agreements Health Check to assess their own internal agreements fields, as well as those of the organizations with which they work. These Collaborative members include: Social Value Institute; Ritchie-Dunham's students at Boston College, EGADE, ITAM; Harvard's Human Flourishing Program; Harvard's Center for Work, Health, and Well-being; Harvard's Center for Health and the Global Environment; the Oxford-Harvard Leadership for Flourishing Community of Practice; YOUnify; Catalyst 2030 Portugal-Spain chapters; Thorlo; and the Garfield Foundation.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data gathered for the *2023 World Agreements for Flourishing Report* was analyzed statistically by ISC staff and two rounds of analysis by Sheri Chaney Jones and her colleagues at the Measurement Resources Company.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Ritchie-Dunham, J. (Ed.). (2023). *2023 World Agreements for Ecosystem-Wide Flourishing Report*. Austin: Global Pactoecographic Collaborative.

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