



HUMAN FLOURISHING

EMERGING FINDINGS & QUESTIONS TO HOLD

A provisional synthesis from two group conversations (Aug 6 & 13, 2026)

This is not a final definition or conclusion.

It is a snapshot of what appears to be emerging from our inquiry – including areas of convergence, tensions that remain unresolved, and questions worth carrying forward.



0 WE BEGAN BY ESTABLISHING A SHARED LANGUAGE

We built a shared lexicon. The group associated flourishing with:

- Purpose
- Hope
- Agency & choice
- Growth
- Meaning
- Contribution
- Resilience
- Capacity to keep developing



A shared language opens the door to shared inquiry.

1 GROWTH MINDSET IS ESSENTIAL – FLOURISHING IS A PROCESS, NOT A DESTINATION



Curiosity, learning, adaptation, perseverance and a willingness to keep developing are capacities that seem necessary for flourishing.

Flourishing is dynamic, not a final state. Growth can reveal new possibilities for further growth – over time and collectively.

*Growth without flourishing is possible.
Flourishing without growth, unlikely.*

? QUESTIONS TO HOLD

Is a growth mindset necessary for flourishing?
What distinguishes growth that contributes to flourishing from growth that does not?
If flourishing is ongoing, what tells us that we are moving toward greater flourishing rather than simply changing?

2 AGENCY MATTERS – BUT FLOURISHING MAY REQUIRE MORE THAN AGENCY

Agency and choice give us hope, pathways and the capacity to act.

Yet a solely ambitious person can grow and achieve without necessarily flourishing. Agency may be necessary – but not sufficient.



? QUESTIONS TO HOLD

Growth toward what?
Agency exercised for what?
What distinguishes flourishing from ambition, achievement, optimisation or success?

3 FLOURISHING APPEARS TO BE RELATIONAL

Community, connection, family, friendship and support are integral, not incidental.

Our flourishing moves outward through relationships.

It raises responsibility: how our flourishing affects others' capacity to flourish.



? QUESTIONS TO HOLD

Can I genuinely be flourishing if the way I flourish systematically diminishes someone else's capacity to flourish?



4 CONTRIBUTION MAY BE AN OVERFLOW OF PERSONAL PROSPERITY ONTO OTHERS

When we have capacity, wellbeing, resources, knowledge or opportunity, some of what enables us to prosper can flow outward and contribute to others.



? QUESTIONS TO HOLD

- Is contribution an essential dimension of flourishing?
- Does contribution become more meaningful when it benefits both the giver and the receiver, or less altruistic?
- Does flourishing give us license for our own prosperity for others – to the extent of our capacity or multiplying rather than merely transferring wellbeing?

THE ALTRUISM MATH QUESTION

If an action benefits another but also benefits me, does that make it less altruistic? Does contribution require self-sacrifice? Or count as genuine contribution?



5 VIRTUE MAY DISTINGUISH FLOURISHING FROM SUCCESS



Virtue may help us distinguish flourishing from mere success or prosperity.

But virtues can be interpreted differently across cultures, worldviews and individuals.

We must ask not only what we value, but what animates our relationship to those values.

? QUESTIONS TO HOLD

Are there virtues that transcend culture and worldview?
How do we distinguish virtue from a deep held value that nevertheless harms others? Who gets to define them?

6 FLOURISHING IS MORE THAN PERSONAL WELLBEING



It likely includes meaning, purpose, contribution, growth, relationship, health, self-knowledge, agency and connection to something larger than self.

? QUESTIONS TO HOLD

What elements must be present for a life – and a society – to be genuinely flourishing?

7 FEAR VS. LOVE: A FOUNDATIONAL QUESTION



The group noted that the same virtue or value can be animated by fear or by love.

Fear can protect us from danger and may be essential to survive. Yet a life, community or system organised predominantly around fear may produce different possibilities for flourishing than one rooted in love, trust, care and connection.



? EMERGING QUESTION

Does flourishing differ depending upon whether our choices, virtues and relationships are primarily animated by fear or love?

From fear toward love may itself be part of what flourishing requires.

8 FLOURISHING MAY REQUIRE US TO BECOME CAPABLE OF HANDLING DISAGREEMENTS



QUESTIONS TO HOLD

Can we create conditions in which people with genuinely different understandings of the good or right together explore flourishing without one worldview becoming the price of admission?



THE LARGER QUESTION EMERGING

“We began with:

Can a person flourish within a system that does not support their flourishing?

“It is expanding into:

What capacities and conditions enable people to continue becoming, relating and contributing – and what responsibility do individuals, communities, institutions and systems have for creating conditions in which their own flourishing does not diminish the flourishing of others?



Human Flourishing

Emerging Findings, Explorations & Questions to Hold

A provisional synthesis from two facilitated group conversations (August 6 & 13, 2026)

This is not intended as a final definition or conclusion. It is a snapshot of what appears to be emerging from the group's inquiry so far - including areas of convergence, tensions that remain unresolved, and questions worth carrying forward.

0. We began by establishing a shared language

The first session began by deliberately building a shared lexicon. The group associated flourishing with purpose, agency and choice, hope, multiple pathways, relationships and community, health, self-knowledge, growth, meaning, contribution, resilience and the capacity to keep developing.

1. Flourishing appears to require a growth mindset - and to be a process, not a destination

One of the strongest points of convergence was around **growth mindset**. The group explored curiosity, experimentation, learning, adaptation, perseverance and the willingness to keep developing as capacities that seem necessary for flourishing.

This led to the sense that flourishing itself may be dynamic rather than a destination. There may be no final state in which we can say, "I have arrived; I am now flourishing." Instead, growth can reveal new possibilities for further growth. The same may be true collectively: communities, institutions and societies that support flourishing may themselves need the capacity to learn and evolve. Even evocatively as having the freedom for one's humanity to unfold, with an ongoing sense of expansion aligned with one's strengths and hopes for the world.

At the same time, the conversations began to distinguish growth from flourishing itself. A person can grow in skill, power, wealth or effectiveness without necessarily flourishing.

Emerging proposition: A growth mindset may be a necessary condition for flourishing because flourishing involves maintaining the capacity to keep learning, adapting and becoming.

Questions to hold: Is a growth mindset necessary for flourishing? What distinguishes growth that contributes to flourishing from growth that does not? If flourishing is ongoing, what tells us that we are moving toward greater flourishing rather than simply changing?

2. Agency matters - but flourishing may require more than agency

Agency and choice emerged early. Hope was described not simply as optimism, but as having aspirational goals, agency and multiple possible pathways forward. Growth mindset similarly involved experimentation, curiosity, adaptation and taking responsibility for one's development.

The discussion then deepens the inquiry. A highly driven or ambitious person can demonstrate agency, perseverance and growth without necessarily being someone we would describe as flourishing. Agency may therefore be necessary without being sufficient.

Emerging proposition: Capacity for growth and agency may be necessary for flourishing, but not sufficient to define it.

Questions to hold: Growth toward what? Agency exercised for what? What distinguishes flourishing from ambition, achievement, optimisation or success?

3. Flourishing appears to be relational

The conversations repeatedly moved beyond the isolated individual. Community, connection, family, friendship and support were described as integral rather than incidental. The image of concentric circles - self, family, community and larger system - introduced the idea that flourishing may move outward through relationships.

The inquiry then went further: not merely whether I am flourishing, but how the way I flourish affects other people's ability to flourish. This brought responsibility into the conversation, including the effects of our choices within systems and governance.

Emerging proposition: Flourishing may not be fully intelligible at the level of the isolated individual. My flourishing occurs in relationship with yours.

Questions to hold: Can I genuinely be flourishing if the way I flourish systematically diminishes someone else's capacity to flourish?

4. Contribution may be an overflow of personal prosperity onto others

Contribution emerged repeatedly: helping others, paying it forward, creating value beyond oneself, serving, participating and affecting one's community.

One way the group began to understand contribution was as an overflow of personal prosperity: when we have enough capacity, wellbeing, resources, knowledge or opportunity, some of what enables us to prosper can flow outward and contribute to the prosperity of others.

A further complication came through the "altruism math" discussion. If an action benefits another person but also benefits me - through satisfaction, meaning, recognition, relationship or some other return - does that make it less altruistic? Conversely, does contribution require self-sacrifice to count as genuine contribution?

The discussion suggested that flourishing may not require us to solve the philosophical tension of pure altruism. The more practical question may be whether our prosperity generates additional capacity for others to prosper, rather than requiring one person's wellbeing to come at another's expense.

Emerging proposition: Contribution may be what happens when personal prosperity has an outward flow - when some of what enables me to flourish also expands the possibilities for others.

Questions to hold: Is contribution an essential dimension of flourishing? Does contribution become more meaningful when it benefits both the giver and the receiver, or less altruistic? Does flourishing ask us to sacrifice our own prosperity for others - or to create forms of prosperity capable of multiplying rather than merely transferring wellbeing?

5. Flourishing may exist under imperfect systems - but perhaps only partially

The central question of the first session was whether someone can flourish within a system that does not support their flourishing. The conversation resisted a simple yes-or-no answer.

Examples from civil-rights struggles, colonisation, oppressive governance, and community life in the Democratic Republic of Congo raised the possibility that people can retain agency, meaning, relationships, hope, creativity, and collective capacity even under harmful conditions. At the same time, the group distinguished between some dimensions of flourishing and the full possibility of flourishing.

This matters because recognising human agency in the face of adversity should not become a way of excusing systems that unnecessarily constrain people. The capacities people preserve within difficult systems may sometimes be precisely what enables them to resist, repair or transform those systems.

Emerging proposition: Human beings may retain capacities for flourishing within systems that constrain flourishing, without this meaning that the system itself supports flourishing.

Questions to hold: What dimensions of flourishing remain possible under harmful conditions? At what point do conditions constrain flourishing so severely that we should call what remains survival, resilience or resistance rather than flourishing?

6. Individuals and systems appear to shape one another

The inquiry moved beyond an either/or framing of personal responsibility versus systemic responsibility. Individuals inhabit families, communities, institutions, economies and systems of governance. Those systems shape people's possibilities, while people and communities also create, maintain, challenge and transform systems.

The group explicitly considered responsibility across individuals, communities, institutions and larger systems. The "ripple effect" became one way of describing how a person's flourishing can influence a family, workplace or community. At the same time, systems can either expand or restrict the capacities available to the people within them.

Another question emerged around capacity itself: as we move from self to relationship to community to institution, do the capacities required for flourishing change or become more complex?

Emerging proposition: Flourishing appears to move in both directions: systems shape people, and people collectively shape systems.

Questions to hold: What responsibility for flourishing properly belongs to the individual, the community, the institution and the wider system - and where does responsibility become shared? What new capacities are required as we move between those levels?

7. Virtue introduces an ethical question - and perhaps a deeper question about fear and love

The second conversation introduced virtue as a possible way to distinguish flourishing from mere success, achievement, or prosperity.

But this immediately opened another contrast: different people and cultures may understand virtues differently. Even apparently positive values - safety, responsibility, freedom, loyalty, protection or prosperity - can lead to very different actions depending upon how they are understood and what motivates them.

The group's discussion of fear and love adds an important dimension. Two people might claim the same virtue or value while acting from very different underlying motivations. An action framed as protecting one's family, community or country, for example, might emerge primarily from fear - fear of loss, scarcity, outsiders or change - or from love, care and a desire to protect what is valued.

This raises the possibility that evaluating flourishing may require us to look not only at what we value but also at what animates our relationship to those values. This need not make fear inherently wrong: fear can protect us from danger and may be essential to survival. The question is whether a life, community or system organised predominantly around fear creates different possibilities for flourishing than one organised predominantly around love, trust, care or connection.

Emerging question: Does flourishing differ depending upon whether our choices, virtues and relationships are primarily animated by fear or by love?

Questions to hold: Are there virtues that transcend culture and worldview? Who gets to define them? How do we distinguish virtue from a deeply held value that nevertheless harms others? What changes when the same value is enacted from fear rather than love? Could movement from fear toward love itself be part of what flourishing requires?

8. Flourishing may require us to become capable of handling disagreements

An unexpected theme across the conversations has been the conversation itself. The group explored the complexity of taking these inquiries beyond people who are already comfortable with growth, iteration and self-examination - especially to those who may experience calls for personal or systemic change as threatening.

The discussion repeatedly returned to curiosity, listening, suspending judgement and engaging people whose beliefs differ substantially from our own. It also raised concerns about creating sufficient safety for people to examine ideas without requiring them to abandon identity, belonging, or conviction.

Emerging proposition: One capacity associated with flourishing may be the ability to remain in meaningful relationship across differences without requiring either agreement or abandonment of conviction.

Questions to hold: Can we create conditions in which people with genuinely different understandings of the good can inquire together about flourishing without one worldview becoming the price of admission?

The larger question emerging

The inquiry began with:

Can a person flourish within a system that does not support their flourishing?

Across the conversations, that question appears to be expanding into something larger:

What capacities and conditions enable people to continue becoming, relating and contributing - and what responsibility do individuals, communities, institutions and systems have for creating conditions in which their own flourishing does not diminish the flourishing of others?

Five questions to carry forward

1. **What distinguishes flourishing from growth, achievement, prosperity or resilience?**
2. **Can I be flourishing if my flourishing constrains yours?**
3. **What belongs to individual agency, and what requires supportive relationships, communities, institutions or systems?**
4. **What would it mean to create conditions for mutual flourishing among people who do not agree about what flourishing means?**
5. **If growth is essential to flourishing, what role does failure play in flourishing or oppressive systems?**

A useful observation from these first conversations is that the tensions themselves may be findings. Agency/system, self/other, growth/direction, virtue/pluralism, fear/love, and individual/collective flourishing do not appear to be easily separable. Continuing to hold those tensions may be more generative than resolving them too quickly.